



# Exotic allure

If you want a garden that has a calm feel and natural allure, be inspired by the Orient

Words: Jacki Brown

There is an exotic allure to traditional Eastern aesthetics — the simple, clean lines, natural colours and materials, and the tranquillity these evoke. Using Asian-style landscapes suits the minimalist architecture of many modern homes. Oriental landscapes also evoke symbolism and encourage contemplation within the garden. Maybe it's the feeling of being at one with nature, or the focus on meditation and calmness. Perhaps the subtle spiritualism and layers of detail are attractive compared with the pre-packaged, mass-produced and homogenised simplicity of much of our urban surroundings.

Some great ideas that can be gleaned from Oriental landscapes for use in contemporary landscapes are the wide use of natural, locally sourced materials; the representation of the vastness of nature within a limited space; the intricate layout and arrangement

of inorganic materials; and the shaping and moulding of plants to take on a symbolic representation of landforms.

## Employing natural materials

Natural materials are an essential part of an Oriental-style garden and their placement is based on the way objects are arranged by nature. Mass is concentrated towards the base and gets smaller at the top, echoing the natural way of objects settling with the force of gravity. There is a focus on materials with character, as opposed to brand-new, flawless materials, so recycled or reused materials can be used for visual effect.

Stone is used close to the ground, where it would be located in nature. This may be pavement, retaining walls or garden edges. Natural stone at the base of a landscape represents solidity and gives you a feeling of

standing on firm ground.

Timber and bamboo, often stained or oiled to improve the aesthetics and durability of the wood, are used for structures such as fences, gateways, pagodas and railings. Timber may also be used for retaining walls and edges — to get that solid effect, use timber sleepers rather than copper logs. Timber products change in character with age, which is one way Asian gardens imitate nature.

**1.** *This stunning garden by Rolling Stone Landscapes offers a modern take on traditional Oriental design.*

**2.** *In Japanese gardens, hedging plants are usually clipped into tight mounds. Garden design by Imperial Landscapes.*

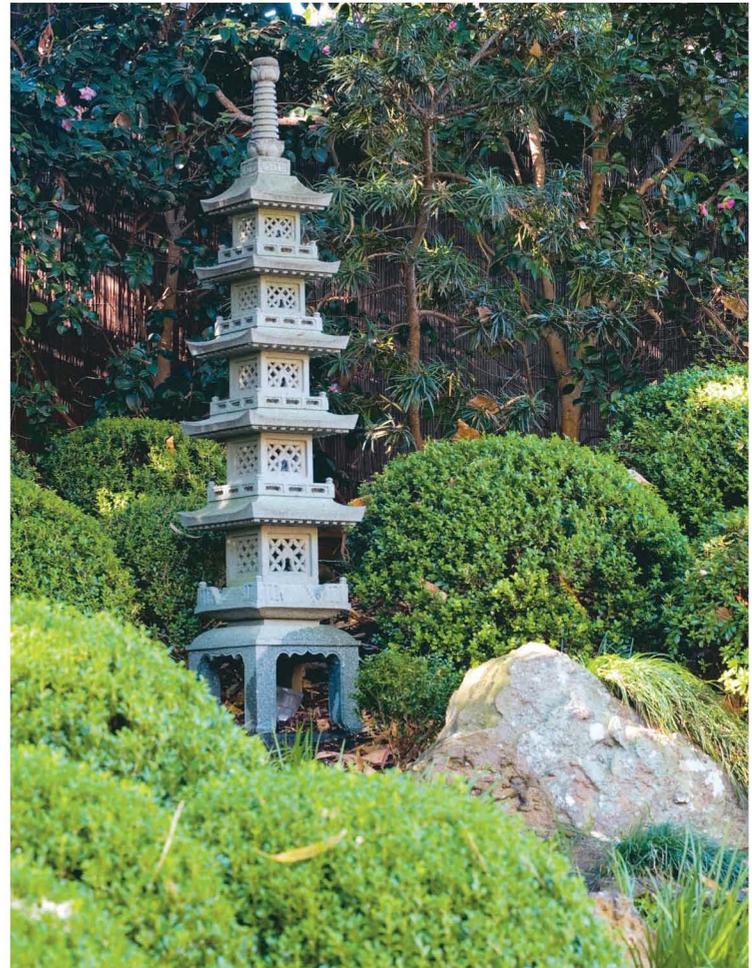


### The importance of water in Oriental design

Water is important in Oriental gardens. In the Chinese tradition of feng shui, which translates literally to “wind water”, water is one of the vital sources of life. Use water in an Oriental landscape by adding a reflection pond, fish pond, trickling water feature or waterfall, bowl or urn filled with pebbles or an aquatic plant, or natural-form stream or pond. Water in a landscape has several benefits: it cools the microclimate, it is calming to watch or listen to and it brings in birds and other wildlife. Traditional Chinese gardens contain a balanced proportion of water and gardens. Where water is impractical, raked gravel can symbolise a body of water. Large rocks placed within the gravel symbolise islands in the water.

And, of course, the ultimate natural materials to use in any landscape are the plants. For the Asian appeal, use deep-green foliage, plants with small leaves clipped into shape or bonsai, mounds of groundcovers such as mondo grass, and spring flowers and autumn colours to accentuate the changing seasons.

While a traditional Eastern landscape requires a moderate amount of maintenance, there are some ways to reduce the maintenance needed. Use cultivars that stay “bun-shaped”, for example, *Babingtonia* or




our mission is to integrate external natural environments, people and architecture and to provide harmonious living spaces that can be enjoyed for generations

**our services**

- landscape design
- council development applications
- arboricultural consultancy
- horticultural consultancy
- construction management

**Winner - “2008 AILDM Landscape Design Award for Best Residential Landscape Design under \$25,000”**

Visit our web site for more information or call us directly on 02 9871 7701

[www.ecodesign.com.au](http://www.ecodesign.com.au)