

Book Review
Plant Driven Design by
Lauren Springer Ogden and Scott Ogden
Timber Press 2008

Early in the wet spring of 1997, I attended my first workshop with Lauren Springer. Recently I browsed through the handout for *The Beauty of the High and Dry*. Animating the page, my notes were strewn with underlines, stars and exclamation points. How this lanky gal was combining plants in such unexpected ways – caught my attention.

The passion and daring Laurens' life engages, informs both her gardens and talks. Now together with Scott, the Ogden's keen familiarity with natural processes and relationships, coupled with a cosmopolitan plant palette - is conveyed through their fresh interpretations and expressed in artistic, sustainable gardens. All photographed beautifully by Lauren in their new book, **Plant Driven Design: Creating Gardens that honor Plants, Place and Spirit.**

And that is just what this book does! It is a loving tribute to the power of plants in our lives. They remind, "The opportunity for a personal relationship with the natural world is essential to a garden, but may be lost simply by failing to include plants in a way that celebrates their inherent character and natural power. Gardens are certainly for people, but to actually be gardens, they must be created with plants first in mind."

This shift in values is highlighted in their statement "This book approaches garden design from a perspective that places plants, nature and horticulture on equal footing with art and architecture." Heralding this change in direction is a challenge to the design tenets of the last 70 years, where architecture has dominated how we experience our surroundings.

With sensitive insights garnered from seasoned experience, the Ogden's describe and share tips and techniques for cultivating this approach. For example, through the years of gardenmaking in Colorado and Texas, the process has taught them that "careful plant selection and placement is their essential design consideration."

They invite us to heed the call of the wild and visit natural places. Notice plants in situ, their textures, forms, fragrances and colors. Plants tend to favor groupings or guilds which form patterns and display varying densities. Often these elements are repeated in an artful randomness, creating a rhythm while retaining a feeling of spontaneity. Take a look at the larger panorama around you and in the variety of signature plants that express the spirit of the regions identity. Echoing these dynamics in vistas and vignettes, will bring an emotive and visual cohesiveness, reflected in a garden at ease with its surroundings.

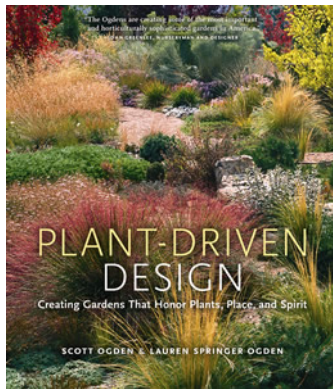
They suggest looking at the "natural geometries" of a site. Its existing large trees, stones, distant views and grade changes and exploring from several perspectives.

Among the forty-four *Feature and Plant Lists*, I was most intrigued by *Companions to Bold Succulents and Fiber Plants*, *Shrubs for Chaparral Gardens*, *Plants with Flowers that attract Butterflies and Hummingbirds and Bulbs, Grasses and Sedges for the Steppe Garden*. Under the section entitled 'First Steppe' they describe using select choices of cool and warm season, tuft-forming, fine textured grasses – all under 12” high. This new 'lawn' replaced a “thirsty sheet of Kentucky blue grass” at their northern Colorado home. The several photographs which accompany each list illustrate the innovative vitality of plant driven design. The lists give clues for gathering familiarity with the cultural needs of plants, allowing them to thrive.

They point out that the “physical texture of a plant determines much of its visual power.” Thoughtful placement to catch the light during the day and through the seasons may further illuminate sensuous silhouettes, patterns and forms.

A garden or habitat rich in mutually beneficial species cultivates a diversity that supports the vital ecological process of pollination. Through offering a wide selection of flower shapes and colors displayed over long seasons, we can attract a variety of pollinators. Create a protective refuge including shelter, feeders and shallow bowls of water where pollinators and small wildlife may live by their intrinsic nature.

With the publication of **Plant Driven Design** and the pioneering, collective efforts of many, including Panayoti Kelaidis and Dan Johnson of the Denver Botanic Garden, has come the opportunity to experience and see demonstrated, exemplary models for emotionally resonant, cohesive and waterwise gardens. *And*, our choice to select from a much more diverse range of native, adaptable and homeoclimatic plants, which now have become the mainstay of the interior west plant palette.



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