



colourful *exotic* retreat

By Alice Spenser-Higgs



Pretoria landscaper Rene Wright of Eco Landscapes is not afraid to use colour and she does it well, producing gardens that are always energising and lively.

Rene's 'Tropical abundance meets city steel' garden won a silver medal at this year's Safari DesignEx garden design show. It provided a superb example of how to fuse hard and soft landscaping elements, juxtaposing tropical wildness with an understated earthy elegance.

The design fully utilised a difficult, triangular site in such a way that the whole of the garden was not immediately visible, leaving elements to be discovered. The luxuriant planting, with splashes of colour that were repeated in the furnishing of the pavilion, produced a sensuous and appealing atmosphere, the very essence of an exotic retreat.

Rene has a number of tips for getting the balance right between hard elements such as water features, paving and walls and softer plant effects:

- Provide a link between the soft and hard landscaping materials by repeating a colour, a texture or even shapes. This creates unity and restfulness in the garden.

- Use neutral, earthy colours for large expanses of hard landscaping – it is easier to offset the potential harshness with plant material if the colour is not too strong.
- Be aware of your major viewing angles. In each view there should always be something for the eye to rest on. It doesn't have to be a container or a water feature. It can simply be a striking or sculptural plant, or an exceptionally colourful plant.
- If a lot of hard landscaping is necessary, particularly in smaller spaces, utilise smaller-leaved plants instead of very large, dominant foliage. This will enhance a feeling of spaciousness as well as provide a much softer overall aesthetic.
- Provide a sense of 'enclosure'. This is the unseen element of the garden but has a huge effect on how we experience the garden. That sense of being enclosed brings a feeling of safety and intimacy. Look for ways to create smaller garden rooms and to make areas more inviting.
- Don't be afraid to dream! Careful planning, some research and an unfettered imagination will help shape your own unique, tranquil retreat. ☺



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