

Old World

Gardens

A local landscape designer and garden artist explains gardenesque, our version of Old World gardens

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The phrase Old World garden brings to mind a plethora of ideas and romantic images, such as concrete figures aged with moss, heirloom roses, lavender and rosemary. While some people think rows of tightly trimmed English boxwood is Old World, still others form images of thatched roof cottages and bordered beds that are lush with tall hollyhocks, old garden phloxes and bamboo teepees where green beans dangle. The spectrum is wide and diverse. Not surprising, since gardens have their roots in royalty and formality. Hence, the modern day formal garden is Old World in geometry, though not in size. It seems nothing that a group of ladies and myself worked on a group of small gardens for nearly a year in preparation for a social gala, if we consider the aggrandizement

of the gardens created in France in 1656 under King Lois the XIV—which, by the way, required the demolition of three villages, 18,000 laborers, five years time, collaboration of several architects and artists, plus costs unparalleled for that time. Made for a great party. But naturalists, who, in the most general sense, pioneered the way for classless gardens with beauty and function, challenged the idea of man viewing the garden from within his domain.

At this point in history, Old World gardens did not give way to native landscape altogether. Louden, the son of a Scottish farmer, established himself as a landscape gardener in the early 19th century. He wrote in his garden magazine in 1832 about a style he called “gardenesque.” According to garden historian Howard Loxton, this style was achieved partly by including exotics, even species of grasses selected to differ from those in surrounding fields, so that the garden instantly would be recognizable as a work of art, not nature.

Where does Fort Worth fit into the emphasis on gardens that have roots dating back to the 19th century? Those of us who are not of royal descent argue that our gardens are full of class. Without an exhaustive review of the gardens of Fort Worth, it is obvious here in the South the emphasis has been on the more formal approach—and still tends to be, especially in the front yard (what I refer to as the invitation garden or the homecoming garden, for the private resident).

When I first moved to Fort Worth fourteen years ago, my first introduction to front yards in the South was by a sincere elderly lady who informed me the plants I chose for her front yard garden were back yard plants. Being an optimist, I convinced her to let it grow. To my relief, a while later I not only was thanked for the quaint garden in the front, but also told by a strong Southern woman I knew what I was doing.

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Elizabeth Samudio, owner of Elizabeth Anna's Old World Gardens—a landscape and installation company—moved to Fort Worth 14 years ago from the Puget Sound area of the Pacific Northwest. A TCU graduate with a passion for gardening and the environment, Elizabeth installed the perennial gardens at Ridglea Frost Bank shopping center. She beautified the courts of University Park Village one season and decked the wreaths at Bass Hall. Back on her feet after a bout with cancer, the “garden artist” has installed numerous Old World Gardens throughout North Texas. She has moved her retail shop in University Park Village and is reopening March 12—the first day of Spring!—at 2825 8th Avenue. She can be reached at 817.335.4577.

