



SPECIAL/MARY PALMER DARGAN

Pink Yoshino cherry trees frame curved steps that lead to a curved pavilion in a private Atlanta garden designed by Hugh Dargan Associates.

Partners by design

Gardening's Sonny and Cher to share landscape concepts

By KATHY SEALE
News staff writer

There's more than one way to tell a good story. Books, of course, and words are the most typical ways. But according to landscape architects Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan, the most successful gardens also tell a good tale.

The Dargans, of Hugh Dargan Associates in Atlanta, will share their concept of storytelling through gardening at 10 a.m. Saturday at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Their lecture, "The Language of the Landscape," is part of the free Plantsman Lecture Series sponsored by the Botanical Garden Society.

"We encourage the public to put as much meaning as possible into their gardens," Mrs. Dargan said in a recent telephone interview. "Include something of yourselves, a clue to who you are."

According to the Dargans, successful gardens are built of the same basic elements: a pleasing entrance and overall view, places for quiet reflection or entertaining and effective pathways and "destinations"

DETAILS

► **What:** Atlanta landscape architects Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan speak on "The Language of the Landscape" as part of the Birmingham Botanical Society's Plantsman Lecture Series.

► **Where:** The Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 2612 Lane Park Road.

► **When:** Saturday, 10 a.m.-noon.

► **Tickets:** Admission is free and registration is not required. Call 414-3590 for more information.

(such as pools, ponds or pavilions).

But the most successful gardens are also personalized with "telling details," she said. "Your garden can be as personalized as any room inside your home."

Garden statues, pots and favorite flowers are a traditional way to reflect your interests, she said. Tile murals, as backdrops to a fountain, pool or spa, are less traditional, but increasingly popular as a way to personalize your outdoor space.

But don't fret if you don't have the time or money for elaborate accents, she said. Even something as simple as a child's footprints on a stepping stone can be an effective way to tell your story. "The point is to



SPECIAL/ALEXANDER L. WALLACE

A moon gate leads to a dining terrace and formal garden in Charleston, S.C., designed by the Atlanta firm.

How to tell a story with a garden.

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Try these tips from Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan of Dargan and Associates in Atlanta for building a successful garden:

► **Statues:** Think big, Dargan said. Most people use statues that are too small for the scale of their gardens. Most statues should be at least 36 to 48 inches tall, he said.

► **Framing the view:**

Columns are particularly useful for framing a garden view, Mrs. Dargan said. They give and "edge" to the picture.

Large boxwoods and tall, columnar cedar trees also make fine frames, Dargan said.

► **Think curves:** Curves, such as pathways, arches, and colonnades "enliven" your

► See **Advice**, Page 6E

Gardens: Informal, formal mix

► From Page 1E

make it say, 'you,' "she said.

How about adding a little mystery, romance or music to your garden story? Clever hidden storage spaces or a curved walkway can add elements of surprise.

"If you're wandering down a pathway, and can't see what's around the bend, it adds mystery," Mrs. Dargan said.

A well-placed bench or soft outdoor lighting can add some romance to your tale, and a fountain or a waterfall could add some music.

The Dargans, who met 16 years ago when she was a lecturer at a Southern Garden History Society meeting, married and combined their landscape architecture business about 15 years ago. Their practice is regional, with projects in 14 states, Dargan said. Recently, they completed master plans for two prominent gardens in England.

As partners in design, the traditionally-trained Dargans share more similarities, than differences.

"I love it when we get together because we think so much alike," he said. "We're able to work through the design process quicker and always have the best solutions together."

But as partners on the lecture circuit, it's their differences that audiences respond to. His wife is the more "scholarly" and "detail-oriented" of the two, Dargan said.

And her husband is "a little more informal," Mrs. Dargan said. "Somebody once said that we're like the Sonny and Cher of landscape architecture."

Mrs. Dargan more frequently lectures solo, but loves to share the podium when her husband's schedule permits. "It's more fun when it's the two of us," she said, then added, "I'm in control of the pace of the slide show."

"She likes to think that," he said, and laughed.

"I hold the clicker," she noted.



SPECIAL/MARY PALMER DARGAN



SPECIAL/LYNN MCBRIDE

ABOVE: Angelique and spring green tulips surround a lead and brass astrolabe, a type of English sundial, in a private Atlanta garden.

AT LEFT: Mary Palmer and Hugh Dargan in the cedar arbor of a Charleston, S.C., garden they design. The arbor is covered with white Clematis Armandi.



SPECIAL/MARY PALMER DARGAN

A wrought-iron archway frames a view of an Italianate garden in the Buckhead area of Atlanta. The formal garden, designed by Hugh Dargan Associates, includes a Koi basin under a fountain. Koi are Japanese fish.

ADVICE:

Don't overdo colors

From Page 1E

garden, Mrs. Dargan said. "Straight lines are perfectly OK, but curves add mystery."

► **Point toward the sky:** Objects or plants that point toward the sky are "very inspirational," Mrs. Dargan said. "It takes you to the heavens."

The Dargans like to use Cryptomerias because they are narrow, can be pruned and have a strong root system.

► **Get creative with surfaces:** "Paving is as important as plant material," Mrs. Dargan said. She likes to use cobblestone, split-blue stone, hand-made brick or a combination of different colors of limestone.

► **Add some aqua:** The music of water can mask a myriad of unpleasant sounds, Mrs. Dargan said. Water also tends to make small spaces look bigger and has a "calming effect" on garden visitors.

► **Be careful with color:** Monochromatic schemes are particularly useful in small spaces, Mrs. Dargan said.

When combining colors, use the color wheel, she said. Use colors that are next to each other, and then add a touch of a color that is on the opposite side of the color wheel "to jazz it up," she said.

Be careful with colors that are on the warm side of the color wheel. "In the south, red is almost too hot," she said. "It can be hard on your eyes in the summer."