

Shaping the Earth



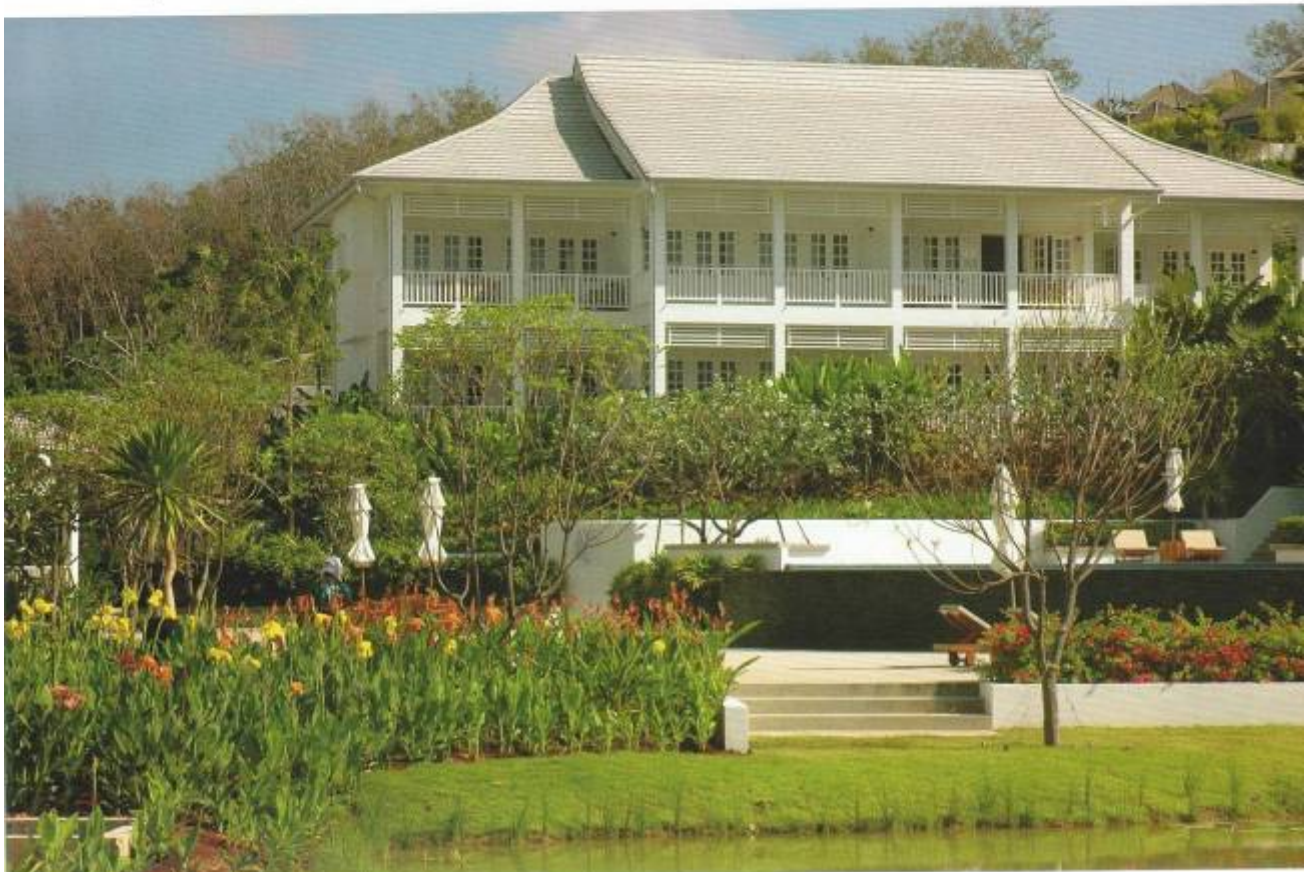
Landscaping is defined as the art, planning, design and management of the land. The Romans undertook landscaping on an extensive scale and in the 18th century, England became the focus of a new style of landscape design as many of the great estate parks of the English gentry were remodelled to resemble a neat and tidy version of nature.

Story : James Goyder | Photography : Nakarin Banjerdjin

In Phuket today there are a growing number of landscapers, catering to those with modest back gardens as well as great estate parks. All are competing for the opportunity to try and bring flair and creativity to the design, construction and maintenance of your particular bit of space.

Adding Value

Phuket resident Ben Davis is the Head Consultant for the Asia Pacific region of Tropical Landscaping International. He has previously worked on the landscaping of prestigious projects such as the American Embassy in Burma.





For him there is one major reason why people should pay attention to the landscaping of their homes, "Property value. When you walk into a house the first thing you notice is the entrance. People will spend four or five million Baht on just their kitchen when their garden is four or five times the size of the house itself."

He also thinks that Thailand's climate makes landscaping even more important. "I am surprised by how low the percentage of people in Phuket using landscaping is. It is a tropical climate so people probably spend most of their time in the garden. You can also improve your privacy and home security - instead of building a big wall you can create the same effect with dense planting."

Alec Pettigrew, the Managing Director of Tropical Landscaping International, believes that landscaping suffers because, "It is often the last thing to be done. Developers will go in with the right attitude but if there is any sort of an overspend, landscaping will be the part of the project which suffers because it is left to the end."

While both men acknowledge that their company is by no means the cheapest they are quick to warn against the dangers of taking shortcuts with your landscaping. Ben says, "We are a group of well qualified people, not just a bunch of opportunists planting plants. I've got a diploma of Horticulture and I've been working as a horticulturalist and agronomist in Asia for the last four years. We are popular because our architects manage everything, so our projects are extremely well organised. I think there's a danger that if you pick the cheapest guy out there you simply won't get what you want."

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Before



After

Tropical Trials

One crucial factor which many people might overlook when considering their landscaping is the water. For Ben, "The distinctive seasons present an obvious challenge. We have six months of too much rain and then six months of none but unfortunately not enough is done to retain this water."

This is a subject close to the heart of Brad Kenny. He is the Managing Director of the Phuket based Environmental Solutions & Protection Corporation. He believes that when it comes to landscaping, "The single biggest concern in Phuket is the water but the majority of people just don't understand this."

Anyone who is hoping for a carbon copy of their garden in their native country should also heed Brad's warning. "People want to recreate what they're used at home to but if you have a manicured grass lawn it's going to require up to five litres of water per day for every square metre."

Too many people do not realise this until it is too late, "Unfortunately the majority of people don't come to me until after they have built the property. I know many places where they have got lawns in and come dry season their well dries up and then they have to buy water. That's when they realise that it's just not sustainable."

Water Solution

However there are alternatives that are both more affordable and more sustainable. Brad says, "I always recommend people go with a landscaper who can do natural vegetation.

Natural vegetation doesn't require much water at all and the environmental impact is a fraction of that of attempting to introduce unnatural vegetation."

"There's a danger that if you pick the cheapest guy out there you simply won't get what you want."

Ben Davis, Head Consultant,
Tropical Landscaping International

Brad continues, "The genealogy of Phuket is basically slate granite so it's not like other locations where people come from, where you can just drill a well and get unlimited water. Even if you do get a well you probably won't be getting more than 10 cubic metres per day."



There are a variety of reasons why people undertake landscaping projects without fully understanding all the long term ramifications. Brad thinks there is a danger that, "Sometimes people just want to please the customer and so they don't take environmental factors into consideration. So if the customer asks for lawns they just say yes instead of pointing out the expense of the water."

For anyone who is concerned about the water usage of their property, or prospective property, Brad can come up with an estimate, "It is a very complicated formula which I have adapted to Phuket's climate. I take into consideration factors like the size of the house and whether there's a swimming pool to give me a very good idea of how much water will be needed per day."

Finding The Right Answer

So whether you are looking to increase the value of your property, or merely to develop a more pleasant environment in which to live, landscaping has something to offer. Whatever your vision, good landscaping should utilize your available space in an aesthetic and manageable manner.

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Brad Koves, Managing Director,
Environmental Solutions & Protection Corporation

However it is worth remembering that it is not just the value of your property that any landscaping work will effect. Nearly everything that a person or company does with a piece of land will have an environmental impact of some sort. It does not matter how good the landscaping

work you have done might look in the short term. In the long term you need to ensure that the impact of your landscaping, both on the environment and your wallet, is positive.

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