

“Right Plant in the Right Place” by Kim Halyak

This is the 3rd of several interviews with Memphis landscape designers. We hope these articles inspire you to create beautiful and functional gardens that best meet your family needs. This month’s designer is Tom Pellet, a well-respected, well-known, much sought after garden designer in the MidSouth. Additionally, he occasionally offers a class on “small garden design”, leads garden tours, speaks at numerous plant symposiums, and readily shares his extensive plant knowledge. A fun fact is that Tom and his wife, Margaret, once lived in Cooper-Young, which they still miss.

- What is your occupation and how long have you worked in it?
 - I’m a garden designer who has worked in this field for 30+ years.
- Tell me a little about your life/work experiences/interests.
 - I started out at Vanderbilt and Tulane concentrating on architecture and engineering. Later I switched to Art School and earned a degree in Fine Arts from the California College of Arts + Crafts in Oakland, Ca. Since then I’ve practiced garden design in Austin, TX, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Memphis. My hobbies include: drawing, watercolor painting, walking, and bicycling.
- How would you address the challenge of designing for our small, urban Cooper-Young gardens?
 - I agree with Cicero, “Praise the large garden, but own a small one”. No matter your garden size all homeowners share similar challenges. One is trying to fit everything you want into the space. Another is if you want it to look good in all 4 seasons, then you need to pick plants that work harder. Finally drainage needs to be addressed.
- What do you consider to be the most frequent mistake made by urban gardeners?
 - The number one issue is most gardeners plant the wrong plant in the wrong place. Another is planting plants too close together. You need to plant them the suggested distance because plants grow faster than you imagine. Usually by the third year, plants have filled in fully. If you plant them too close, you spend all your time pruning and moving plants.
- Are there plants you think are overused or underused in our area?
 - There are no bad plants, just wrong plants for the wrong place. It really depends on what mood a homeowner is trying to create and what situations and problems there in in the garden space. Chose plants that do well in that spot and your garden work is greatly reduced.
- What are the advantages of hiring a professional designer?
 - A landscape designer can keep you from making mistakes. This will save you money and time in the long run. You have plants that thrive. Your particular garden problems can be solved. You’ll do less pruning and spend less time on maintenance. A well thought out garden design adds to the value of the home and to your daily use of the space.
- Describe how you partner with the homeowner to create and execute a design. What is the starting point for creating a functional and beautiful design?
 - Designing a home landscape is like putting pieces of a puzzle together. It’s about solving problems that home owners have. Together the homeowners along with the designer, decide what problems need solving. Typical urban garden problems include: drainage issues, poor

views, noise, eyesores, telephone wires, parked cars, lack of privacy and space and boring landscapes.

- The starting point for creating a functional, beautiful design is listening. I listen to my client and then I listen to the site. My goals are to create a plan that offers 4 seasons of interest, is pleasing to the eye, and leads to the end results.

- Urban gardeners are often busy people. What is your best advice for high-impact/low-maintenance gardening?
 - An easy way to minimize time maintaining a garden is to reduce or replace the front lawn. Front yards are missed opportunities because they should be an extension of your home instead of an extension of your sidewalk. Replacing lawn with trees, shrubs, and perennials creates another outdoor room that enlarges the space and invites you outdoors. You will be amazed at how your maintenance time goes down when you remove grass.

- What current trends do you see in landscape design?
 - I enjoy seeing more homeowners raising chickens, using permaculture to raise food, and incorporating rebar in designs.

- What is the best way for interested homeowners to reach you.
 - Just telephone at 901-276-1631.