



"There's a difference between landscaping and gardening," says Elizabeth LeJand, owner of Private Gardens in Dana Point. "Landscaping is something that doesn't change through time; gardening is the stage you set into motion. The owner personalizes it and perpetuates it in his or her own special way."



Learn the Rules. So You Can Break Them.

Elizabeth Leland Finds Art in the Garden

Story by Jennifer Hyndman Photography by Paul Jonason/Sharon Sumich

Elizabeth Leland has a space problem. With a showcase front yard ablaze in color and texture, the back yard an outdoor living room, and side yards experiencing various stages of vegetable garden and potter's workbench, Leland's "problem" is the envy of the community.

"I'm just used to having more room," Leland says. "I grew up in a house that was surrounded by a huge piece of property — a series of wonderful yards and gardens — each one with a different activity or theme. Between wanting to ride horses and playing outdoors, I can't remember ever being in the house."

Leland has never strayed far from her roots, so to speak, but she didn't rediscover her calling until college. "I went to Foothill College — a beautiful Northern California school situated in the Redwoods.

Above and left: The Leland-designed Culinary Garden of "The Batman House," the film version of the Bruce Wayne manor. Otherwise known as the 1997 Pasadena Showcase House. Herb garden, fruit trees, potted citrus and an outdoor dining enclave make this retreat more than fit for the defender of Gotham City.



Main Photo: "This family wanted to downsize and simplify their life," Leland says. "So they bought a beautiful little cottage, and created a playing area and garden to match with used brick and a simple garden design."

Top - A Calla Lily shade garden.

Center - one of two open-design gates connected by a rambling pathway.

Below - The Private Garden Artist.

My dad was in advertising – which I didn't want to go into — so I was studying art, although I didn't think it would be very viable as a career.

"That's when a friend of mine noticed how much I loved gardening as much as art and asked me why I didn't pursue landscape architecture as a career. I had never even heard of it before."

A professor's recommendation and four years later, Leland found herself deep in diploma with honors from Utah State University, but competing with mostly men with a great deal of field experience. "Not a lot of women pursued landscape architecture 15 or so years ago," she says. "And you needed to

come off confident and competent around architects and engineers. So I needed a little experience under my belt. And to just get over being shy."

That experience came from a serendipitous meeting and subsequent apprenticeship with a Laguna Beach icon and godfather of landscape architecture Fred Lang. "He was the most wonderful mentor I could have had," says Leland. "He was a tiny, eccentric German man in his seventies. He was incredibly well-respected in Orange County for his work designing the landscape for Dana Point Harbor and the John Wayne Airport. He taught plant materials at UC Irvine, and he really taught me that



understanding plants was essential to landscape architecture, and that it made all the grading, all the geometry, and all the theory come together.

"I never knew my grandparents, and Fred was really the grandfather I never had."

Lang's influence can be seen in Leland's absolute depth and breadth of vision she brings to her clients today. "It's much more enjoyable to work with a client whose home reflects their soul and personality," she says. "I get a feel for their personality learning about their likes and dislikes. This kind of back and forth discussion make for a more distinctive garden, because it's truly a reflection of them. I just help

them get there."

Leland's own dream home is suspiciously lacking in detail, but the property it sits upon is another story.

"Ideally, my house would be just a simple box on a hill with a view of the ocean," she says. "I'd have plenty of gardens – a tea garden, citrus garden, a Mediterranean garden, a shade garden, an outdoor 'cocktail lounge,' a vegetable garden – a bit of everything."

Private Gardens can be reached at (949) 240-8771.

Four potted lemon trees and warm terra cotta walls mark the corners of Leland's own "Citrus Lounge" – a haven for orphan plants not used in clients' gardens. A tapestry of texture and color conveniently use similar amounts of sun, shade and water, including red Australian "Kangaroo Paws," foreground.