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A Letter from Craig

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Great Gardens Take Time – Summer, 2008



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As I write this, we are once again in the throes of "spring rush" – every year, we try to be better prepared and yet, as the saying goes, "the faster I go, the behinder I get!" Thankfully, I have a terrific staff and understanding clients who all appreciate that what we do is Art (capitalization intentional) – not the two-dimensional kind contained within the boundaries of a standard canvas, but a three-dimensional **Living Art** that matures into the vision or intended effect after the passing of several years. Like a beautiful painting, our garden Art must be appealing (or at least intriguing) at first glance, but must then draw you in and hold your attention long enough to experience wonder, self-reflection, and a spectrum of thoughts and emotions.

In this age of instant gratification, increasing mechanization, and constantly faster technology, it's tempting to think we can have an "instant garden." 30-minute television segments, before-and-after magazine articles, "builder landscapes" that collapse after the house is sold... it's no wonder that people get frustrated when they experience garden-making for the first time! Many new clients call us to "come out and landscape my house" – only to discover a whole new world of creativity and passion! More than money, it's the creativity and passion – and dedication over time – that makes a garden **great**.

We were recently honored to have one of our gardens featured in *Fine Gardening's* "Great Gardens" series. Editor Daryl Beyers travels the country looking at new gardens, and generally selects one per region for these special issues. I couldn't help but compare our work to the other featured gardens, and draw some comparisons and contrasts. Although the gardens were all distinctly different, each was a strong statement and thorough exploration of some central idea or theme inspired by the land, the home, and the owner's lifestyle or personality. Taken together, these are the elements of "Genius loci" – or the "genius of place." These gardens all changed and evolved over the process of their creation, and no doubt continue to do so, but the guiding vision or prevailing aesthetic continues to guide decisions, both large and small.

This is not only the time of year for making gardens, but also to study gardens and to celebrate the achievements of our gardening friends. I'm delighted to be included, once again, in the annual Garden Conservancy Open Days – and encourage you to take advantage of this open invitation to visit and study some very fine private and public gardens in our region. Visit www.gardenconservancy.org for more information. You'll want to join this exciting organization, which helps preserve many fine historic gardens throughout our nation – including Ragdale and Elawa Farm, located here on Chicago's North Shore.

For those rainy days or chilly evenings when it's just too cold to work in the garden, I recommend a wonderful new book by Robin Karson: *A Genius For Place: American Landscapes of the Country Place Era*, published recently by the University of



Massachusetts Press in association with the Library of American Landscape History (www.lalh.org) – of which Robin is the Executive Director. This is a glorious catalogue of some of the most outstanding works of residential landscape design ever conceived in the history of our country – or anywhere. Carol Betsch's artful contemporary photos blend seamlessly with the historic photos and plans that illustrate this 420-page tome. A good and Inspiring read!

Robin has also authored one of my favorite monographs ever, profiling the work of the great East Coast landscape architect, Fletcher Steele. Steele, whose wonderful swimming pool for the historic Schweppe Estate in Lake Forest is included in the book, was a cultured, well-traveled, and eloquent person. Robin's profile of Steele in *Genius Loci* includes the following quote from one of his unpublished essays – which I think provides an antidote to the instant landscape mentality some people have today:

"As we relish the past, so should we prepare for the future and other coming lovers of gardens yet unborn. The true gardener has abiding faith and must express it, if only by planting an acorn where the 'Genius loci' calls for an oak. Better still is some imprint of ourselves in imperishable wall, in steps of stone, in a terrace that will be but more beautiful if the neglect of centuries overtakes it perchance. Then will our sound satisfaction lie not in showy flowers, not in exquisite details of the moment, but in knowledge that the charm which has been discovered, the genius of the place which has been revealed and adorned, is safe for all time, a gift to the future more lovely than even we can now dream." (Fletcher Steele, "Appeal to the Intelligence" - from Karson, *A Genius For Place*).

Your Gardening Friend,
Craig



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