

expert advice

10 Questions for...

# BRANDON JONES

PRINCIPAL DESIGNER, GLEN GATE COMPANY



Brandon Jones, principal designer, Glen Gate Company right: Recently, people have started to think about their landscape beyond what's just around the pool again.

## 1 What trends are you seeing in landscape design?

We are seeing projects beginning to grow back up in scale. Clients had been focused on smaller portions of the property, like the immediate area surrounding their homes or pool. Now, they are asking us to “pick our head up” and look at their property in its entirety, having us examine how each portion of it relates to the others and how the space can be utilized to its fullest potential. With regard to specific elements in the garden, we are seeing a number of clients asking us to incorporate architectural elements into a design scheme, such as a poolside pavilion or pergola. Clients are looking to integrate a greater sense of structure and definition into their outdoor environment.

## 2 What are your favorite plants or garden elements?

I am not sure if I have a “favorite”

plant, but I do feel that it is important to fill your garden space with plant materials that give you a good year-round return. It is critical that as you spec your plant materials, you keep in mind other attributes besides a specific flower, which may only give impact to your garden for two or three weeks a year. I encourage you to think about your gardens using a 365-day-a-year mindset. It is important to select plant materials that will give the garden great texture and structure during the colder months, along with that fleeting but impactful flower.

## 3 What are some diehard plants that are best for use in this area?

Some of my go-to plants are: *Cornus kousa*, for its great bark texture in the winter, leaf and berry color in the fall, and a flower that blooms later in the spring. Two other great trees with similar attributes are *Stewartia pseudocamellia* and *Franklinia alatamaha*. Some go-to shrubs I

frequently incorporate into planting schemes are *Ilex crenata*, for the year-round structure it provides, and I am always a fan of *Hydrangea*. *Hydrangea quercifolia* provides great mass and color to a garden through its flower and foliage. Some of my favorite herbaceous plants are *Iris sibirica*, and *Anemone “Honorine Jobert.”* If you are bored by the traditional *Vinca* or *Pachysandra* for groundcover, look to *Liriope spicata*, which provides a green carpet to the garden year-round. The trick is to weave a palette together that will provide your garden with continual interest. And if you're concerned about deer, a few “thugs” in the garden that stand up to them are boxwoods, *Nepeta*, *Geranium “Rozanne,”* and *Perovskia atriplicifolia*.

## 4 What design elements increase a home's curb appeal?

When it comes to increasing curb appeal it's about presenting the home. It is important to



*left: A mix of plant material creates a textural and interesting landscape. above: "There is a world of Hydrangeas that provide some great flower presence, as well as textures," says Jones.*

step back and look at your home's architecture, scale, and its relationship to the land. I always look to bridge a home's architecture to the environment it is placed in. Start by reflecting the lines and materials of your house in the forms and materials of the hardscape elements surrounding it. After the bones are set, it's about framing and softening the edges with great foliage. Keeping this in mind will create a cohesive design with tremendous appeal.

**5** **Where can you save?**  
One quick tip to save is with your paving materials. Crushed stone integrated into a path, walk, terrace, or driveway can be a great use of material that adds Old-World charm to a garden space, provides the utility needed, and drives budgets down.

**6** **Where shouldn't you skimp?**  
People will hate to hear it but it's drainage. This is a critical element that people always struggle with spending money on, because they say you can't see it. I say you can. A garden with good drainage shows itself in the health and vigor of its plants. Setting the proper base for the soil conditions in a garden is a step that I always need to encourage clients to trust me on.

**7** **Give us three tips for keeping a garden beautiful.**  
I think the first tip I would share is proper design planning. It's critical to spec the correct plant for the correct place. Use plants that will thrive based on the sun exposure or soil conditions of your garden. The second would be to continually monitor your irrigation system. Gardens need different water requirements throughout the season or even day-to-day, and overwatering can be even more disastrous than underwatering. Coming from a garden designer, this last tip may seem a little self-serving, but I assure you it's an important one: Don't dismiss your designer the day the garden is planted. It's crucial that a garden's design intent is continuously communicated to the people caring for it. Unlike a piece of architecture that remains static, a garden develops and matures, revealing its full potential over time.

**8** **When is the best time to consult a landscape designer?**  
The best time for a consultation is in the fall, after your traditional season has ended, and the needs of your outdoor spaces are fresh in your mind. Give adequate time for the planning to be done, in preparation for breaking ground first thing in the spring. Nowadays, most projects require some type of permits or approvals. Clients

are always surprised by the time lines required for this process. Sooner is always better. And when the season arrives: Allow your garden to wake up. Clients, as well as myself, are so eager to get outside and begin the season that sometimes we do more harm than good. Slow down and allow the plants some time before transplanting and pruning.

**9** **Tell us about the design process.**  
A successful process really involves the balance of three elements. The first is the form or aesthetic of a space, driven by a home's architecture and the environment of its setting. The second is a space's function, led by a client's "wish list" or identified issues to resolve. And the third element is the budget available for a project's implementation. It is important to create a dialogue that explores all of this candidly with a client. From there, it is about creating concepts that clearly illustrate your ideas, and meet all of the established points, while infusing a flare of creativity. It's an evolution from concept to detail that requires continuous examination with your client, until all are perfectly in line.

**10** **What sets Glen Gate apart from other companies?**  
I think there are a few things, such as the attention we give to our clients' needs as well as our creativity. The biggest however, is our firm's ability to create a design vision for a property, implement it, and maintain all of its intricate aspects, through a group of in-house experts, all with individual focuses. We allow our clients to create and enjoy their gardens with the assurance that there is a leader in place taking complete ownership of all the moving parts.