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## Leigh Designs

### Virtual Designs Blend Nature and Technology

By Kay Wilthew

Designing a beautiful garden or commercial landscape is an art form, and, like any artist, landscape designers need the proper tools to practice their craft. Leigh Gronet possesses not only artistic ability and a talent for graphic manipulation, she's introduced a new standard in digital landscape design. By constructing an entire natural-looking digital library featuring plants that thrive in the Bay Area, Gronet developed a system for creating vibrant, highly realistic landscape design presentations. Her company, Leigh Designs, digitally enhances project site photographs or CAD drawings to produce realistic compositions, enabling clients to plan and visualize a completed design before a single shovelful of earth is turned.



(Photo by Bruce Scheider)

Gronet found that most landscape design programs lacked sophistication and available images were of poor quality. A graphic arts background provided Gronet the perfect foundation for building her own digital presentation process. She determined the best approach was to compile a library of natural-looking digital plant photographs. "I went to nurseries and wholesalers, put up a white backdrop, put a plant in front of it and began shooting photographs. With my garden maintenance experience I knew what was successful in many Bay Area gardens and the level of maintenance each plant required."

A wide variety of foliage, trees and flowers are represented based on client tastes, budget and maintenance criteria. Building her library was a painstaking, time-consuming but worthwhile process. "It took me about three years, and I still shoot here and there for specific projects," states Gronet. "But I now have thousands and thousands of plants in my image library."



The client requested a deck, water feature and privacy. Architectural features, such as lighting and French doors, can also be added. (Photo courtesy of Leigh Designs)



The open deck allows the small space to feel more expansive, while the alternating Thuja and Pittosporum provide a playful privacy screen. This digital presentation represents the landscape at two to three years of growth. (Photo courtesy of Leigh Designs)

Gronet's effort results in a concise image of the completed project. "With digital concepts, contractors are impressed and excited to have such an accurate vision to build to. It's very clear what style we're looking for, the kind of stonework we're looking for and any color combinations." Detailed site plans prevent ambiguity, eliminate wasted time and materials, and establish reasonable expectations. Notes Gronet, "Even for the person who's going to install the materials, this is a great tool."

By displaying tiered ground-layer presentations, Gronet offers customers a dimensional perspective. "I show layers so the client can really see everything. For example, a client may not realize what the hardscape looks like behind the plants. There's such beauty in just seeing the hardscape alone." Gronet explains that this also helps clients who, due to the high costs of installation, need to plan construction in phases. "These different views are helpful for the contractor as well. With each perspective, I work with the contractor on how best to break out the stages of installation and provide a cost for each one so we can present a realistic implementation plan for the client."



A more natural-looking, low-maintenance landscape was requested by these clients. (Photo courtesy of Leigh Designs)



The final effect: a beautiful structure that supports year-round, colorful foliage and easy care flowering shrubs. (Photo courtesy of Leigh Designs)



Showing the hardscape alone allows the clients and contractor to clearly see the shapes and textures, as well as plan construction phases. (Photo courtesy of Leigh Designs)

Commercial clients and public space projects are those Gronet finds most inspiring. "There's something exciting about doing public work. I love to satisfy the little backyard garden fantasy, but people to escape that way. But there's a different kind of exposure with public work that's thrilling." Gronet's greatest satisfaction comes from the knowledge that people use and enjoy her natural spaces. "Creating a peaceful place for employees to have lunch where they are surrounded by an oasis to escape from a stressful job - it's a real privilege to be able to create that possibility for someone."

Gronet's determination to create a visual design process hasn't come without a cost. She willingly sacrificed profitability to build her image library, gradually accumulating referrals and new clients. But Gronet's efforts are paying off, and she has an unwavering confidence in herself and her company. "Not only do I have the vision, but I have a very unique way of presenting it, and it has crystallized. Whether my client is a homeowner or a builder, they are able to see what is just possible, and when they see that possibility, they are just 'wow.'" In Leigh Designs, Gronet has cultivated a lucrative business venture fueled by art, passion and true entrepreneurial spirit.

Leigh Designs is located at 163 Lakeshore Court in Richmond, CA 94804. Call (510) 559-6969 or visit [leighdesigns.biz](http://leighdesigns.biz) for more information.