
THE FEMININE LANDSCAPE – THE RE-EMERGENCE OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATURAL WORLD

By Pamela Woods author of *Gardens for the Soul*

When my experience of a place is one of feeling at home it is usually because it contains a feeling of familiarity, nurture and timelessness.

If I can hold, what is often a fleeting experience, a feeling of being completely 'at home' may emerge and it is this feeling which I have found best describes the nature of a space which people today crave whether in a garden or a home.

There are places, which can generate this wealth of emotions, which can be experienced by both women and men and are sometimes recognized as sacred.

I have begun to recognize these places as spiritually, essentially feminine.

Martin Prechtel the Guatemalan teacher, speaking from a Mayan perspective, says that the magical spirit of a plant always appears as a woman. He also says that the earth is She, our own divine mother, drawing from his own vision of the Divine Feminine he explains that we have forgotten how to appreciate the value of what we consume from the body of this earth Goddess and after centuries of exploitation have also forgotten what it is we first needed from her.

FEMININE ENERGIES ?

It seems that our ancestors had less of a struggle affirming the feminine in the land , they considered the earth to be mother, regenerator, creator, grower of grains, mother earth – the womb of life. This being accepted, feminine deities were honoured as the makers of all things. Places were named after female deities and saints, their rituals and rites being held there. Brideswell, Bridford and Bridestowe being places named after the ancient British Goddess Bride.

But if we think of the landscape as a place today, the place we live and work, we hardly know the feminine quality of space for the lack of it around us – level, sharp, angular surfaces and buildings, and heavy metal constructions ! It seems it is only in our own comfy personal spaces where we place softness and comfort where we might define the space as feminine.

In accepting a world, which hails consumerism as God, we have lost the feeling of being at home. The world of nature *is by nature* feminine and in order to return home to a place of balance and harmony we need to re-design a feminine world in which we no longer objectify nature but develop an intimate experience with her.

LIVING IN THE FEMININE MULTIDIMENSIONAL SPACE

Most of the time the modern man-made landscape feels one-dimensional.

If we were able to bring the smells, shapes and textures of nature “home” we could develop a place to return to our true soulful selves, feel nurtured, alive, free, creative, unlimited and unthreatened.

This multi dimensional, feminine world of nature is in fact our heritage and our bodies and souls require to be fed by nature on more than an occasional ‘re-charge our batteries’ basis.

Most of the time we don’t even realize the impact of this one-dimensional world on our lives. When I start to create a lush and nourishing place on the landscape I refer to it as “feminine” because it is a complete contrast to the everyday modern ‘masculine’ world.

The absence of plants in the town and city environment is to me the most striking evidence of the absence of the divine feminine.

DESIGNING MODERN FEMININE SPACES

I feel a new world of designing feminine space will reflect a hunger for more intimacy with the world of nature and will include far more plants, water, rocks and even earth in a closer proximity to our actual living spaces.

Rather than excluding anything organic, bacterial and potentially ‘dirty’ in our living spaces, we will begin to include and enclose the material of the natural world in new and creative ways. We certainly have a current fascination for the ‘ethnic’, wanting to surround ourselves with the aesthetics and the energy of the ancient worlds and peoples- yet we remain ignorant of their ancient spiritual traditions.

We will I feel see a movement away from the fashion for the pristine and sterile one-dimensional white living spaces and develop ways of inclusion and direct relationship with the unpredictable, growing material of life.

We could return again to being in a relationship with the natural world rather than referring to it objectively – keeping separate from it.

‘House’ plants could no longer be limited to windowsills, gardens no longer simply viewed through windows to create a less clear interface between inside and out. So many of my own clients have requested that I achieve this feeling in their homes, wanting their indoor and outdoor plants to merge in a seamless transition.

My dream is to see these new, richer landscapes becoming the surroundings of the future in which we find ourselves working, sleeping, playing, cooking.... surrounded by plants, water, rocks - living substances. Rather than images of flowers/plants landscapes on our walls our future lies in rubbing shoulders with them, in living in close proximity with the growing food we eat, the herbs we use for medicine and developing even closer relationships with the substance of nature.

The unhealthiness of the modern sterile environment for children has been proven – too many disinfected homes don’t help our children develop their necessary immune system. We know from research by NASA scientists that there is a vast range of plants, which have a potent capacity to cleanse and revitalize the air, we breathe and the environment we live in.

Research into the presence of plants in hospitals has shown that patients with a view of plants or in the presence of plants recover from surgery and illness far quicker.

When I was commissioned to make an indoor 'Shinto' garden as the reception area for the leaders of the world's spiritual faiths attending the celebrations of the Queen's Royal Jubilee and the work of the charity ARC, the purpose was to provide a living, breathing, woodland sacred place, walking through which the visitor was suddenly amongst the essence of the living feminine – a lush shrine of plants and water, giving them the vehicle to shed the stressful effects of the city and step into the divine realms of nature. This experience was designed to prepare them for the spirit of the event – the celebration of the diversity of the world's faiths and the sanctity of nature.

The government have recently stated that "A daily 20-minute spell of gardening or merely being around plants could improve the nation's health.....horticultural experts want to see the positive effects of plants recognized in the same way as eating a healthy diet and they are recommending that everyone spends at least 20 minutes a day, or nearly two-and-a-half hours a week, gardening, tending to plants or simply enjoying green spaces.'

The Horticultural Trades Association is urging the health establishment to accept the guidance in a new "recommended daily allowance" for exposure to plants and have launched PlantforLife, a £1.7 million campaign which receives backing from the EU. Its aim is to increase people's involvement with plants and have reported mounting evidence showing the health benefits of exposure to plants in the home and the workplace.

The French professor of botany and inspirational designer Patrick Blanc creates *mur vegetal* – vertical walls of planting, clothing the exterior walls of hotels and parks such as the Foundation Cartier in central Paris where the viewer is challenged to perceive the world of plants in a new way. In his own house and garden in a concrete suburb of Paris he envelops walls with plants creating lush curtains of jungle like foliage . He has developed a vertical metal framework, which supports capillary matting, which draws up water and nutrients from a concrete trough on the ground. Plants are placed in pockets in this matting and eventually their roots and foliage create a dense beautiful wall of plants. Techniques such as these could be used more extensively in cities to cover ugly buildings and create gardens where there is no ground space for them. The quality of our air space would be improved hugely, our working environments could be inspirational and our well being levels increase.

Coming Home

To embrace the feminine world of plants and nature in exterior and interior design would not only bring about more beauty and soulfulness to our environment but we would also lose the fear of earth, soil and plants themselves. Moving away from the dry land of the modern white space and exploring instead the green, rich, lush, complex, world of nature, our living experience would be one of relatedness to nature rather than one of separation. A stride towards a future life of harmony and balance.

Pamela Woods

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www.sacredgardens.co.uk

telephone 01453 885903 pamela@sacredgardens.co.uk

Biography

Pamela Woods is a botanist, landscape designer, plantswoman, artist and author. She has been designing and making gardens for the last 18 years. Her company Sacred Gardens has come to specialize in designing both public and private gardens for clients who have a spiritual focus. Pamela won a Silver Gilt medal for The Feng Shui Garden at the Hampton Court Flower in 1999 and great acclaim for the Shinto garden for the Queens Royal Jubilee celebrations in November 2002.

Her work can be seen on the web site www.sacredgardens.co.uk Pamela now teaches and holds seminars in the sublime and transformative art of creating sacred gardens.

Picture details

The Shinto Garden – a lush sacred space made for the Queen’s Royal Jubilee celebrations and The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, Whitehall, London in November 2002 and designed to bring the essence of the feminine in nature. Photograph John Glover (copyright)