

Shake It Up!

FLEX YOUR DESIGN MUSCLES *Even When It's Challenging*



**By Christina
Salwitz**

In the last year I've lost 50 pounds and to my own shock, I participated in a marathon. My health goals were step one in a year of concentrating on transforming numerous parts of my life. Embarking on this process has had me re-thinking not only my personal goals, but also my professional goals. After the beginning of the new year, the ripples of these changes are now finding their way into my design work.

Part of REAL transformation means being open to changing our habits, and transformational design ideas can easily become a habit unless that muscle isn't exercised. I want a designer six-pack thank you very much.

Being a cog in the wheel of inertia with the seasonal life we live in garden centers and horticulture has

both good and bad elements, right? We can count on some certainty when it comes to the busy and slow seasons, the pace of our calendar is pretty much the same from year to year barring any major disasters or other impairments. But, when it comes to plant combinations, either those I recommend or those I plant up, I need to keep my brain entertained and well fed no matter the season.

Last month, I pleaded for the people with fresh new ideas to stand up, stand out and shout from the rafters of our collective what's new, fresh and distinctive in design. I got some amazing feedback! I'll feature one such designer soon, so stay tuned.

Years ago, I worked for a high-end architecture firm that was excellent at design. However, they used the same palette of plants at nearly every home, so when you drove through certain neighborhoods where they worked on multiple homes, you could easily point out who did the work by the plants.

It's a habit we form to reach for the same combo of plants for a customer, right? The tried-and-true combos that never fail to work, impress and show your design chops.



Dirty Secrets

But, at what point does your work become stale, uninspired and just another combination in the crowd? Is it after the third year? Fifth year?

Design work can become a habitual pattern the same as reaching for chips at 10 p.m. You won't notice any effect

from the chips the first time, second time or even maybe after the fifth time. But, there's that one magical moment when you look in the mirror and the math suddenly adds up.

You can't simply think your way to a better habit; you're not likely to get

"unstuck" that way. You need to shake things up with action!

As I write this article in January, I need to get a client's home ready for a magazine photo shoot on three days' notice. Because of our El Niño winter in the Pacific Northwest, we're already in



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You're invited to join us in Music City for this year's 16th annual GCA Summer Tour - your trusted resource for retail education and inspiration! From trendy, urban garden centers and boutiques to country-rustic nurseries, the offerings of Nashville are sure to inspire! What's more, our host hotel is within steps of the fun and excitement of Music Row, famous for its many restaurants and bars, including Blake Shelton's Ole Red, Jason Aldean's Kitchen & Rooftop Bar and Florida Georgia Line's restaurant, FGL House. We'll see you there!

Have a look at just a few of our store visits:



Gardens of Babylon, Nashville, TN

Check out this urban garden boutique with a fun, funky, eclectic atmosphere that specializes in products for small-space gardeners, sustainable-minded customers.

Moore & Moore Garden Center, Nashville, TN

This independent retailer is recognized for its relaxed parklike setting with sweeping pathways, creative use of space and inspiring merchandise displays that speak to modern gardening lifestyles.



Martin's Home & Garden, Murfreesboro, TN

The greenhouse department is the heart and soul of this local indie operation - it generates one-third of the garden center's revenue. Be sure to check out the new permanent pergola and raised beds.



JVI Secret Gardens, Nashville, TN

The soothing sounds of trickling water greet customers as soon as they enter JVI Secret Gardens, as ponds stocked with koi, waterfalls and other water gardening features are huge focuses for the garden retailer.



Sharon Hadden

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Instead of always reaching for tried-and-true combos, get inspired with new varieties.

pre-spring mode so my creativity muscles need a run, yoga and weight lifting to pull this together with style fast.

One of my favorite authors, Marianne Williamson writes "It's easier to act your way to a new way of thinking than it is to think your way to a new way of acting."

I use this idea a ton in its distilled form; it's simply "fake it until you make it." But, this idea is so much more than that in today's fast-paced retail world.

Instead of pondering and making lists, or scrolling "Pinterest" for ideas and inspiration, I propose the idea that you just shake it up by making a fast decision. (Note that this does not mean an uninformed decision.)

This means playfully re-wire your decision pattern when it comes to plant pairings. It means being open to happy accidents. Then stand back and watch how that ripple begins to effect other parts of your work. Make radical change of some sort just to rattle your own cage.

What I'm after is to create momentum. I want to learn to run faster, stretch my muscles more efficiently and get better results.

That's important to building a reserve of ideas in your design files. You can always go back to having chips at 10 p.m. But my hunch is that once you start to see the momentum take place, you don't want the chips to undo all the work you've put in so far. 🌱

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