

## Chloe Brown

**Designer,  
Photographer,  
Writer**

*has a fascinating background of visual influences which pour into her work, having been born in Kenya, and travelled in Africa and the Middle East before triaging in painting and printmaking at the Glasgow School of Art and then at the English gardening School. She has worked in Uganda and Glasgow and at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh and has recently returned from working with Steve Martino in Arizona.*

Here, she talks about the influence on her work, and her time with Steve Martino



"I think influences from all over the world can really open one up to possibilities in design. East Africa, the place I will always call home is an eclectic mix of different people, cultures and styles. The coast has long been Muslim and so Moorish architecture with a Portuguese influence is common. The Indian Ocean is an inspiring backdrop with the Monsoon winds bringing goods and influences from the middle-east and India. There is an exciting salty taste to the wind, as one wonders the various Arabic towns that line the coast in awe of the conglomeration of styles and flavours. For me my influence here is my love of simple courtyards. Often the streets consist of tiny alley ways that weave between stuccoed buildings and the whole effect, instead of being claustrophobic, it is surprisingly calming. I often note how the built environment really seems to belong. This is something I intend to draw from.

Observing the various tribes inland in Kenya one is inspired by form and material. The Masai manyatta's are wooden low structures, clad in dried mud and dung- it really illustrates the broad spectrum of building materials that one can use. Mud clad walls have a wonderful texture and would add interest to any garden architecture (only in hot countries, of course!)

My time working in Uganda influenced me in a different way- here one really observes the intense farming as the main occupy of the landscape. The plantations are pre-dominantly Banana and they dominate the landscape in a very powerful way. It illustrates the importance of mans influence on the landscape. As a designer if think it's good to note the beautiful

influence of man's controlled and farmed landscape. We are part of nature after all. In the garden setting perhaps this could be used in formal plantings. An example of this would be to create structure with plants, for example with Buxus Sempervirens; a common use of a plant for structure in the English Country Garden style. There is no reason why structure could be formed with mass plantings of agricultural crops such as corn or bananas.

I would implore any student to try and get experience with an established designer. I was fortunate to go and work for Steve Martino in Arizona and the experience was vital in my development.

I have to describe Steve as a genius, so down to earth and so much fun. He approached the design process with such practical ease and then once the problems are solved he becomes an idea factory! I would work on three ideas and he would keep firing out options all of them practical and very creative.



*Baja garden by Steve Martino*

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I think from him the most important thing I learnt is that the hard-scape structure in a garden is the most crucial in determining the space. Un-like what I learnt studying design in the UK,

using plants for structure are not essential in determining the space in garden. In-stead the plants compliment the more permanent hard-scape design"

Steve has played an important role in the re-introduction of the desert plants into the Desert Urban environment. Cities like Phoenix are famous for vast green lawns and palm trees- Steve's efforts have been vital in the slow but very definite change away from the high water consuming exotics to native species. Palo Verde and Mesquite trees are now commonly seen in public spaces. When Steve first started as a designer no desert plants where available in the nurseries, he spent a lot of time collecting seed in order to build up a palette of plants he could use. The desert plants really are spectacular and Steve uses their structure and forms in a powerful 'scruffy' way. He really is inspired directly by the desert and wants his use of plants to provide as natural as habitat as is possible. The soft wild plantings compliment the very bold garden architecture that make Steve's gardens so signature.

I cannot describe enough the wonder at visiting one of Steve's gardens. Photos and drawings of the spaces do a lot to alight ones imagination, but visiting a finished garden is incomparable. My favourite awe-inspired visit was to the Baja garden in Paradise Valley. This I think is one of Steve's most eccentric gardens and around every corner I was amazed. Bold angled walls grow out of the desert selecting careful views whilst masking any sense of the neighbours. It really is a masterpiece. "

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