



LEFT AND THIS IMAGE ROCK IS USED TO GREAT EFFECT IN THE MAURITZFONTEIN GARDEN IN THE KAROO, FROM JOANE PIM'S NETWORK OF STONE-BUILT PATHWAYS, TO FOCAL POINTS SKIRTED BY HARDY GRASSES



The art of rock

Franchesca Watson on the subtle science of incorporating rock into your garden

I recently went on a moss-garden building course at Babylonstoren, which was fascinating – it involved the careful and intended placement of rocks in relationship with one another, before the final planting of the glorious mosses. The day really distilled all my experiences of working with rock in gardens.

Rock in a garden requires careful handling. It can be sublime, whether naturally occurring or purposefully placed, but can very easily slip over into shapeless misunderstanding or fearful kitsch.

With the move towards more natural, less manicured gardens, rock is a wonderful addition. It can be used to great effect for steps, pathways, walls, changes in levels or focal points.

Placement of rock is a great skill, which some very observant people have an instinct for, but which can also be learned with time and experience.

Here are my views and tips:

■ **Don't mix different kinds of rocks together.** Rather use various sizes and shapes of a similar rock type.

■ **If you're after creating the effect of rock having occurred naturally,** use the biggest sizes you can manage or afford. Very large rock will probably require placement by machine.

■ **Most large rocks in nature are partially submerged.** This is because they have been there a long time, often with soil and plants gathered around their base. You can use the submerging process to hide the placement of smaller 'chock rocks', which may have been

necessary to achieve the desired angle of the main rock.

■ **Inspect your rocks carefully** and turn the best looking sides towards the viewer, and the broken or ugly sides away.

■ **If the rocks have fissures, streaks or other natural markings,** in nature these would usually all flow the same way. So when placing two or more near each other, make sure the patterning is angled similarly.

■ **Take particular care not to damage and scrape the rocks** during transport and placement.

■ **If you have naturally occurring rock formations in your garden it's best not to disturb them.**

Rather plant to complement their character and that of the garden. Plants such as aloes and succulents give a typically African or dry look when combined with rock. Alternatively, green grasses and watsonias will create a more meadow-like look.

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