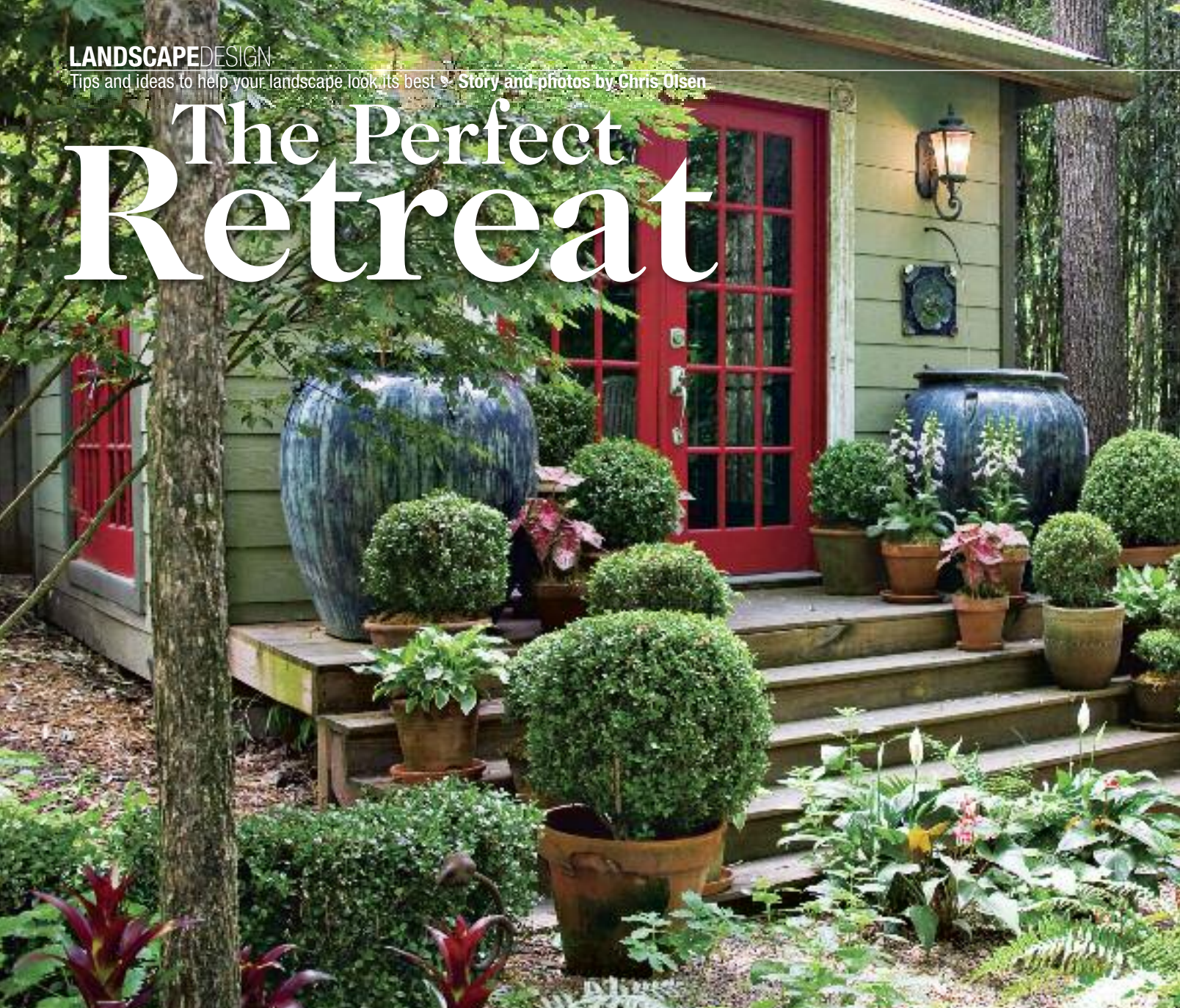


# The Perfect Retreat



◀ Keep your plants in their boundaries by planting a hedge of Wintergreen boxwood (*Buxus microphylla* 'Wintergreen'). Just trim them about three times during the growing season.

◀◀ Soften your wood bench with pillows of different hues. Stack them for added appeal.



**E**veryone wants a retreat, a calming place, somewhere just to relax and recharge. Whether you have mental or physical stress, or both, as in my case, most of us desire a place of solitude. The question is, do you have such a place? If you don't, or if people keep invading that space, then take control, and create a new and special walled area just for yourself and invited guests.

If you love the outdoors, then why not build a screened-in porch off your house that overlooks your garden? The size of your retreat does not matter, as long as you have space to stretch and the ability to gaze out into nature and your landscape. And you can leave your door open from the house to the screen porch, allowing bugless

△ **Create seating areas near your retreat. Vibrant chairs say "hello" and "relax."**

**Above right: The sound of water can be captured with this low-maintenance water feature. All you need is copper tubing, a pump, an oversized glazed jar and aqua.**



fresh air to drift into your home. But the real benefit is that you can sit outside yet be protected and covered while enjoying a good rain storm. What a great feeling to be out in the elements.

Make your screened-in porch comfortable, personal and inviting. A pair of overstuffed chairs or a cushioned settee only makes your experience more relaxing. Assorted containers, overflowing with lush plants, help set the mood and bring in a part of your garden. You will also need a surface to rest your drink and book upon, so think of an interesting little side table or cube to add to your mix.

Decorate with personal elements; this space is yours. Go ahead and use items that you have collected over time. Maybe incorporate a larger piece, like a fountain, for the corner. In my case, I have a big concrete sculpture of Buddha. The oversized Buddha head has become the focal point of the porch.

Remember, you're sharing this room with the outdoors, so bring in some of those pots and artifacts, especially if they look old and weathered. You want the effect of found objects, some of which could have come from your travels or were washed ashore. My Buddha sprouts tillandsias, or air plants, so that he doesn't just appear wise and happy – he looks as if he were newly excavated from the jungle.



To get this look, which you can achieve with almost any outside object, I took an assortment of tillandsias, and hot glued them onto my statue. Yes, hot glue. Tillandsias are rugged little plants, easy to care for, because they are indigenous to areas where they grow nestled in the forks of trees or within rocky outcroppings.

Because their roots are little more than anchors, they receive moisture through their stems, from dew or the occasional downpour. I only “water” mine once a week, misting from a spray bottle. More than that, and they will rot. They actually survive on neglect. If your retreat is in a humid spot, you may not have to worry much about watering them at all in the warm months. Air plants prefer semi-shade, so if you have enough natural light in your screen porch, they might live for years. During winter’s cold, you can peel them off and bring indoors. Because of their size, tiny sculptural leaves and gray-green color, they look great mixed in with Christmas decorations.

**Opposite page: “Never be Shy” ... Nothing says welcome so much as doors painted a lipstick red. Old wood siding, reclaimed wood walls and antique furniture adorn this retreat.**

**Below right: New purposes for old things is what it’s all about. This antique plant stand is now a wonderful votive holder.**

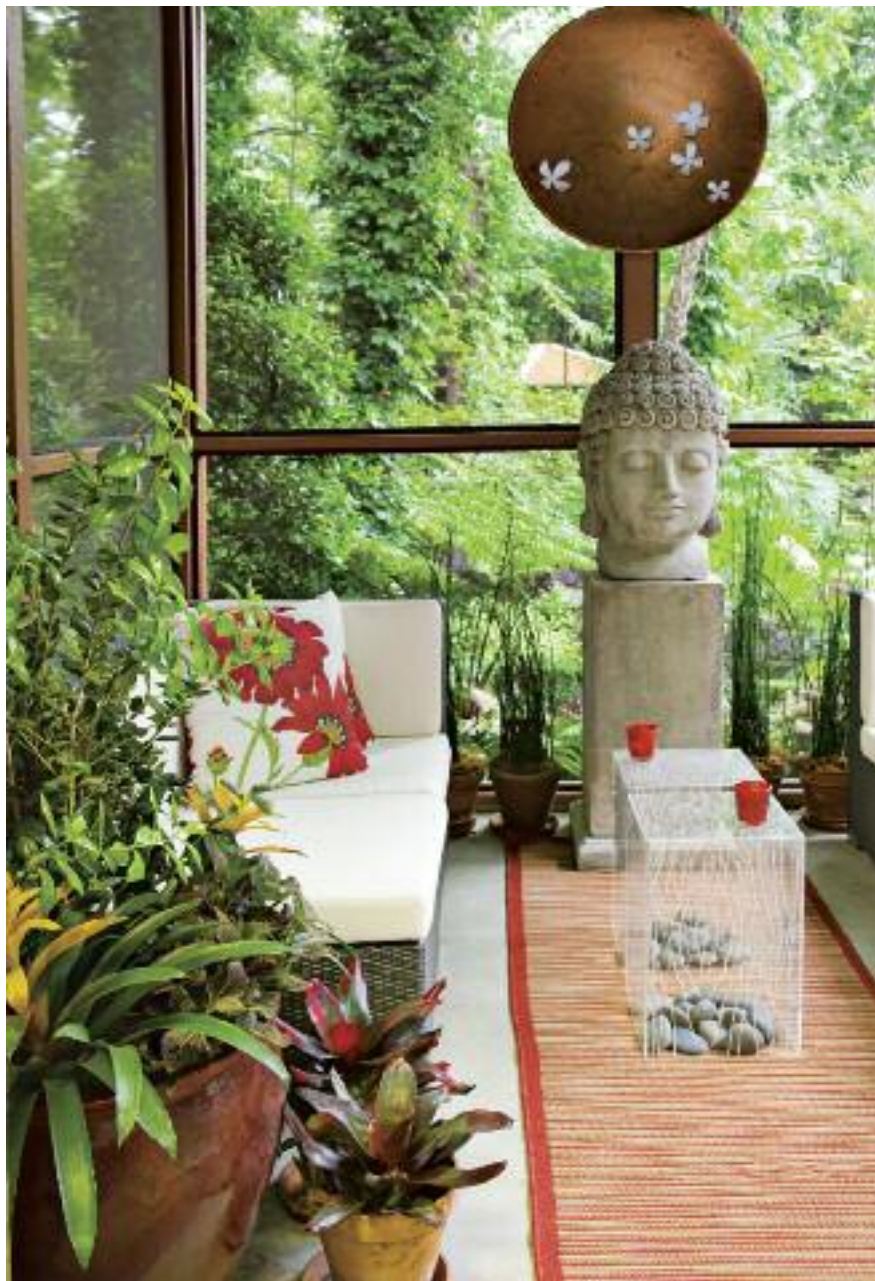
**Create your own focal point such as this Buddha sculpture. Pots full of horse reed (*Equisetum hyemale*) add vertical emphasis. ▽**

What if you can’t build a screened porch onto your home? And what if maybe you want more seclusion, even farther away? For some of us, escapism means getting away from the house itself. You can build a freestanding garden shed, separate from your house. You won’t need much space at all. Think about it: All you need is enough room in which to retreat, so you can forget the stressful day you just had.

I have a great layout and simple design for you, which can be modified to your taste and existing yard. My garden shed, or “shack” as I like to call it, is only about 100 square feet. It is basically a house turned inside out, constructed from recycled timber, some more than a century old.

The interior of my shed is walled with planks from the outside of an old farm house. The trim is from an aging office building, and the floors were once cedar walls, possibly from farm dwellings. All these components appeal to me because I love history, plus value using recycled elements. Using such varied lumber sources and leaving it all unfinished means my shack will not be like any other, or even like future ones I might build.

For light, I have a pair of French doors placed in each of the three walls that face the garden. The ceiling is vaulted and painted sky blue, that serene old-fashioned porch ceiling color. I installed electricity so I could augment the lighting, just in case I have an intimate little dinner.



“No excuses. If you need a mini-vacation, then create that wonderful retreat that you so deserve.”

I have two tables in this space. One table is in the center of the shack, and collapsible. If I have a large tour of people, it goes away and I serve wine and cheese on the antique potting table that graces the back wall. The building is heated and cooled and has surround sound (just for me). The roof is metal, so the experience in the shack during a rain storm is either delightfully soothing or almost deafening. I have installed an iron and glass sculpture that reaches skywards on the top of the roof.

**Found objects adorn the antique potting table in the garden shed.** ▽



△▷ **Decorate above!!!**  
**These plastic flowers are attached with magnets to tacks stuck in the wood. I found these on the Internet from CB2.**



My garden shed is like a miniature house, except without a bathroom and kitchen. It's just a place to escape every now and then. The greatest thing about being out in the garden is my view. I have a totally different viewpoint from the shack than I have from my house. I would never have taken advantage of such a view, if it were not for this wonderful, homey shed.

Adjoining the front porch of my garden shack are two oversized glazed jars outfitted as fountains. Water is piped out of the exterior wall, through copper, right into the jars. These two fountains are dramatic, and they create a soothing sound. If you want a low-maintenance water feature, this fountain is for you. Just remember to add water during the warm months.

Outside the shed I have created a sitting area with two wooden chairs painted a vibrant peach. Surrounding the chairs is an assortment of tropical plants such as 'Limelight' *Dracaena deremensis*, different varieties of bromeliads, autumn fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora*), assorted anthuriums with their oddly elegant blooms and collections of various plants that I find on my shopping trips. Remember, you don't have to even buy additional plants if you have overwintered some in your house. Bring them out where they'll thrive, as long as you monitor the water and amount of sun. It doesn't really matter if you even sit here. The look is a suggestion of relaxation and sets the mood.

If you decide this is the avenue for you, find the perfect location first. Siting is critical because you want to make sure the view from your "shack" is not of your main house. The point here is to get away and find yourself once again, and a view of nothing more than landscape helps you find calm. Once you've found the area, then build it. If you are a do-it-yourself type of person, then more power to you. Or, if you're like me, hire a reputable contractor to create your dream, and go shopping for the right elements.

No excuses. If you need a mini-vacation, then create that wonderful retreat that you so deserve. Take advantage of the outdoor spaces of your home. It's about time you enjoy more time in your own yard. Increase the value of your home with an affordable screened porch or a garden shed. When all is said and done, building a screened porch or garden house may be about the same cost as a vacation to Europe, but this mini-vacation lasts so much longer than just 10 days. ✨

Happy Gardening.

*Chris Olsen is the owner and landscape designer of Botanica Gardens in Little Rock. He is also a local TV personality in association with Today's THV 11. Check out his two new national DVDs at [botanicagardens.com](http://botanicagardens.com). For more information on Chris go to [chrisholsen.com](http://chrisholsen.com).*