

The Mind of Design: A Creative Approach

Essay and artwork by

Garry L. Menendez, A.S.L.A.

Instructor, Department of Ornamental Horticulture and Landscape Design
University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture

A crisp sheet of paper lies before you. An arsenal of reference books and design manuals are close at hand. The graphite tip of the pencil maintains a threatening but eager point that could rip a hole in even the most durable piece of vellum. The light has been adjusted precisely, as are the drafting table, stool, and temperature of the room. All systems are go. Let the design begin. But wait! There is something missing. You've forgotten to unlock the door. The door to that very special room in your brain which contains that all-important design necessity... creativity.

To be creative is to be imaginative. Letting the mind explore all of the possibilities with a no-holds-barred approach is to be original and stimulating. One may ask if creativity is a trait that can be learned or taught. I personally do not believe so. The ability to be creative lies within us all. What can be taught are methods to deal with the obstacles that lay in the way of our creativity. Hurdles such as fear, self doubt, and negative attitudes must be overcome if we are to unleash our imagination and produce truly unique designs and solutions. Fear is the most pronounced barrier. It is out of the fear of being

wrong that most of us wait until we have all of the answers before we speak out. We also fear criticism, change, and loss of habit. But most of all we fear being alone. Expressed in another way, we fear truly being an individual.

Self doubt and negative attitudes continually chip away at the foundation of creativity. Not believing in one's own abilities and using phrases such as "I can't" instead of "I'll try" destroy any attempt to develop the imagination. Positive attitudes and self esteem ironically are two of the most difficult attributes to mature within oneself. By changing our focus from fear and negativity to optimism and confidence, we can overcome this block to

creativity.

Creativity is something that should be exercised in our classrooms daily. In teaching, often too much is offered by an instructor when a student is seeking help. An effective teacher should ask more questions of the student than vice versa. It is not easy and it takes patience, but it is essential in helping to develop a creative mind. Naturally, the simpler approach for the instructor is to give little feedback to the student and hastily tell him what is correct or incorrect. This is wrong. By asking thought-provoking questions a superior instructor will be of the greatest assistance to the student.

Finally one may ask "How can I stimulate my own creativity?" The answer is very simple, as I have learned from a program entitled *The Psychology of Achievement* by Brian Tracey.

Whenever you have a problem or a question that needs to be answered and are in search of creative solutions, there is one best thing to do...

sit in a quiet room with a comfortable chair and no distractions and just sit for thirty minutes to an hour. Do not read, write, listen to music, or sleep. Just sit quietly, take deep breaths, clear your mind and become totally relaxed. For the first twenty to thirty minutes it will be one of the most difficult things you have ever done. After that time you will be astonished by the thoughts and images that go through your mind. It is at this point that you realize that you have remembered to unlock the door to the room which houses your creativity. ■

