

Gems of the Garden

IN SOUTHERN LADY'S 20 YEARS, WE'VE FEATURED A HOST OF GARDENS DESIGNED BY TROY RHONE. HERE, HE SHARES HIS SECRETS FOR AN ARTFUL MIX OF ANTIQUES AND NATURE'S OFFERINGS.

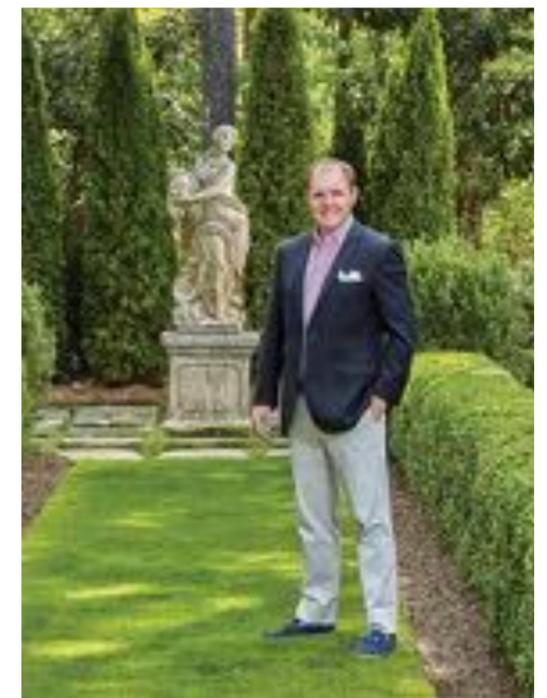
BY Elizabeth Bonner Czapski | PHOTOGRAPHY BY Ryan Carlson



For as long as he can remember, Troy Rhone was drawn to the endless possibilities inherent in the splendor of the outside world. Having grown up in a family of writers, artists, and gardeners, he followed the latter path, focusing his talents toward cultivating natural beauty. Now an acclaimed garden designer based in Birmingham with a two-decade career that has spanned 13 states, Troy parlays his creative prowess into custom sanctuaries, filling them with lush plantings and abundant blooms, but also incorporating statuary, antique ephemera, and other objects to lend interest and distinctive personality.

“Using garden elements adds a personal touch to a space,” Troy says. “They give you something unexpected. A garden with just plants can sometimes seem out of balance, but stone, cast iron, and things like that bring visual weight.”

Statues are one of his favorite features to achieve this balance. “They give scale to the space,” he explains. “They can be used as a focal point—a place for the eye to stop and rest.”





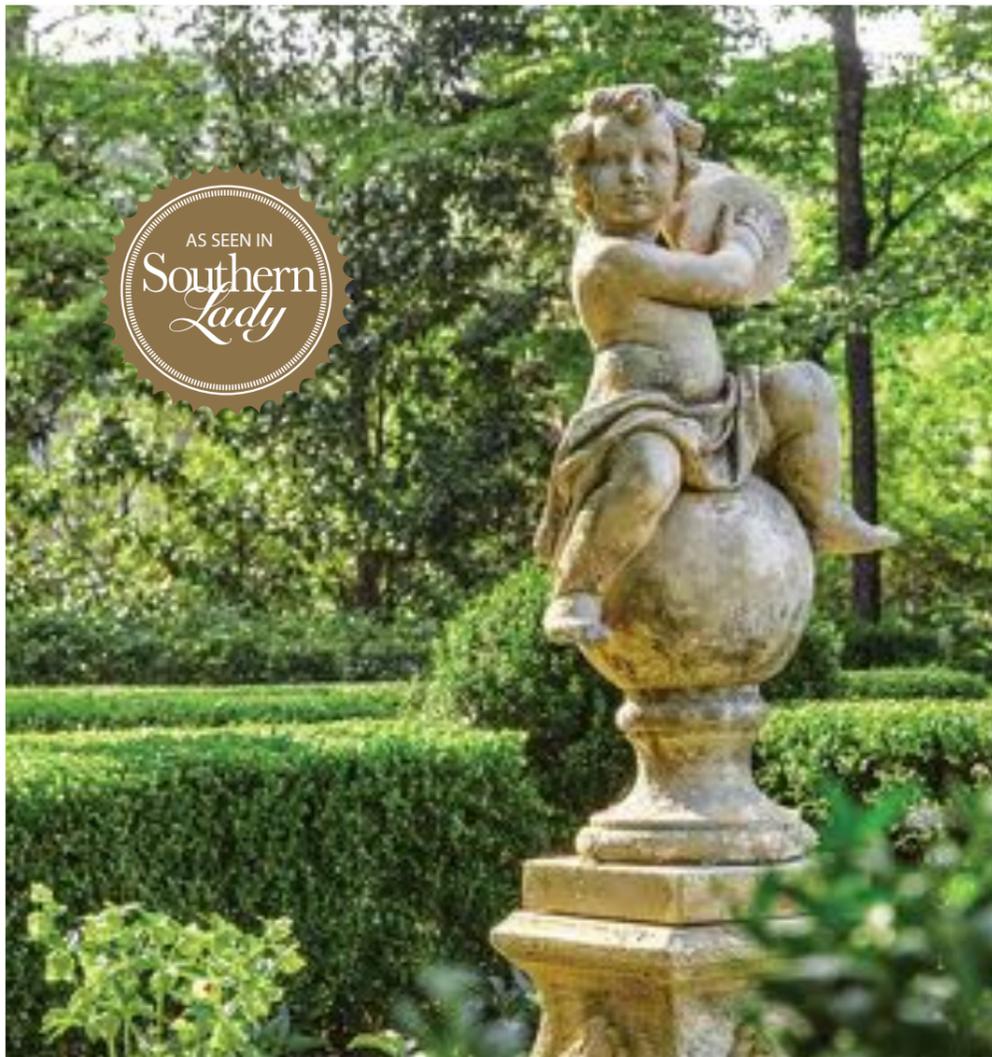
Troy also uses statuary to reflect the life of each garden's owner. He once worked with a three-time cancer survivor, and he wanted her garden to be a satisfying reminder of her unwavering strength. To accomplish this, he chose a striking statue of a huntress to stand at the head of a stately boxwood parterre softened by Lenten roses. "The huntress symbolized the power of this person being someone who could overcome adversity," he says. "That was the whole theme of the garden."

Vintage and antique pieces, whether family heirlooms or elements selected by Troy for the project at hand, reveal his penchant for designing outdoor spaces that are an extension of home interiors.

While Troy loves hunting for things specific to each house and its garden, many clients have accents of their own that they ask him to incorporate. "If somebody has a great piece, we try to work it in because it already has meaning and personal value," he says. "It makes their garden become that much more of an important part of their life."

"These elements bring history into the garden," he continues. "You know a piece was used somewhere else, other people got to admire it, and now it's in your space. These are the pieces that become sentimental. They instill a feeling that you're not going to get from something store-bought and mass-manufactured. They give you a personal touch that you couldn't get otherwise."





TROY RHONE'S TIPS FOR INCORPORATING STATUARY AND ANTIQUE ELEMENTS INTO YOUR GARDEN

1. DON'T BE AFRAID OF USING ANTIQUES OUTDOORS. "We use antiques in the home, so why not in the garden?" Troy says. He recommends easing into the idea with common objects made from sturdy materials. "Start with cast-stone products like antique containers or small statuary," he says. "Cast iron can break pretty easily, so you don't see it as much." Still struggling to decide on your first piece? Try an armillary (model celestial sphere). "People really like to use an armillary with a stand as a focal point," he says. "Sometimes statues feel too formal, and an armillary provides balance. It is usually brass or bronze, and the base is usually a cast stone."

2. INVEST IN HIGH-QUALITY PIECES. Whether you're looking for antique, vintage, or new elements, it's worth spending a little more for quality objects that can withstand the deteriorating effects of weather. "Make sure you have something that's going to last, especially if you want to pass it on to family members," Troy says. "Ask, 'What's the country of origin? Where is it being made? What's the thickness? How is it going to hold up in my garden?'"

3. SEARCH SMART. Be sure to buy from trusted antique dealers. "Unless you have someone who specializes in it, it's difficult to figure out the original date of a piece," Troy explains. "You can be taken advantage of and have someone tell you that something is 150 years old when it's only 50. Having a reputable antique dealer is important."

4. SAFEGUARD YOUR FINDS. If you're using true antiques (more than 100 years old), give them the protection they need. "Use a sealer on stone products to keep them protected from freeze, thaw, and other elements," Troy says.

5. REMEMBER THIS SIMPLE RULE FOR PLACEMENT. Begin with a piece you want to use as a focal point. "If you have a symmetrical garden, put something in the middle," Troy says. "Every time you turn 90 degrees, have a place for your eye to land and rest." Such additions work best if they have a backdrop—Troy prefers simple evergreens that allow the piece to stand out, rather than flowers against which it can get lost.

