



# On the Just Placement of STONE

By Steven G. Ziegler

Today, there is a proliferation of “placed” stone throughout the modern landscape, but with what level of sensitivity and creative thought is this stone placed?

Stone as a structural and spiritual element in human-made landscape dates back to the first garden creations. The ability to move unmovable objects through ingenious engineering and perseverance is a testament to the character of humankind. The placement of stone for purpose, symbolism, religion, direction, structure, aesthetics, function, or just

to get it out of the way, has been a part of every culture and many religions.

Stone placed in the contemporary Japanese Garden dates back to 606, and the works of Ruji-no-Takami. This placement has Buddhist influence and symbolism pertaining to “the awe and beauty of the next world,” the design aesthetics of “a sense of great distance in a small place,” and the art of the stone emerging and floating on the earth.

The indigenous people of Hawaii and the Inuit of the Arctic placed stone

in order to give strength to spiritual locations, depict tribal boundaries, or to serve as signposts on the stark Arctic landscapes. The organic arrangements of single stone or stacks of stones often brought the tension line above the earth or stone that lies above.

Stone placement in early English gardens and landscapes is in many ways a transition from a symbolic stone placement to functional aesthetic placement. The placement of stone outcrop in the greater landscape as decoration, along with the dry stacked stone walls that separate fields,

retain hills, and enclose gardens, demonstrates the just placement of stone that combines function, structure, and design.

Each stone has its own tension line or axis. The tension line is determined by mentally drawing a line through the midpoint of the stone, as if the stone could be balanced on a fulcrum. Respecting this arbitrary tension line is the starting point to the just placement of stone. Different cultures have, knowingly or not, always dealt with the principle of the tension line.

The just placement of stone falls into 3 categories:

**1) THE STONE EMERGING:** This is stone as part of the earth, or stone that is being pushed out of the earth, eroded around, or settled into the earth. The general rules are that greater than 50% of the stone lay beneath the surface and/or that the tension line of the stone be buried beneath the surface. If the stones are stacked, the overall tension line still must remain below the surface.

**2) THE FLOATING STONE:** This is stone that is lying or “floating” on the earth, yet has the feeling of being a part of the earth. The general rule here is that the main tension line of the stone gives the illusion of being just above the grade line or at the grade line.

Many times, the stones are horizontal in nature and can be integrated into paths.

### 3) THE STONE THAT LIES ABOVE:

This is a stone or group of stones that is unequivocally placed by humans. This is a statement of being that does not necessarily relate to earth. The general rule here is that the main tension line of the structure is above and disconnected from the earth. The stones must have balance yet bring great tension, the feeling of movement, and a sense of the greater landscape.

The just placement of stone is a function of the physical presence of the stone, the location in the landscape, the intent of placement, and the timing of the act. Therefore, the just placement of stone is a dynamic act, which is not easily replicated.

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