

Beautify Your Bush – 25th October 2025

Workshop Notes:

1. Introductions

2. About Lake MacDonal Creek Care Program:

<https://noosalandcare.org/programs/water-supply-catchment/>

3. About Urban Wildlife Gardens <https://urbanwildlifegardens.org.au/>

(some content of these notes have been compiled with the assistance of AI)

4. Capability Brown and the English Landscape Movement

How do we marry competing pressures of restoring nature but wanting to achieve beauty or at least bucolic landscapes? Domestic gardens influences are also jarring and problematic at the rural scale, and total ecological restoration does not fulfill lifestyle or amenity aspirations. The English Landscape Movement provides a good template that appeals to Western Culture and this workshop focus on this approach, but noted that indigenous and eastern design approaches are equally valid.

Lancelot "Capability" Brown (1716–1783) was a transformative figure in British landscape architecture, credited with reshaping the aesthetics of the English countryside. His nickname came from his habit of telling clients their estates had "great capabilities" for improvement.

Who Was Capability Brown?

- Profession: Gardener and landscape architect
- Style: Naturalistic and sweeping, moving away from formal, geometric gardens
- Legacy: Designed over 170 parks, many of which still exist today
- Clients: Aristocrats, royals, and major landowners across England
- Signature Elements:
- Rolling lawns
- Serpentine lakes
- Clumps of trees and shelterbelts
- Carefully framed vistas

Capability Brown was a leading figure in the English Landscape Movement, which emerged in the 18th century as a reaction against the rigid formality of earlier garden styles. This movement emphasized:

- Imitating nature: Landscapes were designed to look effortlessly natural, though carefully planned
- Integration with architecture: Gardens complemented the house, often with views framed from key rooms
- Romanticism: Inspired by pastoral paintings and classical ideals

Brown's genius lay in making art out of nature—his landscapes were not wild, but idealized visions of the English countryside. His legacy continues to shape how we view and design green spaces today.

Notable Sites:

1. Audley End House: Called a “Capability Brown landscape in miniature,” showcasing his signature elements.
2. Stowe, Blenheim Palace, Chatsworth: Grand estates showcasing his mature style

5. The Concept of the Picturesque

The concept of the picturesque emerged in 18th-century Britain as an aesthetic ideal that bridged the gap between the beautiful and the sublime. Coined by artist and writer William Gilpin, it referred to “that peculiar kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture”—essentially, scenery that looked like it belonged in a painting.

Key Characteristics

- Irregularity: Asymmetry and roughness were prized over smoothness and polish.
- Variety: Sudden changes in texture, elevation, or light created visual interest.
- Surprise: Unexpected views or hidden elements added drama and intrigue.
- Texture and Detail: Crumbling ruins, twisted trees, and rustic cottages were favoured subjects.

In Landscape Design the picturesque influenced garden and estate design by encouraging:

- Naturalistic layouts: Winding paths, uneven terrain, and mixed vegetation
- Romantic elements: Ruins, bridges, and follies added historical and emotional depth
- Framed views: Landscapes were composed like paintings, with foreground, middle ground, and background

In essence, the picturesque invited people to see the world as a living canvas—where imperfection, age, and wildness were not flaws, but features.

Note: Application of the picturesque can elevate even the most mundane of views or outlooks, and amplify the good views!

The creation of the picturesque fundamentally relies on framing the view as a picture to provide perspective, depth and interest.

Here are some examples of the application of the picturesque that could be applied to rural properties:

Picturesque element	Ideas for Rural Property
Viewpoint	Consider the viewpoints and where they will have the most impact if picturesque is cultivated. Ideas include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - House entry - Entertainment areas - Private areas such as studios, bedrooms and bathrooms
Foreground	A low hedge, fence or wall near to your house that can be seen over. The edge of a terrace with contrasting materials can also provide a foreground
Mid Ground	A revegetated creek or a dam. A revegetated nature corridor snaking through the mid ground
Background	A distance ridgeline or mountains or horizon Often borrowed from the broader landscape
Framing	Shade trees either side of the view to frame the view
Interest item in the viewscape (optional)	Feature tree or trees with notable trunk and canopy distinguished from surrounding vegetation Outbuilding or Studio with architectural interest Large sculpture Nest boxes on totems A bird hide Fire pit terrace A folly

Note: Follies can be a great technique to encourage exploration and movement around the property by providing a destination. Practically they can also provide comfort and shelter for practical jobs!

6. Drama and Romance in the Landscape

Firstly and predominantly Australian wildlife provides the most incredible drama and romance in the landscape. The sounds and movements of our birds for example is remarkable and unique to Australia. Living in our nature landscape demands a great respect and tolerance for wildlife. The more we protect and nurture our wildlife is fundamental to having a beautiful landscape.

Note: a flock of Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos in the sky against a setting sun shrieking with plaintive cries is landscape

Note: celebrate the bush turkey mound and set it up as a feature for observation and interest

Secondly the most beautiful landscapes create theatre through a pattern of drama. It is best described by music – music that has the same loud volume and pitch and repetitive chorus is ultimately tiring. Whereas the best compositions have quiet and loud, changing pitches and instruments. Subdued passages often precede and amplify exciting intermittent choruses.

Here are some examples of creating theatre in rural properties

Drama and Romance element	Ideas for Rural Property
Front gate	Options: - 1. Have a large gate or entry landscape feature that sets expectations OR 2. A subdued or discreet entrance that sets a subdued experience to help amplify the landscape experience as you move through the property (my preference)
Driveways	Winding and responding to topography (and better for drainage and erosion!)

	Use a circuitous route to amplify the perceived size of the property and celebrate its features.
Boulevards framed with copses of trees	<p>Create a pattern of light and shade as you move through the landscape with copses of trees alongside driveways and pathways interspersed with open paddocks and vistas. Balance is achieved through volume and massing.</p> <p>Ditch the formal avenue – balance cannot be achieved as one or more trees always fail in the sub tropics due to storms and / or disease.</p>
Mystery destinations	Suggest destinations with pathways supported by quality gates, milestones framed by deep shade
Waterway crossings	<p>Celebrate waterway crossing with quality design that celebrates the experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity for shade and revegetation - Timber structures - Rock pitching - Flood markers!
House Area	Certainly adopt more domestic styles and approaches in and around your house to create comfort, joy and emotional exchanges in a mor more detail
Interest Items in the Viewscape	(as per previous)

7. Waterways and Waterbodies

Of fundamental importance in the Lake MacDonald Dam and Six Mile Creek Catchment is the protection of water quality and protection and restoration of ecological corridors:

Waterway and Waterbody Element	Ideas for Rural Property
Creeks and Gullies	<p>Revegetate creeks and gullies to protect water quality.</p> <p>Choreograph the revegetation to provide a mid-ground, back-ground or framing of the landscape – ecology and beauty are not mutually exclusive, Also consider it as part of the pattern of light and shade in the landscape and creating interest and texture in addition to ecological sustainability.</p>

Strata and Diversity	Ensure layers in planting on groundcovers, vines, grasses , shrubs and trees to create strata in the landscape and create maximum opportunities for biodiversity
Ephemeral planting to dams and waterbodies	Ephemeral planting to the edges of dams and waterways with reeds and grasses conceals changing water levels, controls erosion and provides exceptionally good habitat

Note: Landcare has a lot more information and expertise on ecological restoration.

8. Some Other Practical Things

Here are a few ideas to deal with some of the practical things in the rural landscape:

Practical Element element	Ideas for Rural Property
Northern Aspect	Don't plant forest of shade trees on the norther side of the house – you shade the winter sun and be miserable
South West Aspect	Do shade the south west with a forest to create shade from hot afternoon summer sun and protect from cold winter winds
Drainage and water capture	Fundamental to sustainability and maintainability. Consider the drainage paths on the land and work around them. Carefully design your driveway to consider cross camber and water run off for serviceability
Maintenance	Consider maintenance obligations at the outset. Many people abandon rural properties because they have set up domestic style gardens on a large scale that is beyond their maintenance abilities. Focus higher maintenance landscapes at key arrival and entertainment spaces to provide maximum enjoyment and focused maintenance, with the balance landscape being the supporting framework.
Hedging	Avoid except in key courtyards and spaces. Hedges require too much maintenance in the subtropics. Replace with mixed shrubbery that is loosely pruned to achieve screening

Ha Ha	The use of the “Ha Ha” which is an earth embankment instead of fences to exclude livestock is well established in pastoral estates
The “meadow” mown edge	The use of a mowing line that is sculpturally placed in the paddock is another well established technique to visually distinguish the house yard from the paddocks
Service Areas	Options: 1. ‘daylight’ the service area and co-locate with your arrival area. Frame an entrance courtyard with sheds, walls and fences. Think like a “carriage yard” or 2. ‘screen’ the service area with a totally separate service area, often accessed by a secondary driveway and screened with walls and planting

Note: there is nothing beautiful about a car slipping off a driveway because it hasn't been well thought out and will quickly diminish joy of living in the rural landscape!

9. Practical Exercise 1

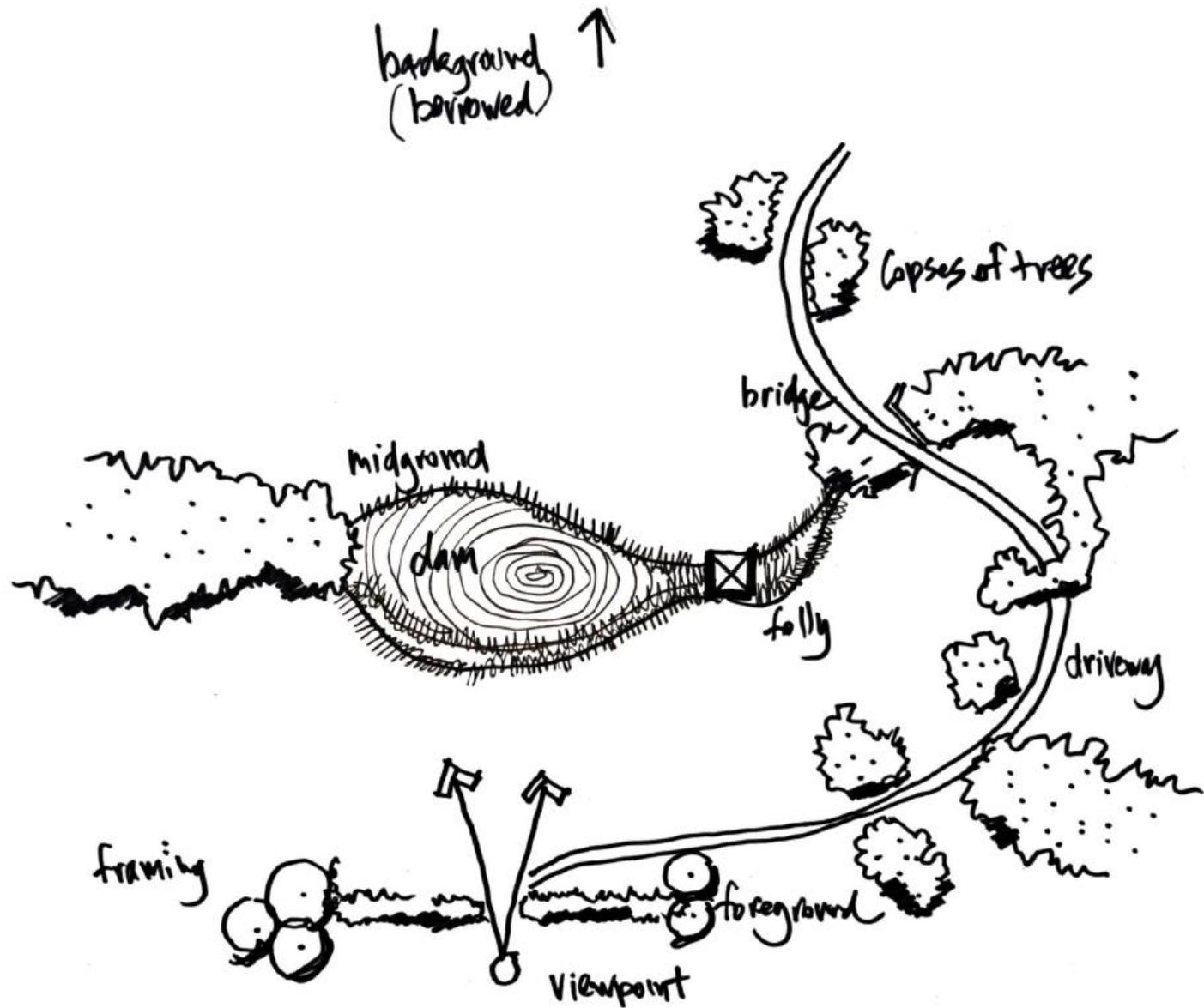
Walk to dam location and with paper and pencil sketch out and discuss a design that embraces beauty and sustainability using the elements outlined above. Note the water body, the distant views, the pathway with gate and the shed.

10. Practical Exercise 2

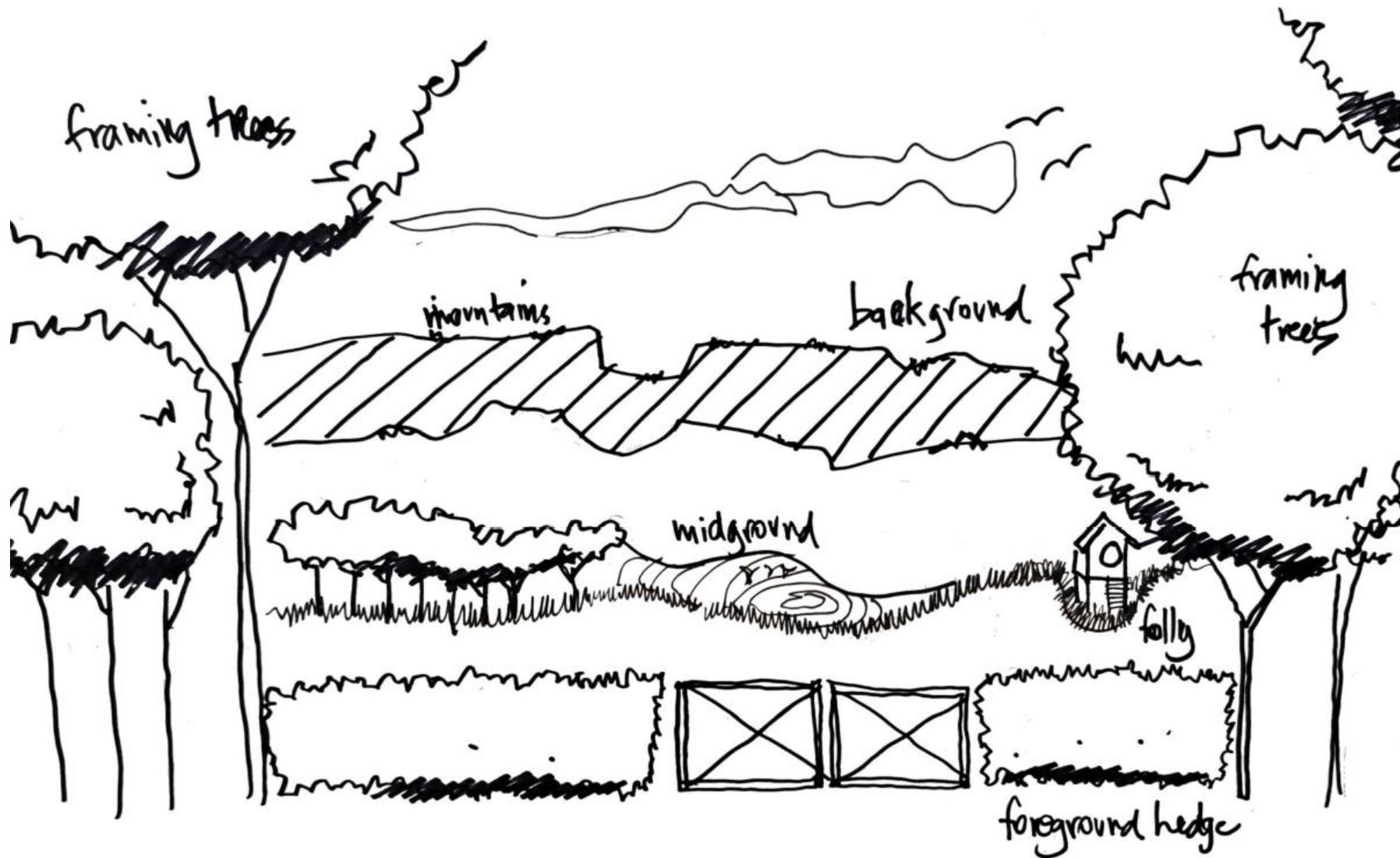
Over refreshment consider the design of own rural property. Shaun will walk around and offer assistance and answer specific property questions.

11. Chris and Sharon Garden tour

12. Close and Thankyou



PICTURESQUE PLAN



PICTURESQUE ELEVATION