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Adaptive design conference set for Santa Fe

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Nate Downey/For The New Mexican

When I received the invitation to speak at the annual conference of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD), my calendar looked clear a year down the road. The epicenter of the five-day event, Santa Fe, meant I could commute to the gig by bike, and that's always a plus.

Although I had only vaguely heard of the association, when they mentioned an

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honorarium, I read on. As a fan of words and ideas, the conference's theme, The Art of Adaptive Design, was big a draw. If there is a more inspiring, succinct, and instructive title for a public landscape-design conference in 2016, I'd like to hear it.

Mostly, I found myself intrigued by the opportunity to speak about my profession to an audience of potential collaborators and clients. I knew the talk would motivate me to reexamine my approach, to hone it down to its essences, and to consider its implications. "Please count me in," I replied.

Little did I know that my alma mater, St. John's College, would soon announce its annual reunion in the middle of the APLD conference. If history were any measure, this meant a gaggle of great, old friends would return to my back yard to suck down green chile, tequila, and boisterous conversation until the rosy-fingered dawn. "I'm hoping," I said in a subsequent negotiation, "to speak on Friday — not over the weekend."

"Perfect," they replied.

Now, happily sandwiched between two mind-blowing keynote addresses, my Friday, Sept. 16, session, The Power and Beauty of Water Harvesting, will describe how to create gorgeous landscapes that harvest water, grow food, respect nature, and foster conversation, meditation, and merriment. We'll look at my usual subjects — roofwater, stormwater, greywater, blackwater, and water conservation through a 21st-century designer's eye, but we'll also approach "beauty" as a complex and potent motivating force, not merely as a source of visual allure.

Fragrances from well-chosen perennials, mellifluous sounds from birds attracted to flowering trees, smooth surfaces for bare feet, edible plants to promote physical, ecological, and spiritual health, inviting microclimates intended to enrich the human experience — these are some of the concepts we'll explore.



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But because beauty always involves personal preference, I'll also share my options theory. Early on in the landscape-design process, all clients should receive a number of very different choices. Each option must be beautiful in its own way, but it's up to the person who will be living with the land to decide which is best. In residential settings especially, beauty should rarely be selected by a designer's decree. Instead, it should be determined by the needs and desires of both the land and the people living on it, and optional conceptual designs are the best way to approach this dynamic situation.

Unless you think you'll be sucking chile in my backyard, I recommend you save these dates, September 15-19, for some or all of the conference. In the meantime, look for my next column, which will describe the rest of the stimulating conference in greater detail. More info at www.apld.com.

Nate Downey, the author of Harvest the Rain, has been a local landscape consultant, designer, and contractor since 1992. He can be reached at 505-690-7939 or via www.permadesign.com.

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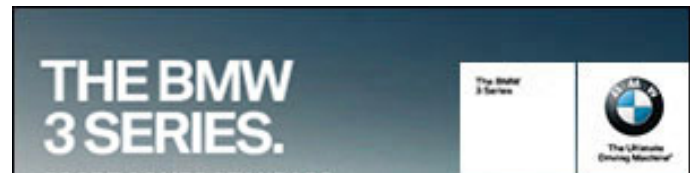
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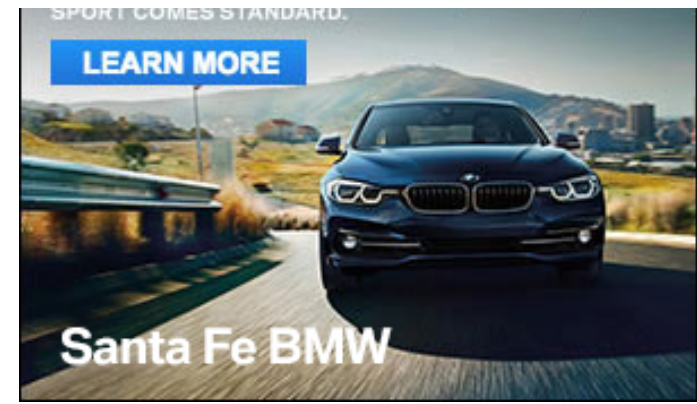


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