Aquascaping with Nicolas Guillermin

There is a bright future ahead for aquascaping. In the last few years, there has been a huge evolution in planted aquariums. Each year brings in new high quality aquascapes, and we can see more personal styles emerging among aquascapers. People are more attracted to this hobby than ever, and the passion continues to engulf our minds.

I am French but I have been living in Japan for the past 10 years. I am relatively new to aquascaping world. I started doing planted tanks about two years ago after I discover Takashi Amano's aquascapes. I do my best to keep up to a high level and learn more about the different elements of planted aquariums. I will try to do some more original creations in the future, but for now I have learned a great deal from my aquascaping experience.

Aquascaping Inspiration

I think everyone should reach deep into their minds and use their imagination to create their aquascapes. Feel free to do whatever you like. Aquascapes do not have to follow standards or rules. As different as your own vision may be, we must remember aquascaping is an art where one can express freely their own vision of nature.

You can find a wealth of inspiration on the internet, as well as get advice on your scapes. No one should be ashamed to show their aquascapes even if its the first one you have ever created. You can learn from the people's comments and advice.

Aquascaping Styles

Although I admire biotopes aquariums and 'Dutch Style' aquascapes, I am mostly interested in "nature aquariums" as it is this particularly style that turned me to planted tanks, and aquariums in general. Ever since I moved to Japan, I have been fascinated with traditional Japanese gardens, and since the Nature Aquarium Style (particularly Iwagumi aquascapes) has many roots in Japanese gardening composition I was naturally drawn to this style.

The Nature Aquarium Style contains a certain amount of freedom that allows an aquascaper to build on the basic principles. As a spectator and as a creator these aquascapes leaves a lot of room for imagination. Though there are few rules should not be broken, it seems nearly anything can be created with simple things such as plants, wood, and stones (I particularly love aquascaping with stones).

Even though I try to forget them, some aquascapes I see on the internet impact my imagination a great deal when I try to create a new scape. They unconsciously influence me a lot. I have been trying to create some "classic nature aquarium" scapes and "classic Iwagumi" scapes. I now want to do something more personal, and try to find my own style which should show in my future aquascapes.

I look to get inspiration more from nature nowadays. I am very lucky to live in a beautiful area in Japan, (Kansai district). I often go in the mountains to take pictures, collect rocks, and take in the ambiance of nature. I try to take everything I absorb from my nature excursion and place them into my aquascapes.

Fertilization and Maintenance

I do a quick check everyday of my tanks. Fertilizing usually depends a particular tank and the plant growth. I usually do a 30% weekly water change and add fertilizers to compensate the flush of nutrients.

Plant trimming usually also depends on the scape and plant density, style, and plantation. I usually do a big trim every 2 to 3 weeks for the most heavily planted tanks, more rarely for the Iwagumi scapes such as my 240 liter 'In Lucem Sanctam' which has never been trimmed.

I try to keep my aquascapes as simple as possible. The trick is to use a small number of plant varieties in a certain scape. I also use less and less red or orange stem plants as they can be picky growers. I like to play with the "nuances" of green plants which can create beautiful contrasts in a very simple way.

Plant Combinations

I like several varieties of plants, and instead of choosing a favorite plant I like to think of plants that work well in combination like Lilaeopsis + crypts, and glosso+riccia. Combination of plants offer more textures and color contrasts that can make an aquascape more interesting.

Complementary Fish

Fish add to an aquascape in a unique way. I think of them as a way to complement the scape by using their colors, shapes, and specific swimming behaviors. Here again, I tend to use simple fish species that will blend into the landscape rather than stand out as center pieces. I want to give the impression these fish belong naturally in the aquascape.

Overcoming Algae

I am quite lucky and do not have many algae problems. I think it is important to get a well balanced and stable tank to keep algae away. Easier said then done, I know. But I recommend starting slowly with the lights (in intensity and photoperiod).

Watch the plants carefully for any signs of nutrient deficiencies. Algae loves to take advantage of weak and dying plants, so it’s important to maintain healthy plants. Once you get to a certain stability, try not to do any drastic changes like altering your CO_2, lights and fertilizing routine.

A rigorous maintenance schedule and a good knowledge of your fertilizers and the needs of your plants is the best way to avoid algae.

Sketching Before You Start

Sketching is a great tool to use to build your imagination and creativity. I sketch a lot of nature scenes or imaginary scenes and usually this is how my scapes start .

Sketching gives me a general view of the result I am expecting when I begin to scape. It saves a painted picture of my imagination such as how I expect my hardscape to look with the rocks and wood. It will not show the exact placement of the materials in a scape, but shows how they will associate with either other.

The same goes with sketching plants. I am able to see how the plants will look in general with each other, and how they can potentially fit into the hardscape. It gives me a clear idea on where should be the most contrasted areas (light/shadow).

The point of sketching is not to have an exact view of the final result of your scape but to have a good lead that allows you to avoid some mistakes and guides you while you start the tank .

Here are some sketches of an idea I was thinking about for my 240 Liters tank. They show a imaginary scene with a few different attempts with background plants and a few landscapes from a place that inspire me a lot recently.

Aquascaping Beauty

My first tank (sonata) was maybe the most original and personal as I was influenced by many different things. The “asian style” that I have just discoved, and not fully explored yet is all around me here in Japan. It is a very exciting experience. The “dutch style” is still popular among the forums I used to visit in France, and has it’s own uniqueness.

All aquascapes are interesting no matter what style you chose. Each of my aquascapes have elements I like about them, and reflects a different moment of my progression as an aquascaper.

Sonata (120x45x45cm)

In Lucem Sanctam (120x45x45cm)

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