

How does your garden grow

by Malcolm McElvaney

It grows one image at a time simply for the challenge of seeing what I can create and the garden in question is a tabletop zen garden with an unique and somewhat unforgiving writing surface. Part of the reason it is zen or meditative is that a focused and light touch is needed so clearing the mind is intrinsic to the process but I will not be using traditional themes so it will “Zen” in spirit mostly as I reuse found art objects in some of the very minimalist compositions. As of this writing I have yet to create an image because it is parts and pieces in the process of becoming a garden proper but present or future tense I believe it will happen. As a project this goes beyond creating a transitory image to be enjoyed briefly and then lost to time as the next creation is made in that same area.

What do I mean by as a project it goes beyond creating an image because it is part of my work flow, yet, I'm more random at best and pushing beyond a proof of concept is rare for me. As an amateur photographer this isn't a bad thing as my growth is ongoing while connecting the fragments that gain a purpose somewhere down the journey. This website is a commitment to trying to organize and see where these random thoughts have been heading and it is updated weekly so far but it is my weekly photo sessions and test images from just trying new ideas that mainly drive the updates. Weekly is an excellent start for me but can I commit to a daily task like posting an image created from this zen garden as well and in the process maybe the site grows because I update other things while I'm at it. If I can do this then a more focused effort to a longer term project is possible and where can that lead. With notebooks of ideas and random discoveries to explore this would be a good progression in what I do.

Photography is my filter as I explore the visual arts but one could think of photography as capturing light so everything recorded reflecting light is created by something adjacent to it. The zen garden is one of these adjacent things that I could just explore because I could but I see it as a tool to create more content to capture with a camera in a never ending cycle. The interesting aspect of pursuing a photography adjacent subject maybe I actually just having fun doing it because it exist so who knows where this type of approach may lead. I express myself through photography and this website is a repository I share some of that work through so from a zen garden to how my mind works this piece has wondered a bit but next I will next cover my DIY garden itself.

The DIY Zen garden

I am using sand as that unforgiving surface requiring the lightest of touch but that sand has a story behind it. It is fracking sand lost along the side of a interstate service road

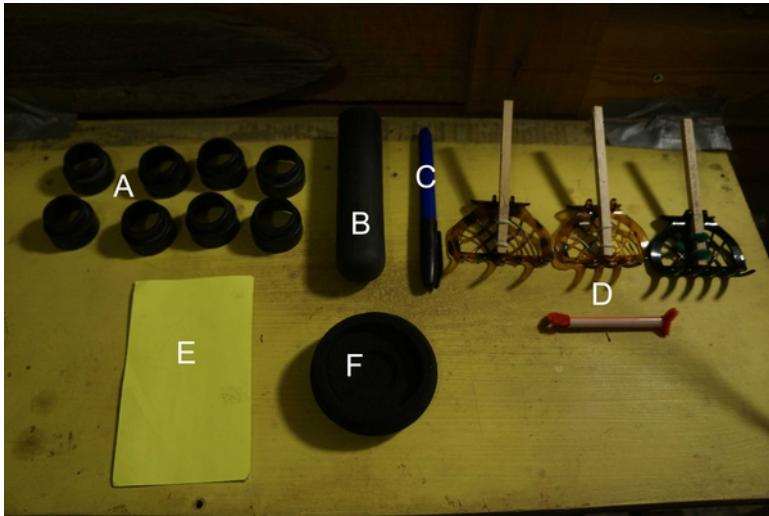
from sand hauling trucks not far from the sand processing plants that shifted, sorted, and cleaned it. That sand likely came not from within the Monahahs Sandhills State Park but in the shifting sands it is part of and the plants surrounding the park processing it. I collect it for free as it lays in small piles here and there of no value to most but it seems like I'm seeing the final product of a place tranformed that I walk and know well.

The rest of my kit isn't quite so deep but it is reused and cheaply acquired raw material to make my tools and even the container for the sand is a disposable cookie pan with its edges painted black. Two more cookie pans create a catch system for the sand lost over the edges.



As solutions go I like how this looks and with a clear cat proof cover could act as an art display as well, card board box will do for now.

My tools



Improvised to do a job but very workable. **A** – Small tubes that if placed down and filled with extra sand create a dome of sand once lifted. **B** – A broom handle cover is hollow and allows for a controlled pour of sand. **C** – The marker is dry but the felt tip may help in creating a mark. **D** – My rakes are one half of a hair clip with tongs selectively broke off for alternate patterns. The straw and pope cleaner once placed on

the handle give me rotational controll. **E** – A simple note card to smooth the surface. **F** – Foam piece going over headphones for which I have no idea how to use yet. The rake fully assembled and how the tube creates the features are shown below.



A stable system with sand in place is a start but the next step is to actually begin using it or I simply replace one bit of clutter with another in its place.

In conclusion

To create a proper design I will have to at least understand the art form and some of its history and this will inspire me in some other unexpected area of photography most likely. The minimalist nature of these simple compositions hopefully will help me see that quality in other photographs I may take as I learned to see depth better after getting into 3D photography. Everything builds upon itself so learning never stops. If nothing else I will have done some cleaning to acquire the space the garden needs and keep it that way to access it!