

walk this way

Thoughtfully designed paths are about more than getting from here to there

A secluded oasis of shade. The stoic serenity of a stone slab bench. A place to ponder a garden sculpture. These are the destinations you could reach in your own backyard via the perfect path. Itching to get into your yard while the weather's still too chilly for gardening? The early spring months are ideal for making a simple landscaping addition that yields dramatic results.

Before planting colorful annuals, first "plant" your path or walkway. "A path should be the first [thing] to go in," says Aaron Forrester of The Hilltop Landscape Architects and Contractors in Albuquerque. Paths can help define planting beds. And yet, as one of your yard's less intrusive improvements, a path can also be placed amid a landscape in full bloom. "Paths can meander around existing structures and flower beds. It only takes a few days to put one in—it's not a huge imposition," says Forrester.

Logistically simple, the key element to a perfect path becomes design. "In its most basic form, a path functions to



Landscape Solutions built this geometrically intriguing path for a Japanese-inspired home in Pau-Ka.

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get you from point A to point B, but how do you do it in a beautiful way—a way that's fun, poetic, engaging?" asks Kenneth Francis, founding partner and principal of Surroundings, a Santa Fe design studio for innovative landscape architecture, urban design, and planning.

"I like to create magic, mystery, and marvelousness," says Tobi Wilde, designer at Glorious Earth Landscapes in Santa Fe. Drawing on her background as a children's book illustrator, Wilde weaves butterflies, birds, and spirals into her designs, which her partner Adam Steinberg renders in cobblestone, flagstone, brick, pavers, and more.

We may have outgrown hopscotch, but we can still take pleasure in alighting on stones. We can also take our literal paths as seriously as we take our figurative paths. The character of your walkway should depend on your personal aesthetic and the emotional reaction you want the path to elicit, taking into account your home's style and existing landscaping or features of the space, such as outdoor sculptures, ponds, and patios or decks.

"We look at all the context and the character and color of the house," says Francis. "We can use traditional materials in nontraditional ways. A recent client had an existing *portal* of brick, so we matched the brick, using bands to create a woven pattern that looked almost like farm plots. Now we're working on a project for the owner of a historic home, but she wants a contemporary landscape. So we're creating a dynamic, clean, and minimalist look with saw-cut concrete."

Color and texture are other important design considerations. "Hand-sculpted natural flagstone adds a handsomeness to the whole



A cobblestone and recycled paver path winds through a Santa Fe backyard designed and built by Glorious Earth Landscapes.

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pathway and is complementary to any landscape," says Rick Garcia of Landscape Solutions. Garcia recommends planting woolly thyme in the spaces between the stones, noting, "Of all the creeping thymes, woolly thyme is the most drought resistant; it requires little to no water."

Crusher fines are another popular walkway material in the Southwest. Made of pulverized gravel mixed with a stabilizer, crusher fines are a hard material like concrete, but with an earthy look. Available



A colorful walkway by Glorious Earth Landscapes (above) boldly informs the palette of a yard, while slate-colored flagstones set upon crusher fines inform a serene path designed by Surroundings (right).





a touch of royalty

When their client asked for a privacy wall to shelter his home from urban street noise, he was envisioning the typical Santa Fe adobe wall. Fortunately, he gave earth sculptress Tobi Wilde of Glorious Earth Landscapes permission to do her thing. "And boring is so not my thing!" says Wilde. She decided that the working-class street needed a touch of royalty; from there the inspiration came, and the puzzle emerged. Along with building partner Adam Steinberg, Wilde designed a vertical wall using a melange of earthy, textured materials: "tall, grand rocks, concrete slabs, railroad ties, and chimney tile, softened by colorful plants," says Wilde. On the other side of the wall, she created a small hillside with plants and benches. The result is a wholly unique landscaping motif that reflects Wilde's passion for the beautiful and the different. "I love it," she says. "I put love into it!"

Glorious Earth Landscapes
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