

For the *Love* of the *Landscape*

by despina yeargin | photographs by jon holloway & caitlin atkinson



When Daniel Nolan left Greenwood for a new life in San Francisco, he hadn't imagined that his landscape design career would evolve as rapidly and as dramatically as it has. Now, just within a few years, he is a designer with nationally recognized Flora Grubb Gardens and has a book deal with the famed New York publisher, Rizzoli. He is modest about his success and genuinely grateful for his San Francisco career, but in his heart, Daniel Nolan still calls Greenwood, South Carolina, home.

"Greenwood feels like home to me," he says, although he was not born here. "Besides spending time on the lake with my family, going to the farmers'

markets and seeing my friends who do such creative things, when I drop my bags, I feel so welcome, and I know that I'm where I should be." Nolan's love of Greenwood and of South Carolina is genuine, which is why he proudly displays the Palmetto flag on his car. And, for a former resident of the Palmetto State, it seems as if it's more than a mere coincidence that Nolan uses palms predominantly in his designs and that he has access to rare and exotic palms through the wholesale nursery side of Flora Grubb Gardens. "The growing and brokering of palms of all kinds," he says, "is a big part of our business, so much so, that some of my clients mistake the South Carolina state flag on my car as the logo for Flora Grubb Gardens."

Nolan considers himself very lucky to have started his landscape design business in Greenwood and to have worked with clients such as Linda Dolny and Sigrid & Brand Spangenberg, among others, during his time here. “They trusted me and gave me the opportunity to grow my design business,” he says.”

Today, looking back on his early influences, Daniel says that it was his father who was the catalyst for his love of landscapes and garden design. “Definitely my father,” Daniel says. “He would spend hours outside on the weekends, and I never really got it as a kid, then when I reached my late teens, a light came on, and I loved spending time outside poking around in the garden.”

Nolan was born in Chadds Ford, in the historic Brandywine Valley region of Pennsylvania, and his aesthetic clearly was shaped by the beauty of the area. He talks about the valley as “...so naturally beautiful. I noticed how little the land needed to be touched to make an impact, and I think that always relates to my work,” he says. “I can look at fantastic gardens all day (and I do), but there’s just something about seeing an oak tree in a field with the forest in the back that just makes me go, It’s perfect. Don’t change a thing.”



Nolan describes his aesthetic as “pretty traditional; it’s based on using repetition and scale for dramatic effect, and I love the use of different textures of plants as a design element. I steer away from wild combinations, focusing on plants that will complement the existing architecture.”

Following studies in fine arts at Otis College of Art & Design in Los Angeles, Daniel moved to Lake Greenwood, where he had spent many of his summers growing up and where his parents, Phyllis Nolan and the late George Nolan, now lived. Daniel speaks often of the great love and support of his parents, who he describes as “the best two people ever,” and says, “My dad taught me the importance of working hard for what you want, and my mom taught me that camel is a color,” and he winks. “In all seriousness,” he adds, “she has such a good eye, that I’m always ‘borrowing’ from her aesthetic.” The lakefront home of his parents was Daniel’s first design project and continues to be a place where he can experiment freely. “Every plant has a story, from the ginkgo I bought at the Micheal Dirr lecture at Lander University to the loquats and grasses my dad and I planted en masse. If I love something, we’ll find a home for it.”

Daniel Nolan is talented, but he is also deeply grateful for all of the introductions and opening of doors as he has endeavored to advance his career, which is how he found himself working at Flora Grubb Gardens and for the owner, Flora Grubb.

“She’s been amazing, allowing me to use my creativity. We’re a really good fit.” Having worked with Flora Grubb Gardens for seven years and as a designer for the past three, he continues to enjoy a job that doesn’t feel like work. He says, “Every day I get to decide which variety of unusual plants I want to use in my latest design, and I also get to play with all kinds of palms, which, incidentally, I love.” Palms feature prominently in his designs because “they add instant architecture,” he says.

The Flora of Flora Grubb Gardens speaks highly of Daniel, acknowledging a shared love of traditional form and rare and unusual plants. “[He] is truly one of my favorite working garden designers, and I feel so privileged to be working with him. Daniel’s gardens always have a nod to formality, with lots of repetition and formal planting plans. This aspect of his designs refers to and honors the past, but his plantsmanship is imaginative and unexpected. He combines plants from every corner of the globe, always taking a plant on its merits and not getting stuck on what tradition would dictate as far as plant choices. The results are surprising, harmonious and, dare I say, unique.”

Since joining Flora Grubb Gardens, Daniel has been busy designing standout projects such as living walls, redesigns of commercial and residential gardens and even designs for public spaces. Distinguishing himself at such an early point in his career, he has become the designer of choice for prime landscape design projects such as the total garden redesign of Clos Pegase, a California winery designed by Post-Modern architect Michael Graves. Daniel describes the project with unbridled enthusiasm and gratitude. “I was given complete freedom to design a garden in front of a building by a design legend, and I’m only 35 and not a big name at all, so it was a huge honor. But more importantly, was that I brought my parents to the vineyard years before the project and then returned with them last fall after the project was completed. To see how proud they were of me, was probably one of the best moments of my life.”





“I’m excited to come home to Greenwood after my book is out and share it with all of the generous people who were kind enough to support me in my first years as a garden designer.”

Daniel Nolan’s love of family, of Greenwood (the home of his heart) and of all of the good people who’ve guided him in his career and in his life is mirrored in his love of the landscape, a love which will, no doubt, change the landscape of design as his career continues to grow.

At a Glance

- » Born in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania
- » Studied at Otis College of Art & Design, Los Angeles, California
- » Founded Daniel Nolan Landscape Design, Greenwood, South Carolina
- » Began working with Flora Grubb Gardens, San Francisco, California
- » Articles & Features: *Martha Stewart Living*, *Elle Décor*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Monocle*, *Sunset*, *the San Francisco Chronicle*
- » *Sunset*’s “5 Designers Under 35” and selected to reimagine the *Sunset Home*, 2013
- » Presented at *Sunset Celebration Weekend*, 2013
- » Presented at *San Francisco Flower & Garden Show*, 2015
- » Redesigned garden, *Clos Pegase*, Calistoga, California
- » Signed book contract with Rizzoli.

His design is open to the public in what he describes as, “five outdoor rooms that run the length of the building, with benches shaded by olive trees. We planted a true collector’s garden of plants from five of the six Mediterranean climate zones to show what is possible with minimal irrigation in Napa: Specimens like the *Jubaea chilensis*, a once critically endangered palm, which ring the garden, and Australian grass trees that bloom on 2 meter spikes and look like rubber hoses.”

This year, Nolan signed a book contract with Rizzoli, the

prestigious publishing company renowned for beautifully produced and curated books. The book will feature gardens designed for low water use and which are visually impactful, including some in the Lowcountry of South Carolina. “As someone who grew up loving books and who now collects art and design books, Rizzoli has always impressed me, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with them.” The book, which is scheduled for release in about 18 months, will feature Nolan’s garden work and that of other designers around the country with a similar design interest.

Tips from Daniel Nolan

How to choose a landscape designer: Look through multiple designers’ work, then pick the one that most suits your taste. I encounter so many potential clients who request “formal gardens with a lot of roses and no grasses, cacti or palms,” and I think, “how on earth did you find me?”

Best Plant to Use in a Garden Design (in Greenwood): Hands down, it’s *Fatsia*. It grows in shade, it’s an evergreen and it has these amazing big leaves. I love it!

