



THE GARDEN GAL MAGICAL MOSAICS

BALE ON MOSAICS

- ✎ *The trickiest part of building a good mosaic is finding the right stones. Most people are too lazy to really do a good job.*
- ✎ *I also sort through piles of pebbles in stone yards, a rather joyless and tedious task that requires a meditative will, as it usually takes 3 or 4 hours to sort a couple of 5 gallon buckets worth.*
- ✎ *The pebbles can't be laid flat like pancakes so that you get more coverage, as they will pop out over time. They have to be set on edge, or if they are large, have enough thickness to stay imbedded in the mortar.*

WANT TO MAKE YOUR OWN PEBBLE MOSAIC?

Visit Jeffreygardens.blogspot.com for *Building a Pebble Mosaic Stepping Stone*, August 3, 2011.

For more info:
jeffreygardens.com

Anne Jaeger, writes *The Garden Gal* for *Just Out*. Anne was a hard news reporter and anchor at KGW and KOIN before turning to gardening full time. After that her award winning garden shows appeared on both stations. You can now look for Anne's garden videos on the *Oregonian* newspaper web site: oregonlive.com/hg, catch her on Twitter: [@AnneJaeger](https://twitter.com/AnneJaeger) GardenGalTV or send her a suggestion on her web site: GardenGal.TV.

Jeffrey Bale's title — landscape architect — tells us Bale knows a heck of a lot more about plants, structures, design and the earth sciences than most of us. What the moniker doesn't convey is — the man weaves magic in pebbles. Rather than merely arranging so many "rocks" in mortar, Bales builds hypnotic mosaics mimicking tapestry rugs. His work is heavy, back breaking and tedious to the extreme. The result underfoot is a story; a pictograph steeped in history and mystical forces. Bale travels the world constantly trying to quell his hunger for people, plants, art and mosaics. And I could have sworn I saw Jeffrey's aquamarine eyes become a plasma screen for his transfixing stories. Yes, Bale casts a spell and his mosaics are not only a feast for the eyes...but a pleasure for the soul.

Anne Jaeger: Mosaic is an ancient art, but I don't remember seeing it in Oregon until you built them here years ago, causing a sensation in the garden community. What do you get out of mosaics?

Jeffrey Bale: They're intricate. Seeing them, changes the way you're feeling. It's a low cost material that I can put together to create something extremely luxurious and meaningful because every stone has been collected for its individual beauty, then amassed together. So you have all of these little components, each one is magical unto itself and then together it creates a much bigger artistic vision.

AJ: You must have a tremendous memory for rock.

JB: I pick very carefully from nature and leave a minimal impact. I remember the day on the beach when I found THAT rock (a huge single stone) and what a beautiful spot that was. You have to carry it. You're putting in a penance, carrying it up the slope from the river into the truck. 'Oh my God that hurt.' You're not going to forget it because it hurt. For instance, I'm

looking for certain architectural shapes for the wall over there (a horizontal rock alter spanning one entire side of his garden) and it might take me years. Or the snake, (a slithering stonework side path) I worked on it seven years, but not continually. The rocks come from Sauvie Island. There's only one little section of beach where they come up through the sand, a half mile from where I can park. When I go, the river needs to be low, later in the fall, when no one is there. The geese are coming in. It's a magical, epic place to be. I like to rock when I'm alone."

AJ: And the stone tapestry's you built for the television actor in 'Monk?' Going through 400 pounds of pebbles to find two dozen that fit? (See *The New York Times*, December 23, 2009)

JB: Tony Shalhoub.... I built the entire mosaic in sand and then took it all apart. It is so exact. It's very precise and rebuilt in wet mortar — a Moroccan carpet design; I needed to know where every pebble was going to go. Again, it's a fine art piece.

AJ: What will your work say about you 200 years from now?

JB: I'm crazy (gives throaty laugh). And again, there's a story behind everything. I really think the mosaics speak about my grandparents. I honor my ancestors; they were geologists with a true love of stone. A lot of the stone in this wall (surrounding his backyard garden) are from their collection I inherited. It says a lot about my life as a world traveler — a quarter of the year I'm a vagabond and the rest I'm anchored here and creating. I want to trigger consciousness: of memory, of beauty....like these temple bells (hanging overhead) from Thailand. When they ring I see it all again. The bells tell you the wind spirits are passing through the garden, ringing the bells to make you aware, conscious of nature. I honor nature. ■