

Desert or Paradise: Restoring Endangered Landscapes Using Water Management, Including Lake and Pond Construction

Sepp Holzer

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Many climatologists are concerned that the recent spate of drought across several parts of the world is likely to become the new normal, which would prove particularly challenging for farmers, but will also affect everyone from city planners to rural landowners. Creating well-regulated water usage systems and better agriculture production methods are crucial for preventing widespread collapse or water shortages, and Sepp Holzer's excellent thoughts on the topic provide a handy guide for the type of solutions that are needed.

Well known in the field of sustainable agriculture, Holzer first introduced his innovative water-retention ideas in *Sepp Holzer's Permaculture*, a handbook of small-scale, integrative farming techniques that drew on Holzer's experience as a farmer in Austria. Much like that useful volume, *Desert or Paradise* contains a wealth of practical tactics that can help prevent desertification, reverse poor water policies, and even create areas rich with orchards and crops.

In his new book, Holzer offers examples from countries like Russia and Portugal to demonstrate the breadth of landscapes that can be healed with a greater emphasis on natural water management. He covers an immense range of topics, including using pigs to restore forest-fire areas, constructing ponds with proper shallow zones, restoring hydrological balance in the world, and abolishing industrial livestock farming. Despite the wide range of topics he covers, Holzer creates a cohesive, well-argued, and persuasive handbook that aims to help people "restore paradise."

"This is nature's mandate to us: paradise in our hearts, souls and spirits," he writes. "Our intuition leads us to knowledge, to have the experiences we need in order to become whole." For Holzer, restoring the earth's balance isn't about economic development and squeezing a few more seasons out of an exhausted stretch of land. It's about a long-term and beneficial view of the world as a resource. He encourages farmers to become rebels, gardeners to become advocates, and everyone to become more self-reliant and community-minded.

In a lively, accessible style, Holzer manages to address the issue of endangered landscapes while offering guidance to the home gardener and small-scale farmer. By blending big-picture thinking and achievable local-level results Holzer elevates his book far above a how-to or polemic. He seems the voice of reason in a world where a disconnect from nature is imperiling land, water, and people.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (March 18, 2013)

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