

Into the Aquascape

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Everyone has an opinion. We can't be certain when this trend started, but we know it hasn't changed since humans began codifying their opinions in writing at the dawn of recorded history. The aquarium hobby is especially rich with individuals willing – in fact, very eager – to share their opinions, often in a loud, boisterous and sometimes abrasive manner. I intend to add my voice to the fray. This is my new blog, Into the Aquascape. I chose this title for a number of reasons. I'm a very big fan of planted aquariums, and especially smaller desktop-style setups. I love the Nature Aquarium and Takashi Amano's work, along with the work of Tom Barr, Diana Walstad, and a number of other very notable planted tank aquarists.

There's more to my blog's title, however. I'm also an avid scuba diver, spending many soggy days and nights submerged in the waters of the Pacific, off the coast of Southern California. I like to put myself right where the waters take hold and dry land dissolves. Water is a wonderful solvent – it's often called the universal solvent. When I was a child, I would lose track of myself when I stared into the reflective ripples of a local mountain stream or pond, or while I watched waves crash against the tide pools of Laguna. To be dissolved this way, to be carried away by the rhythm of water's totally singular movements, is an incomparable experience.

What better way to capture that feeling than to keep a piece of the water with us while we fumble about on land? It's a logical choice for me. My aquariums remind me of that feeling. I've designed my setups with the goal of mimicking the idealized visions I have of underwater environments I see in nature. I'm not great at it yet. I like what I've done so far, but I've seen others do it better.

Make no mistake, I think the works of the aquarists I've mentioned previously should be considered art. Though the medium may be unorthodox, the result is an expression of human creativity on par with some of the great works we see in museums. Is it any wonder public aquariums compare with museums in terms of public interest and support? This must be something more than just a simple hobby.

Seeing this part of nature up close in my aquariums reminds me of the aquatic environments I'm trying to mimic. I think about how fragile mountain streams can be, how appalling a sewage spill-induced red tide is in the sunset. Without my aquarium reminding me of these things, I might be inclined to ignore the real problems facing the Earth's aquatic environments. In addition to admiring this part of nature, I want to help protect it. We can do some good for the natural environments we copy and admire so much in our aquariums, and a large portion of my blog will be dedicated to this purpose, as well.

I hope the way I feel about our hobby rubs off on you a bit. I want aquarists to immerse themselves in their setups. Wait, don't take that the wrong way. OK, I want aquarists to metaphorically immerse themselves in their setups. I'm not advocating some bizarre home diving experiment. However, if your tank is large enough for you to dive in, by all means, be my guest. I envy you. Just don't spill on the carpet.

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