Walt Disney World News

Living Landscape Inspires Storybook Settings in New Fantasyland at Magic Kingdom

Seven Dwarfs Mine Train Mountain Completes Landscape Magic

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. - Disney landscape magicians didn't need a wand to conjure the storybook settings of New Fantasyland at Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World Resort. Instead, they wielded a diverse plant palette, trucks of soil, rockwork and cobblestones, plus enough imagination to breathe life into richly textured scenes from classic Disney films.

As guests heigh-ho their way into New Fantasyland to hop aboard the new Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, they discover tracks encircling and bisecting a steep, verdant mountain from the classic film "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Beyond the Mine Train setting, guests encounter a colorful meadow and a foreboding forest straight from "Beauty and the Beast," a breezy seascape from "The Little Mermaid" and an old-time, tree-shaded fairground representing home base for the Storybook Circus, inspired by the Disney animated film, "Dumbo."

Subtle landscape transitions turn the storybook pages for guests so they can immerse themselves in each different fairytale world filled with eye-popping living-landscape details.

Rebecca Bishop, area development director of Walt Disney Imagineering's landscape architecture division, oversaw the New Fantasyland concept design and offers some of the landscape details:

Scene I: **Seven Dwarfs Mine Train** - Guests cross a stone bridge and see the Dwarfs' cottage in the distance as they enter a magical forest studded with red poppies and more than 150 live oak, cedar and birch trees. The 2.3-acre setting with 22,000 square feet of living landscape includes 20,000 shrubs planted from the mountain's base and rising to an elevation where live shrubs could be maintained. The mountain's height required clever planning by Bishop's team, which blended faux landscape into the scene where maintaining live plants and turf would have been impossible. The team developed five varieties of faux grasses in different shades and blade lengths to simulate the fading green and yellowish, drier grasses typical at higher elevations. "As you move down the hillside, it gets greener and greener," Bishop says. "It's got to look natural. We added orange-red poppies, and they have to blow in the wind. We also placed artificial shrubs and grasses in the rockwork crevices where they might sprout among the rocks." About 13,000 square feet of artificial grasses, 350 faux shrubs and another 55 synthetic trees blend with the live landscape to complete the mountain peak.

Scene II: **Enchanted Tales with Belle** – As they head toward Maurice's (Belle's father's) cottage, guests encounter a bucolic meadow, where fluffy riots of plumbago blossoms, blooming purple trumpet trees and gently drooping lemongrass offer an idyllic escape for bookworms and dreamers like Belle. Bottlebush shrubs with bright red blossoms, birch trees, sycamores and oak-leaf hydrangeas add to the unruly wildness of the meadow. "We grouped plants in colonies and ran the groups together so they look like a meadow on the hillside, then used lots of blossoms and textures," Bishop says.

Scene III: Beast's Castle and **Be Our Guest Restaurant** – The pastoral scene fades as guests choose an ominous path across an old stone bridge incline toward the enchanted forest and a rocky "mountain" where red oaks and dark

deodara cedars – some standing 30 feet tall — surround Beast's massive castle and darken the landscape. Waterfalls tumble over the mountain rocks to a rushing stream. "This landscape is sharp, pointy and masculine. We used red oak so it would be dark green in contrast to the fall colors at Belle's cottage landscape," says Bishop, explaining that the elevation change adds perspective and drama to the setting. "We wanted you to have the feeling that you are trudging up and across the bridge to this somewhat menacing castle."

Scene IV: **Under the Sea — Journey of the Little Mermaid**– As guests depart the castle, their path shifts gently downward toward a strikingly different maritime landscape inhabited by Ariel, Sebastian and friends. Tons of sand, gentle waterfalls and tide pools ease guests into Ariel's world. Clumps of sea grapes, graceful umbrella trees and palms of many species — tall, thin palms; short, chunky palms; and a multi-trunk Reclinata palm – further evoke the storybook seaside. To add light and whimsy to the pathway around Journey of the Little Mermaid, Bishop's team found glistening, multi-colored glass beads to scatter and embed in the pavement. "The paving magically shimmers at different times of day," Bishop says. "Inside the attraction queue, it's always shining and looks wet. It gives a nice sensation to the walking surface."

Another special touch: The New Fantasyland team added a nod to the Nautilus from the original 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea attraction (which closed at the Magic Kingdom in 1994 and was located where the new attraction now sits) with a rockwork carving of the submarine at the back of the last tide pool.

Scene V: **Storybook Circus** – A walkway paved with faux peanuts and banana peels invites guests to enter the old-Florida-style, tree-shaded fairground where Storybook Circus rolled into town on Casey Jr., the famous locomotive from "Dumbo." Large old oaks transplanted from the Disney tree farm, a pineapple guava tree and a Japanese blueberry tree surround Dumbo, the Flying Elephant and other attractions with welcome shade and leafy beauty.

Along the Casey Jr. Splash 'N' Soak Station water play area, flowering, towering camellia shrubs soften the scene, and 20-foot-tall leafy, lime-green eucalyptus trees create a border between the play area and the Fantasyland Train Station. "Storybook Circus was very fun. We had seen a picture of a cobblestone path that was overtaken by dirt," says Bishop, who decided to create a similar look with an imprinted "storyline" for the walkway where elephants and monkeys may have tread. "We made 2,000 peanuts to put into the concrete, as well as banana peels from a circus monkey. And you can see the prints of big elephants and Dumbo walking between their legs."

From start to finish, it took a concept team of 10 Disney Imagineers, about 20 landscape installers and another dozen paving experts to craft the New Fantasyland landscape, from planting of trees and shrubs to the paving of pathways, building of fences and molding of rockwork and even "mud" curbs.

The overall landscape concept is designed to provide maximum beauty and realism with a color palette of as many brilliant blooms as possible through spring, summer, autumn and winter. And around every corner, through every storybook scene, there's something new to discover, whether it's realistic faux grasses atop rockwork above Beast's castle, bright red-orange firecracker plants beneath The Great Goofini coaster track or the meticulous aging of paved areas with more than a spoonful of sugar (yes, sugar actually eats away the paving!)

"The rewarding part for us is to watch it all build, blend and become a three-dimensional place that was compartmentally envisioned on paper," says Bishop, adding that the greatest payoff for Disney Imagineers is to be "part of something that will outlive ourselves; that has the ability to bring happiness to millions of all ages."

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