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[MINIMALIST AQUARIUM MOVEMENT]  
[2009 CONCEPT BOOK]

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*BARE ESSENTIALS – FLAGSHIP SERIES AQUASCAPE  
DESIGN: FRANK WAZETER, 2009*

## IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup> - MISSION STATEMENT

*To foster and expand the Iwagumi and Minimalist movements in aquarium design.*

Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> is dedicated towards the promotion of the aesthetic beauty of simplicity and subtlety, the expansion of the hobby, and the fostering of the budding minimalist movement. By providing unique written, photographic and video content that is focused both on inspiring new people to join the aquarium hobby and helping existing hobbyists to expand their knowledge and awareness, Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> hopes to inspire a new age in American aquarium design.

*Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> Founding Mission Statement - November 2009*

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*THE IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup> LIFESTYLE - THE STUDIO OF JONATHAN BLAIR, ANN ARBOR, MI*

## THE IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup> VISION

The Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> vision is in short to facilitate the widespread recognition of the minimalist aquascape as an art form. To say that we desire only to expand the aquascaping hobby is an incomplete statement. The essence of our goal is nothing short of the synthesis of modern home and office design with the elegance of the aquascaped aquarium. To that end the quality of content, development, innovation, and marketing strategy must exceed that of our competition.

Our team shares a common passion for aquascaping and seeks to express this medium in a manner that intertwines our specialties in architecture, culture, and the art fields. With this background experience, even at our humblest level we have a wide variety of perspective and design theory. These aspects are vital components of the Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> strategy for success, the guarantee of quality, and the dedication to provide wholly unique content.

Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>'s primary directive for the immediate future is focused on the successful launch of the website, iwagumicubed.com, and subsequently the continued rise and maintenance of its popularity. By taking a multi-faceted approach that entails utilizing modern marketing techniques and providing a previously unforeseen volume of quality and original content centered on Iwagumi and the Minimalist design, while garnering the community's support, the first year of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>'s operations will be oriented towards building a strong positive reputation which will function as the foundation of the company. Profit is not expected in the first year of operation, but any profit that is made will be routed into advertising and the further development of content and designs.

Building off of our reputation, the next step will be in the writing and publishing of books that cater to the prospective, beginner, and advanced hobbyist that ideally will earn a spot not only in local fish and pet store's but also on the shelves of book stores around the nation. Widespread education on minimalist aquascaping is a necessity to achieve our vision. In tandem with this project, the service-based aspect of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> will begin by providing low rate or free construction of aquascapes for (provided they pay for equipment and advertise for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>) local fish and pet stores, offices, etc. Most likely this will be centered in the Seattle area to begin with. In this fashion the process of building Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>'s reputation will be an ever-continuous project.

The essence of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> is in its drive and passion for the goals and objectives it lays out. By learning from the mistakes of others, innovating new designs, improving upon tried and true styles and fostering positive professional relations, Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> will be among the pioneers for the future of the aquarium industry.

## THE STORY OF IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 2007 a friend and I decided to go to Nagoya, Japan as part of a student exchange program. One thing I remember vividly was sitting in front of a karesansui (rock garden) for hours admiring the elegance of such a seemingly simple art. There has always been something about Iwagumi that has inspired me and seeing such work incorporated into aquariums motivated me to renew my childhood interest in aquariums in 2008. I became enraptured by the works of Amano and his synthesis of Japanese art and aquatics.

It was this inspiration in addition to the frustration of the lack of information on Iwagumi that led to the birth of the Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> concept.

While working on extensive research papers on the Iwagumi/Iwagumi style of Japan, I published my first article detailing Iwagumi in the aquarium, and it was through this article that I met Jonathan Blair. Our personalities, shared taste for design, and appreciation for Japanese culture led to the two of us getting along almost instantly. It was because of this that I shared with him my idea for a new webpage dedicated to Iwagumi which immediately interested him as an idea with enormous potential.

The result of this collaboration was the transformation of the concept from an idea to a project in development in the summer of 2009. The ideas were gushing out at a faster pace than we could write them down (some plans even detailing the company's course in the far-reaching future!), and as a result the decisions were made to not only cover Iwagumi, but also the Minimalist design and the part they play in the home and office as a work of art. Since we were both moving residences, we had the unique opportunity to model our new respective apartments around our aquascapes and layouts expressly for the purpose of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>.

Work on Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> slowed down during the fall of 2009 as research and setting up our new aquascapes (the flagship series) and residences began. It was during this time that I asked a friend of mine I had met in the early months of 2009, Meredith Mallette, if she was interested in joining the endeavor. To our delight, she accepted and the concept of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> evolved once again. Soon after she joined, Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>'s concept went from simply being a provider of content on already existing aquascaping styles and methods to the additional desire to innovate new ideas and concepts for aquascaping in the hopes of bringing fresh ideas into the hobby.

So it was with the synthesis of these three unique viewpoints that the core principles and values of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> became solidified. While Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> is still in its infancy and the story is nowhere near over, we have full confidence in the potential for the success of the company to inspire, innovate and improve.



*HUMBLE ORIGINS - THE AQUARIUMS THAT LEAD TO THE VISION  
DESIGNS: FRANK WAZETER, EARLY 2009*





## THE PEOPLE BEHIND IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup>

For those of us working on Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>, it has become a symbol of our vision of a new direction for the aquascaping hobby. In order to reach and exceed these goals and objectives, we have brought to the table experience and knowledge that has a wide variety of origins. Our team prizes learning from each other to expand our perspectives in order to see things from varied angles and approaches. In fact, many of our best layouts (both

*THE RESULT OF COLLABORATION – FLAGSHIP SERIES AQUASCAPE*  
*DESIGN: JONATHAN BLAIR; LAYOUT & DESIGN ADVISOR: FRANK WAZETER*

in the aquarium and out) are the result of our collaboration and have become the representation of our team's cohesive strength. Although our backgrounds are varied, we share the same common passion for tasteful design, education, success and improving ourselves at every opportunity.

*Francis X. Wazeter IV* works as the team leader for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> and has a background in writing, cultural studies, webpage design and marketing, and communications. Previous project experience includes the development and marketing of the Texas State Financial Aid web page, eqoutrider.net and the authoring of a thesis paper on Japanese gardens. Responsible as the coordinator for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> and author of most of the current written content for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>, it is his objective to insure the smooth operation of the company in its endeavors and development projects. His philosophy for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> is modeled after a "Renaissance Man" approach to strategy and design. He is projected to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies, focus on International Business in 2010 from Texas State University San Marcos.

*Jonathan D. Blair* graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture in 2009 from the University of Detroit Mercy, and is currently working on his Masters of Architecture at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He has previously worked with GotFrag, LLC as a graphic artist and journalist as well as a freelance landscape designer with several years experience building and maintaining Japanese koi ponds and water gardens throughout West Michigan. Jonathan's architectural experiences most recently include work with Hobbs+Black and Associates where he contributed to the development of the City Creek Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. His fascination with aquatics led to him to become a licensed SCUBA diver in 2009 in an effort to gain a greater appreciation for the underwater world. Jonathan brings an invaluable perspective on the technical aspects of design, and adheres to the minimalist philosophy to incorporate Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> designs and visions. He is responsible for the design and maintenance of the web page, the creation and upkeep of the Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> studio branch in Ann Arbor, Mi, and acts as the de facto "vice president" of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>.

*Meredith Mallette*, although being the youngest and most recent team member of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>, she is a talented artist from Alameda, Ca. She provides an artistic insight to Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> designs, layouts and concepts that aids in the company's aspirations for quality and original work. Responsible as one of the minds behind the new concept styles in production by Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>, her input and contribution provides a valuable addition to the team and rounds out the skill base of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>.

## IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup> VALUES

Due to the nature of the content that will be contained on iwagumicubed.com, we have a high moral and ethical responsibility to only provide information that is accurate, authentic, and original. Content that fails to fall into all three of these categories will not be published as a part of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>. This ethos encompasses, but is not limited to, photographic, written and video content. It is our desire to have 100% original content only, which is a monumental, but feasible task. The content that comprises Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> will be one of the primary cornerstones in its development and success and as such it will be protected to the full extent of the law (just like any product-oriented company would protect its designs).



With that being said, education and innovation are two key components of the drive behind Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>: Education to learn from the expertise of our predecessors, to teach and spread the minimalist design principles, and to aid in improving the perception of the modern aquarium. Innovation to bring fresh designs to the aquascaping scene, to inspire new and renewed appreciation for the art, to bring new blood into the hobby, and to captivate the viewer.

*MINIMALIST DESIGN, INNOVATIVE APPROACH  
MIDDLE DESIGN: JONATHAN BLAIR; BOTTOM DESIGN: FRANK WAZETER*

We believe in upholding these standards with the utmost attention. In tandem with this philosophy, we also believe in reciprocity. The ideal relationships for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> in both a business and community sense is a relationship that involves an equivalent exchange of benefit. We uphold the notion that the contributors and supporters of Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> will have earned the right to share in our success, be it through shared credit, advertising, profit-sharing, or otherwise.



*THE GROWTH OF A NEW BEGINNING – FLAGSHIP SERIES AQUASCAPE  
DESIGN: FRANK WAZETER; DESIGN ADVISORY: JONATHAN BLAIR*



*THE FUTURE OF IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup> – THE FUSION PROJECT 2010 CONCEPT DESIGN*  
*CONCEPT ARTIST: MEREDITH MALLETTE*

## DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Perhaps the most exciting endeavor for the Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> team is the work on developing new concepts for the art, and the dissection and analysis of other popular concepts in the hobby. While this branch of the Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> vision is still very much in its infancy, it also has the most potential in the continuation of unique content. Because of the sensitive nature of these projects, we can only provide basic information until the launch of iwagumicubed.com.

Code named the Fusion Project, this is the center-piece for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>'s next generation design concepts for 2010. Essentially it combines ikebana and iwagumi principles together to create an aquascape that takes the minimalist mentality in aquascaping to the next level. By emphasizing the impact and presence of the rock layout in Iwagumi and the brilliance of color hues and delicate placement of a few carefully selected plants, this style may very well become the next big aquascaping craze, who knows? I know we're excited about it. But for now, that's all we can reveal.

Two other projects I can briefly discuss is the wabi-kusa code-breaking project, which is mostly an educational desire to find out how they are composed to stay together (which has practical uses for future development projects). The other is the development of a product form of the Iwagumi<sup>3</sup> home recipe for algae prevention. The potential for these projects, like the potential for Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>, only see's the sky as the limit. *This paragraph is for the non-production version of this booklet only.*



*IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup> FLAGSHIP AQUASCAPES – A GALLERY SAMPLING  
THE STUDIO OF JONATHAN BLAIR, ANN ARBOR, MI*

## ARTICLE SAMPLES

Please enjoy these two complimentary articles as a basic preview for the content that will be provided on Iwagumi<sup>3</sup>. The intended target audience for these particular articles is the aquascaping beginner or the person who is considering trying their hand at aquascaping.

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## THE ESSENTIALS OF IWAGUMI

The most difficult question ever asked of me, in regards to this hobby, was very simply: "What is Iwagumi?" Here we have a question that I could write pages upon pages on without ever fully covering all the bases of the art form. However, the simplest way I could describe Iwagumi is to say this: **Iwagumi is a moment**. Liken it to taking an important personal photograph, except instead of being a literal recording, Iwagumi is capturing the **essence** of the moment and displaying said moment's raw emotion. Iwagumi is a representation of a vague feeling or sentiment, rather than a concrete interpretation of something physical, as a result the same Iwagumi means different things to different people. These aspects are what create a captivating Iwagumi.

Above all else, Iwagumi strives for harmony by creating a perfect coordination and combination of hardscape, flora and fauna under the notion that **less is more**. It could be said that Iwagumi is the epitome of the minimalist aquarium design mentality. Generally speaking, simplicity is the name of the game. Iwagumi is not the art form for incorporating massive jungle tanks with countless species of plants or fish. Even in the most daring Iwagumi aquascapes, there are at most 4 or 5 types of very carefully selected plants (and only one or two of those make major impacts, the rest are usually accent plants), and typically only 2-3 with many tanks only using one type of plant.

The cornerstone requirements for Iwagumi are fairly straightforward. The first thing you should understand is that Iwagumi uses **only rocks** for hardscape materials. Iwagumi **literally translated** means "rock formation," so using any kind of driftwood in your hardscape means it is **not an Iwagumi**. Your driftwood and rock combination aquascape may be creative and inspiring, but it isn't an Iwagumi. Adding driftwood to a layout may make it look more natural, but remember Iwagumi isn't about making the layout look "natural" it's about making an aquascape that appeals to you emotionally.

Aside from the hardscape requirements, Iwagumi's should only have a couple carefully selected plant types, usually three (or one). Why three? Three plants allow you to have the foreground (carpet plant), a transitional plant, and a background plant. **Never\*** use two plants, one of the most commonly made errors in Iwagumi's is having no method of transition between carpet and background plants, which throw's off the balance and harmony of an Iwagumi. Do not understate the importance of transition plants or stones in an Iwagumi, they will make or break your work.

The last part you should know is to never use more than one type of fish (this rule also applies to shrimp, especially the color-laden ones). Having more than one type breaks both the rules of simplicity and harmony in your layout. However, having algae eaters such as amano shrimp and nerite snails (otocinclus if the tank is large enough that they don't make an impact), is acceptable. One shoal of small fish is enough to add the finishing touches to your Iwagumi. Again, when in doubt, go for the simpler option.

Creating an inspiring aquascape does not require precise mathematical or scientific equations. It does not require expensive materials or top of the line gadgetry. It doesn't require competition with the Jones's. In fact, those things have nothing to do with aquascaping. All it really requires is having heart. The only requirement is to listen to yourself, and create a work of art that represents what you need it to be. When that starts happening, you'll wake up one day and realize that you've created something breathtaking that doesn't require an enthusiast to appreciate.

-Frank Wazeter

*Author's Note:* While some of these basic rules can be broken, they can only really be broken without ruining the aquascape once you really know what you're doing. \* For example an aquascape with only two plant types might have the hardscape itself functioning as the transition point, or the two plant types might work so well together that they don't need a transition.

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## IWAGUMI THEORY 101 - THE BASICS

Before we even begin to delve into constructing a hardscape, planting the tank, and all that other fun stuff, the first thing you should become established with is some of the basic theories behind an Iwagumi layout. These basic theories are the cornerstones for the rest of your layout, and are prevalent at all stages of design and setup for

your Iwagumi. The big three are: simplicity, transition, and the rule of odd numbers, which combine to form an emotional impact on the viewer rather than being a literal representation of nature. Adhere to these three principles and you can easily avoid BTS - boring tank syndrome.

Simplicity lies at the heart of the Iwagumi world, even the most riveting and edgy Iwagumi's typically have much less noise (simultaneous actions occurring at once, which dilute the impact of an aquascape), less variety in hardscape materials (only **one** type of stone per layout) less variety in plants and fish (usually only 3 plant types and 1 type of fish), and usually contains much more subtlety than other aquascape designs. The goal here is to express the elegance of subtlety and simplicity. Too much noise in an aquascape leaves the viewer with 'confusion' on where to look so to speak and to summarize Amano's words "the viewer becomes anxious because he/she doesn't know where to look." Reducing noise is achieved by having simplicity - one rock type, one or three plant types and one fish species. Which is reinforced by creating subtlety - the method in which stones are placed and laid out, how and where the plants are placed in conjunction with the rocks, and how the fauna impacts the aquascape and brings it to life.

Often you will hear aquascaping experts talk continuously about flow, and what they mean isn't the flow that comes out of your filter, but rather flow in the hardscape (rocks or driftwood) and softscape (plants) itself. When someone mentions the word flow in this manner, what they mean is essentially a vague way of saying that you need better transition. Without transition, an Iwagumi aquascape falls apart at the seams. Basically one thing must flow into the next, and failing to do so causes tension in the layout and fosters noise, which as we established previously, is a bad thing. The key word here is compliment. The stones must complement one another in shape, characteristics, color and size, not just by being the same type. The plants must enhance each other by being similar enough that they don't clash with one another, and yet not so similar that they fail to provide a transition from foreground to transition/accent plant to background. A lot of Iwagumi aquascapers tend to understate the importance of the fauna they introduce to the aquarium. In other words, the fish become the afterthought after all that hard work creating the layout. **Don't fall into this trap**, if the fish you choose don't compliment your plants and stones, then the aquascape falls apart in the clutch part of the game. As an example – an angelfish is more suited to a driftwood layout than an Iwagumi layout.

The third leg in the triangle of basic theory principles is the odd number rule. To put it simply, even numbers are bad. To once again paraphrase Amano, he essentially says that "even numbers are unnatural." Now, when the word "unnatural" is used for this purpose, it doesn't necessarily mean it doesn't look like it'd be found like that in nature, again, Iwagumi isn't about being a literal translation of nature. But rather, that even numbers basically sabotage the flow and transitional aspects of an Iwagumi by not feeling 'natural' to the eye. It also stems from Japanese culture - four is considered bad luck because it shares the same pronunciation as the kanji for death. But on a more tangible level, essentially here's why it exists: even numbers don't "end" the transition cycle, odd numbers do. For example, if you have only two plant types, then there's nothing in between them to aid the conversion from A to C, in short you need something to act as B to end the cycle at C. "A" can stand alone as just one, but C needs B and E needs D. So basically if you end with an even number of stones (this is more important than plants, since stones can act as "B" between plants A and C) or plants, then you have a sequence that looks like: Primary Transition Secondary Transition, with the final transition leading to nothing. If you are confused at this point, don't worry, that's entirely normal. At the basic level you pretty much just need to know that when in doubt, use an odd number.

These three principles are intrinsically tied to one another, and when utilized appropriately should be indistinguishable from one another in your final layout to the untrained eye. The odd number rule aids in the creation and support of transition which is applied through simplicity and subtlety to result in an aquascape that feels natural to the viewer's sense of order and emotion and thus reduces noise and creates a harmonious aquascape regardless of what the intended emotional infliction of the design is. It may be a little confusing now, but it all begins to make sense the more you work with it and the more you practice these three principles.

-Frank Wazeter

## **AFTERWORD**

We hope you have enjoyed this publication and we wish to thank you for taking the time to support our goals by reading our content and sharing in our vision. As a starting company, we welcome any critiques, comments, etc that you may have for us. Additional information and samplings is available upon request.

**-THE IWAGUMI<sup>3</sup> STAFF**

**FRANK WAZETER**

**JONATHAN BLAIR**

**MEREDITH MALLETTE**