

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

COMMODITY GROUP NEWSLETTER



welcome to 2008! message from the chair

Can you believe another year has come and gone? The older you get the faster time seems to march on. The seasons seem to blend into each other as do the years. With the New Year here, it's time to reflect on 2007. As designers do we take enough time analyzing our successes and failures of the previous year? Sure we were busy, run off our feet, but were we able to figure out what works, what doesn't and how to grow our business?

This month our editor Jennifer Hayman has reached out to the design community to get some business answers and inspiration. Designing should not only be a labour of love but a labour that leads us to prosperity. We've talked to designers across the country to find out how they prepared for certification and we've asked some of our more seasoned veterans how to build and grow a design business. And don't forget to join us on January 7 for the second annual Landscape Design Conference, a whole day completely devoted to building the knowledge and expertise that we all need as Landscape Designers to successfully grow our business.

Yours truly,

Beth

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Table of Contents

in every issue

- 1 Message from the Chair
- 5 Plant
- 6 Designer Profile
- 8 The Board

feature articles

- 2 If you want to grow, you have to let go
by Harry A. Gelderman
- 4 Q&A: certification
by Jennifer Hayman

upcoming events 8

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featured article

If you want to grow, you have to let go.

by Harry A. Gelderman

If you want to grow you have to let go. This is a statement that just came out of my mouth after someone asked in a designers meeting; "How do I grow my business?". I'm not sure where it came from but there it was on the tip of my tongue. If you ask most successful entrepreneurs what was their success, they will probably tell you they had a business plan. In most cases I'm sure this couldn't be further from the truth. If you dig a little, you'll probably find what they did, was start a business and by sheer passion worked very hard to build the young business. As the business began to grow larger than they could handle on their own, they would either hire someone to help them, or in a lot of cases, pass tasks that they might not be strong at or might not like doing, to a third party, such as a bookkeeper.

I remember asking a very successful local landscaper about 12 years ago, when I was still trying to be the designer, the estimator, the sales man and the supervisor, when he decided to stop designing. His answer was 'I didn't decide to stop designing; I realized I was much better at supervising the crews and growing the business that way.' Older businesses and, of course larger landscape businesses, have a business plan. And some of them would call in consultants to help them with such a plan.

Today we will look at how to grow your design business. We will first look at all the tasks a designer has, advertising, participating in public engagements, meeting with clients, measuring sites, drawing, and accounting. In a lot of cases you are now also required to be both the estimator and the project manager. This is a topic that I will deal with at a later date. I am sure there are a few more 'hats' in a designer's box, but these are the main ones.

As you get busier and have more work it is always hard to decide first of all when it is financially feasible to give one or more of these tasks up, and secondly which ones to give up. The first and easiest one would be accounting. This can be time consuming and a job we tend to procrastinate. It is, however, very important to your business. There are a lot of bookkeeping firms that, for a reasonable price, will take care of the accounting for you. Whether they come into your office once a week for a few hours, or whether you drop (email) the books off, there are a few options here.

featured article

Knowing when to grow the rest of your design business is always a tough question to answer, and will vary in every situation. It is always important to lean on others in the industry and on their expertise when trying to figure out where to go from where you are.

It is harder to decide which of the remaining tasks to give up. Figuring out which ones you enjoy the most, and which you are good at, is important. A hard and honest look in the mirror will be needed. All visits to the client are very important. Finding out what the client's needs and dreams are, presenting the concept and finalizing the working drawing are most often about the trust between the designer and the client. The most important function of the design firm, therefore, is its interaction with the client throughout the process. If you look at the rest of the tasks, pretty well all of them can be done by someone else.

Except for a couple of diehards most designers use computers to complete their drawings. Some of these programs, such as Dynascape, have come a long way in showing the same depth and line weight quality that a good hand drawing displayed. This makes it easier to spread the workload without compromising the 'distinct' look you try to portray. The most economical way to grow the design portion is to hire straight out of college. This way you can 'mould' them into the style you have without much trouble, we hope. (You will note that most seasoned designers have their own style, which might not suit yours at first, and before you know it you spend your days butting heads. As the firm grows larger a seasoned designer might very well be an asset, but not necessarily when you are first trying to grow what has been a successful business to date.)

A student who has worked in the landscape industry will almost always be a better asset than one who has not, and therefore better to hire. They will know what it takes to do a project; they should know how to measure from a drawing. Other benefits of hiring a graduate straight out of college are a lower starting salary, recent instruction in measuring grades as well as plotting existing buildings, trees, walks etc. Speaking of which, one of the more time consuming things designers have to do is site measuring. If you have someone who is good at this it will free up a

lot of your time for other tasks. Of course measuring is very important, so teaching them well is essential. It is important to remember that in order to survive and continue to grow you must recover your costs and make a profit off each individual you have hired or subcontracted work to. These are just some preliminary suggestions on how to grow your design business. The bottom line is you need to learn to delegate.



"The most important function of the design firm, therefore, is its interaction with the client throughout the process. If you look at the rest of the tasks, pretty well all of them can be done by someone else."

Harry A. Gelderman

Q&A

Three landscape designers share their thoughts on certification

By Jennifer Hayman

Why do you think certification is important to designers and prospective clients?

It's great to raise the bar in the industry, not only for personal reasons but also for credibility in the industry. Today, without any generally accepted regulations for the designation 'landscape designer', the homeowner must trust that the designer is as qualified as he or she says they are. Without a referral, the CLD can help give the client confidence in the designer.

Did you have a mentor to guide you through the process?

Ron Swentiski...he was fabulous. I could not have done this without him.



Connie Cadotte, CLD
Home and Garden
Retreats, Toronto, ON

Education:
Landscape Design,
Ryerson University

**Practicing
Designer:**
10 years

How did you prepare for the CLD exam and portfolio review?

It can take as much time as you want to put into it...you cannot possibly read all the recommended texts but they are all very helpful. I attended the Information Session and all the pertinent workshops and courses, and read as much as I could, so I spent a lot of time preparing. The exam was easier than putting the portfolio together. I was surprised by a few questions that I did not know the

answer to and just how much there is to know in this business.

How has gaining certification helped you in your everyday practice?

Absolutely, it gives me confidence during the planning stage and at site meetings with other professionals.

Stephen Dee, CLD
Isidore Landscapes
Inc., Vancouver, BC

Education:
Mechanical
Engineering, University
of British Columbia

**Practicing
Designer:**
9 years



How did you prepare for the CLD exam and portfolio review?

I actually walked into the exam with no preparation. All my knowledge was from experience. I spent probably 3 days preparing the portfolio (photos, write-ups, minor adjustments to drawings etc.)

Have prospective clients ever asked you if you are certified?

Yes but not many. I expect it will be much more recognized in the future. Not having formal design schooling, certification is a great asset in proving qualification.

Why do you think certification is important to designers and prospective clients?

There are many unqualified people who start up a gardening business and then call themselves designers. Certification will give clients confidence in one's expertise.

Q&A continued

Why do you think certification is important to designers and prospective clients? I wanted proof in hand to show my clients I had the skills to carry out their design needs. It was apparent that not all of the graduates from my training program were necessarily good landscape designers.

What surprised you the most about gaining the CLD certification?

CLD certification wasn't all easy; I did learn from the process and it's made me pay attention to some details I may have become lax with previously.

How has gaining certification helped you in your everyday practice?

Certification has given me a confidence about the service I offer my clients. Clients almost always ask what I have had to accomplish to become a landscape designer. This certification is the "clincher" in my bio. It gives my clients the confidence they are hiring a professional.



Linda van Vulpen.
CLD
Van Vulpen Design,
Halifax, NS

Education:
Landscape Horticulture Technology,
Nova Scotia
Agricultural College

Practicing Designer:
12 years

What was the most interesting or important thing you learned during the process?

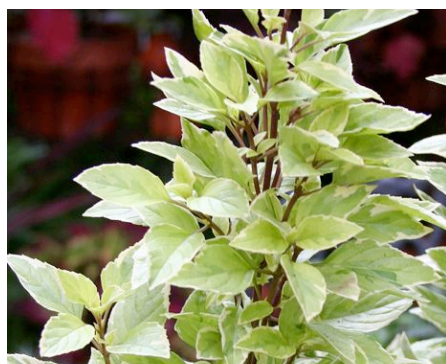
I knew more about some details that I thought might be my weak points. I do a lot "right." I produce solid, professional designs I am proud of.

Have prospective clients ever asked you if you are certified?

Yes! They don't always know the exact question to ask but they want proof I have the qualifications. It is very simple now to show them.

in every issue
plant
by Paul Zammit

Variegated Greek Basil Perpetual Pesto™



Ocimum x citriodorum
'Pesto perpetuo'

Photo provided by Paul Zammit

Highly fragrant, 'yummy' and 'visually appealing' are just a few ways to describe this recent basil introduction. Perpetual Pesto™ basil is the first true variegated basil to hit the market. Overall the plant is quite colourful. This is because the mid green leaves have an irregular white margin and the leaf petioles and stems often develop a purple colouring. Another great feature is this selection does not go to seed like most basil. As a result, fresh new foliage is continually produced. As if this plant did not already have a number of desirable traits, each leaf is also very fragrant, edible and tasty. Regular pinching (and harvesting) will further encourage continued new growth.

Overall the plant has an upright columnar growth habit, and may reach a height of 2' to 4' depending on the growing conditions. I suggest positioning plants where passers-by will brush up against it to release the strong fragrance into the garden air. I have also enjoyed adding Perpetual Pesto™ to mixed containers as displayed in the cover photo. Plant in full sun to optimize growth and flavour. Outdoors, grow as an annual. It is also suitable for growing indoors in a bright, sunny window. Having had the pleasure of growing this new plant for the past two seasons, I believe this basil has true lasting power in the industry. I cannot see having a herb garden or container garden without it.

in every issue

designer profile a conversation with Welwyn Wong

by Jennifer Hayman



Welwyn Wong
Welwyn Wong Landscape Design,
Ottawa, ON

Education:
Landscape Architecture
University of Guelph

**Practicing
Designer:**
8 years



What type of practice do you have?

I specialize in residential design although I do some commercial work but only if it inspires me and if the client is open to creativity. I really become inspired when I can educate my clients about the environment and provide them with somewhere functional and beautiful that they can enjoy just outside their door. I try to show them that there is a place beyond the office, car and the interior of their home.

You have worked in various parts of Canada, US and even Hong Kong. How do you think this

has impacted your design approach today?

I would have to say that working abroad really enlightened me and exposed me to new technologies and aspects of the industry. I was working in Hong Kong on roof top gardens a decade or so ago. Here in Canada we're just starting to explore this initiative, which is great, but also lagging. I actually find that Canada is very conservative, especially Ottawa. Not only are homeowners conservative about their choices, but so are some of the contractors. In my mind, Toronto is really starting to push the design envelope, which is great to see! Ottawa is coming, but it may take some time.

You have stated that your company mandate is to preserve, reuse and relocate as much material as possible while creating a unique landscape for your client. Can you give us some examples?

I begin by reviewing the existing landscape and looking for ways to keep or re-deploy not only the existing plant material, but also the existing hardscape. I've had clients say to me "well, we can get rid of it...it's not a budget issue". But I really believe that it is our responsibility that if we cannot re-use the product then we should find someone who can benefit from it. The landfills don't need more material. I encourage us all to call up Habitat for Humanity or other similar charities to see if they can use the materials that we don't need. It's important to me that we are environmentally aware in both design and build.

How do you think Landscape Designers can become more environmentally responsible during the design/build process?

First and foremost, the most environmentally responsible thing we can do, is to design well and build right the first time. Beyond that, I always look for ways to reduce time and energy spent on removing materials from my job sites. It's tough to find that perfect 'cut and fill' ratio so that we are not carting away yards of soil and sub-soil. But I do try. I often create berms as a way of finding a home for the extra fill, and then adding a richer soil on top. The berms not only add to the aesthetics of the landscape but they also reduce energy wasted on removing soil from a job site. I realize it's difficult sometimes to stock pile soil during an installation, especially in some more urban areas. But I think it's worth discussing this with your contractor.

You have recently expanded your firm to include additional designers. When did you know that you were ready to expand your business?

Over the eight years, my company has slowly expanded from a one woman show, wearing too many hats, and having too many sleepless nights at the office, to a three to four person team, in the growing season. I'm still working on the whole life-work balance thing but my staff enjoy regular work schedules. I promote the well-rounded lifestyle and I think we have a team of quality people, working more efficiently as a collective because of it.

How do you divide responsibilities among your team? I have an Office Manager who is responsible for managing incoming calls, scheduling appointments and, because of his engineering background, is able to do plan revisions and finesse the drawings. I outsource my bookkeeping and the other members of the team work with me quite closely on the designs and project management. We try to hire at least one student a year providing them with excellent exposure to all aspects of the design process, which may not be the case in a large firm.

What has been your best marketing tool?

Exposure! Get out there! Be a guest speaker! Get on TV! Educating the public about landscape design increases public awareness of what we do and the value of planning ahead!

I write articles and speak at a number of different show venues annually. I think it's also important to give back to the community that supports your business through volunteering and helping out local charities with a landscape project.

As an industry, we should really learn from interior designers on how they have promoted themselves. If we all did one event, or wrote one article for the paper per year, we might find more and more clients wanting professional design services. We do make a great difference in the outcome of the landscape project!



Photo provided by Welwyn Wong Landscape Design

Your firm is involved with a lot of Charity work in the Ottawa area. Can you tell us a little more about it?

We have worked with the Ottawa Rotary Club, The Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa and Bruce House, an AIDS hospice in Ottawa. At Bruce House we have helped to re-design their landscape after an extensive renovation. We have given them 4-season gardens, helped pick and place memorial trees, and created a shady terrace for the patients to sit away from the summer sun. We have also worked with the Head Chef to create a walled vegetable garden they use to help feed their clients nutritious meals. The wall works well to absorb heat and extend the growing season and also helps to keep out the rodents. It has been a real success and now the Ottawa Garden Club helps maintain the gardens we all helped plant.

What advice do you have for your fellow colleagues? Don't chase the wrong carrot! Figure out your niche market, continue to learn and evolve, and go after what inspires you. Don't try to be the biggest and best; there will always be someone bigger and better. Strive for a unique contribution to the world of design – push the envelope, and eventually, with enough exposure, clients will come looking for you because they like **your** style! Be the business you want to be, the rest will follow.

in every issue

upcoming events

January 7, 2008

2008 Designers Conference

8:45 am -5:00 pm

Doubletree International Plaza Hotel

655 Dixon Road, Toronto

January 8, 2008

President's Reception & Awards of Excellence Ceremony, Construction, Maintenance and Design Programs

4:45 - 6:45pm

Doubletree International Plaza Hotel

655 Dixon Road, Toronto

January 8-10, 2008

Congress 2008

Toronto Congress Centre,

650 Dixon Road, Toronto

January - March 2008

Ongoing winter seminars, Landscape Design and Measurement

For more information, visit:

www.horttrades.com

January 30, 2008

Prosperity Partnership Seminar

7856 Fifth Line South, Milton

For more information, email:

prosperity@landscapeontario.com

February 13, 2008

Green Trade Expo

Landsdowne Park, Ottawa

February 19, 2008

Landscape Lecture Series 7:00pm

Toronto Botanical Garden,

777 Lawrence Ave E, Toronto, ON

March 12-16, 2008

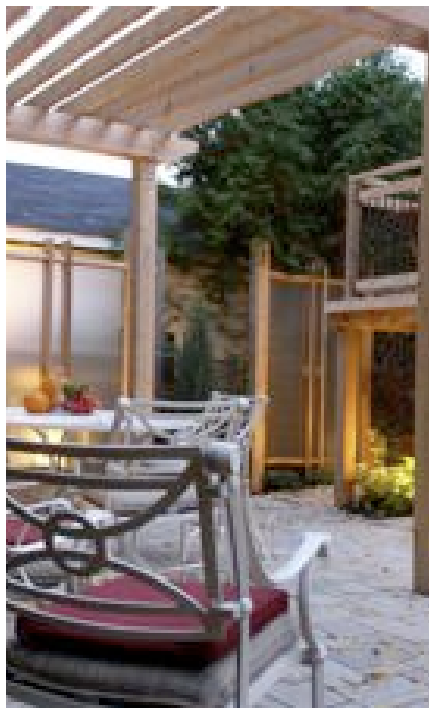
Canada Blooms

Metro Toronto Convention Centre

(MTCC) South Building

222 Bremner Blvd.

Toronto, Ontario.



"First and foremost, the most environmentally responsible thing we can do, is to design well and build right the first time."

Welwyn Wong

Photo provided by Welwyn Wong Landscape Design.

your Landscape Design Commodity group

the board

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Beth Edney

vice-chair & conference chair '08

Tony Lombardi

past chair Beth Edney

treasurer Janet Ennamorato

ontario rep, CNLA Haig Seferian

ontario rep, CNLA Ron Swentiski

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