

LO Landscape Outlook

Issue 93 • Spring 23

**A cool city
courtyard**

**Plants rehabilitate
brownfield sites**

**Garden sculptures
to move you**

**Landscape business:
Vehicles, finance, insurances**



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New Members

- | | |
|---|---|
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Anjane Sunnah (VIC) |
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Emily Dutton (NSW),
Nathaniel Currie (Qld),
Siew Leng Lee (NSW),
Rene Elysee (NSW),
Sarah Miens (NSW),
Dane Gartrell (Qld),
Christopher Carr (VIC),
Jill Johns (Qld),
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Cover Photo: Moving sculptures reflect light and 'make the wind visible'. Photo supplied: Rudi Jass Kinetic Sculptures



editor's message

Our environment is a big issue and major focus for landscape designers, in fact anyone associated with managing, designing, implementing or enjoying landscapes. This issue is therefore a great opportunity to report on some developments in this space. These include OzBreed's work identifying plants that can tolerate 'wet feet' after our excessively wet seasons. And collaborative work by government, educational institutions, landscape architects Chris Johnstone and SueAnne Ware and others in Newcastle (NSW) is identifying plants that can actively support remediation of former industrial 'brownfield sites'. This exercise is not just academic. It will help bring much needed former industrial land into consideration for much needed housing and to meet many other community needs. We begin a new series of profiles on some of our most notable designers, and some valuable 'how to' articles on using new rose varieties in landscapes, choosing and financing vehicles for your business, and understanding your real world insurance needs. There's also a preliminary report on the recent landscape expo held at Ryde TAFE (NSW). A panel discussion on how designers and contractors can work together better was a feature. This should all contribute to a better 2023 as spring brings us warmer temperatures and renewed energy.

John F

John Fitzsimmons, editor

PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

STORY: COL DAGGER, LDI DIRECTOR

- Major LDI partnerships
- New sections in Landscape Outlook
- Executive Officer to retire
- New research - plants in wet sites

Welcome to Issue 93 of Landscape Outlook, Spring 2023. We have had an exciting few months in LDI and I am happy to share with you our latest achievements.

Firstly let's welcome back two major partners Landmark Vectorworks and Alpine Nurseries. Pivotal to all our work for the industry is the highly appreciated support from two fine organisations. Personally, we should gather around organisations that share our values and I recommend you to consider their services.

Special acknowledgement goes out to the Vectorworks team for sponsoring the Emerging Designer category of the LDI annual awards and offering a free annual subscription as a prize. It is great see our industry partners - companies that supply our industry, invest in supporting the new generation professionals as they carve their place out in this rewarding but challenging industry.

In this Spring edition we will be delving into the operational side of our businesses; Called "Studio Works", this section will focus on the business of the Landscape Design and equipping you with great information to make your business more savvy.

We also get the latest research from OzBreed on plants with wet feet. This is a key direction for LO as we aim to bring you key knowledge around plants and how we work with them.

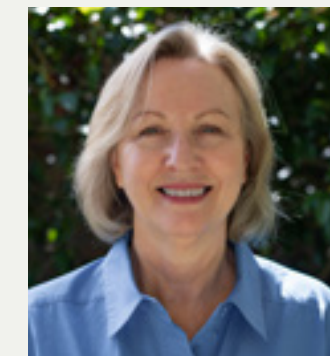
LDI has also just announced a new partnership with digital law firm Levy & W. Director Dari Levy has worked with interior designers, landscape designers and architects

over the past 5 years and has gained a stellar reputation for her firm's specialist services, so much so that she is currently developing a new subsidiary of her firm dedicated to legal services especially for designers.

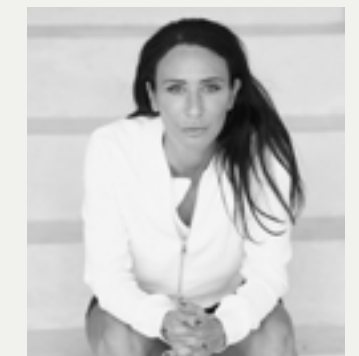
We are thrilled to advise Levy & W. has agreed to offer their support to LDI and our members to ensure we have access to superior specialist legal services at affordable prices and with ongoing assistance via newsletters and live streams, Q&As etc. In addition LDI members interested in having professional legal documents for their business, are entitled to a complimentary phone consultation and exclusive LDI rates.

Finally, the linchpin of our association has been the executive officer, Maureen McKee. She has been the very glue that held us together for the last 12 years and those of you that have had a chance to deal with Maureen will join in with me with an enormous thank you, and a very big wish you well as she chooses to retire. The LDI board has known of Maureen's intentions for some months now and we have been working hard towards finding solutions when she actually retires in November this year.

LDI will be advertising for roles to cover the administration of the association. Naturally members are welcome to apply when the positions are advertised.



Maureen McKee



Dari Levy



As the days become longer and the weather gets warmer, the landscape around us begins to transform. Naked trees, stripped of their leaves in winter, begin to show tell-tail signs of an awakening. Heavy with buds and leafy green shoots, Spring is finally here, and as every “green thumb” knows, it’s the perfect time to get planting! But where to start.

Speak to the experts

Whether you’re looking to source plants for a residential or commercial landscaping project, it’s essential to seek out quality with no exceptions, something this multi-award-winning business prides itself on. Alpine Nurseries is part of the largest wholesale production nursery group in Australia. The operation has 3 sites totalling over 150 acres of growing area to provide quality, service, scale, and variety of green life to the landscape industry. “For over 45 years, Alpine has been the benchmark for quality,” said Dan Ewings, General Manager, Alpine Nurseries. “Our industry knowledge and expertise, ensures that our customers receive market leading, quality plants and supply year-round.”

Dedicated support and service

The Alpine legacy and its strong reputation within the plant industry, can be attributed to its people – the backbone of the business. Alpine’s staff are passionate about horticulture and care about quality outcomes, the perfect blend to consistently deliver a quality experience across every area of the business for customers.

The Alpine sales division has dedicated teams that look after large commercial infrastructure projects, high-end residential private gardens, down to small backyard make overs. Alpine grows advanced trees in excess of 2,500 litre containers, all the way down to tube stock for roadside plantings and has access to an extensive Australia-wide network of specialist growers, should you require something a little different or specific.

One stop landscape shop

The Alpine Trademart, which operates a strict trade-only policy, is located within the Dural nursery, and has an entire hectare dedicated to offering trade customers a wide range of plant species and allied products. Open weekdays and Saturdays, this one-stop-shop has a retail feel in a wholesale environment, providing easy access for browsing and selecting a wide variety of plants along with a range of potting mixes, mulches, and fertilisers.

“Alpine’s Trademart is a place that inspires landscape design, and sees many customers, from landscapers and landscape designers, to architects, local councils, property developers, garden retail centres and government agencies, frequent our nursery,” said Gavin Bodilly, Trademart Manager.

“With over 3,000 varieties of plants available, our friendly, dedicated team, many of whom are horticulturalists with decades of experience, are on hand to assist and offer valuable insight into your plant selection and needs.”

An added benefit of the Trademart, is that it’s a place you can bring your clients. When planning upcoming projects, it provides inspiration and an opportunity for you to work directly with the expert Trademart team when selecting the right plants for your project. For more than 20 years, the Alpine Trademart is proud to offer customers - a single source of all things plant related, under one roof, to help bring landscape designs to life.

SCULPTURES THAT MOVE AND MOVE YOU

ARTICLE: JOHN FITZSIMMONS

Above: Kinetic sculptures can change in light, colour and movement throughout the day

Over more than a decade German-born Rudi Jass has carved a niche here creating kinetic (moving) sculptures that ‘make the wind visible’ and described as having the power to soothe and heal. His works are based on nature and make much use of tree, plant and cloud forms.

Many of Rudi’s sculptures are found in hospitals, retirement villages and other settings where they bring restful, calming and contemplative vibes to often stressful or worrying situations.

His website reminds us that the healing benefits of nature, fresh air, gardens and sunshine for the sick are well documented and in one famous study patients recovering from surgery who had a view of nature from their bed recovered, on average, a day faster, needed less pain medication and had fewer post-surgical complications than patients who only saw a brick wall.

It was therefore ‘natural’ for Box Hill Hospital in Victoria, as part of a multi-million dollar revamp, to come up with a creative solution to help high-risk patients to enjoy their stay in hospital. Rudi Jass was commissioned to create 17 large-scale interactive sculptures that can be enjoyed by high-risk patients.

His trees are made from steel. The sculptures are accessible to patients in intensive care, maternity, paediatrics, oncology, cardiology and respiratory care. Each of the updated wards face out to the courtyards so that patients too ill to go outside can still see the sculptures change in light, colour and movement throughout the day.

A bit sick of people copying his static sculptures Rudi shifted his focus to kinetic sculptures, combining his passion for beautiful design with his primary technical engineering skills as a mechanic for famous German automotive marques.

The majority of his kinetic sculptures are wind-driven and react to the forever changing wind and light conditions created in the environment. Supporting towers usually made of Corten steel contrast with the reflective qualities of the stainless steel add to the constant visual dance between nature and the sculpture.

Rudi said clients usually start with his website to see what he has done.

“Then they might tell me basically what they like but they want it a little bit different, as in dimensions perhaps.”

“For the pieces I make, some of the components are interchangeable, I might have a base column that can accommodate different types of rotating frames which, in turn, can accommodate different types of leaf or whatever other designs are on the top.”

Then he checks the site or people send him photos where they want their piece.

“There might be some restrictions regarding size – perhaps some trees or shrubs in the way. I always have a look too whether the place might be too sheltered and whether it’s a waste to have a kinetic wind sculpture or not. Sometimes it might be on the

coast where there are a lot of strong wind gusts and I have a different design for some of the components which can cope with more or less wind. I sort of assess the position of the sculpture. And I see what will work best because they all have different effects and need more or less wind,” he explained.

In the beginning he tried to make the rotating mechanism with bits and pieces bought off the shelf – bronze bushes, ball bearings etc.



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This all worked well but only if it was in a horizontal position. As soon as you put a bit of angle on there was too much friction. To improve the sculptures’ working he basically had to get pieces machined for bearings to fit properly, he said.

“They are stainless steel bearings and they are sealed so they basically need no maintenance. I add a seal to prevent moisture ingress. That took a while to work out. I worked with an engineering company and luckily the owner was always happy to work things out with me – ‘you tell me what you want to achieve and I’ll tell you the best way,’” Rudi added.

“The only way was to machine all these pieces out of solid stainless and then put my bearings, and shafts and seals into it. It’s not a cheap exercise. I try to make things as maintenance free and as long lasting as possible. The only real maintenance is how nice and shiny you want to keep the stainless steel. Then you have to give it a bit of a polish occasionally or you leave it and let it develop a bit of a patina.”

“I’m not a big fan of coating things because over time almost every coating will disintegrate and you have to renew it. So I always let my customers know what they can do OR if they wish they don’t have to do anything.”

For inspiration Rudi sometimes looks at tiny details in nature.

“If you have a good look you discover immaculate shapes, sometimes I pick up on that. But I think you always watch out that you don’t over-do things when you design things. I like to keep shapes still nice and simple. In my opinion that makes them a bit more timeless.”

About 20% of Rudi’s work has been with landscapers and landscape architects.

“At the moment I have two projects in progress – one for a local school and one for a retirement village in Sydney and they were specified by the architects. I just got emails requesting an official quote and then it’s in their system. So sometimes I don’t even know the people who specify my work. I’ve done a lot for retirement homes. There must be a couple of architects who like my work.”

“It also must be the market a bit – it’s something restful – it’s different because you have the movement. I try to make the pieces so they move with very little wind. Sometimes I describe it as ‘making the wind visible’. Sometimes I look outside here and there is virtually no discernible movement in the trees or the scrub but the sculpture has a bit of movement.”

There is a lot of balancing required for Rudi to make the individual bits and pieces. He has even made special tools just for the balancing process.

“Communicating with designers has always been fairly easy. Last year I made 3 6 metre tall pieces for a park in Romsey (VIC) and



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that too just saw an email arrive from the landscape architect who worked on it and he picked basically three of my designs and he just wanted to upscale them. We talked a little bit about the column because I knew with public installations there are always questions about openings and finger entrapment, climbability and so on, so we just modified the designs so that people basically can’t hurt themselves wherever they can reach; then I just upscale the top moving pieces to suit the overall height of the columns. Then we talked about the fastening, anchorage and so on. For public works I usually make a suggestion as to how the thing should be bolted to a footing, and then if it needs engineering their engineer can say it’s OK or we have to upsize the fixings.”

WH&S issues are becoming more complicated but Rudi says he is not a civil engineer but knows how the system works so it’s not a big problem for him.

“At the end I can provided everything needed but it’s about the money and who pays for it. If needed I can organise an engineer to organise exactly what is right but most projects have engineers on site. The engineers know what is required when it comes to safety.”

1 & 2: Columns of different height can elevate moving elements for visual effect, or provide safe clearance against harm
3: Different forms and elements can be interchangeable on various carrier combinations
4 & 5: Sculptural installations at Box Hill Hospital are a ‘natural’ way of mitigating stress on patients in several high stress wards

BOLD CHARACTER AND MICRO-CLIMATES FOR AN INNER CITY VIBE

LDI AWARD WINNER: OUTHOUSE DESIGN
PROJECT: WOOLLOOMOOLOO COURTYARD
PHOTOGRAPHY: KATRINE MARDINI, SENIOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT



CLIENT BRIEF

Our design-savvy clients love the inner-city vibe of Woolloomooloo and had recently purchased a spacious ground floor apartment. With its clean lines, a strong design sense and a semi-brutal concrete feel to it, this apartment has real strength of character. This, coupled with their exceptional taste for high quality finishes and strong design eye, meant the proposed courtyard garden needed to be exceptional in its level of quality finishes, as well as delivering a sense of connection and gravitas.

The clients' brief was clear, they sought a green connection and flow to the outside, still in keeping with the location's setting – vibrant and somewhat edgy – whilst creating a protective coating of green. And they got a great deal on a new spa and so this needed to form part of a private getaway with a supporting shower area; privacy is key so they can't be overlooked by passers-by or neighbouring apartments looking down.

- 1: A sense of purpose and fun**
- 2: A private sunken spa and shower zone**
- 3: A 'green connection', vibrant and edgy**



SITE EVALUATION AND CONSTRAINTS

The major challenge within the design was the location and installation of the client's spa, as this is an extremely tight space and measuring 2400mm in depth. The second and significant impact was the existing site services that could not be moved and were concealed within the existing garden bed.

This garden is on a concrete slab, so every aspect had to be calculated by the project engineer to take into account live loading and drainage.

Access! All materials to be retained had to be moved around on site, all removed materials had to be craned over a 3000mm high wall as well as all incoming planting media.

PLANNING REGULATIONS ETC.

This project required detail design for construction as well as Strata and Council planning applications.





PLANTING SELECTION

This garden has a number of micro climates from full shade to full sun. Planting has been selected to suit each zone and making this a sustainable space. Native violets and Ajuga sit comfortably in deep shade, whilst the Frangipani and Raphiolepis enjoy the afternoon sun and the succulents located with the wall planters lap up full sun, as well as acting at boundary police to unwanted guests!

Deciduous feature tree planting of the Frangipani allows the right balance of natural light in winter and shade in summer, whilst creating a striking up light sculpture in the evening when viewed from the lounge. This is in strong contrast to the soft balance of the tree fern canopy that sits just above the spa, providing a dappled overhead screen from passing neighbours.

DESIGN CONCLUSION

Whist this small garden is reserved, it still has a strong boldness about it and a sense of character, just like our clients. Its once awkward layout is now its strength, offering the ability to entertain the masses and providing a setting for those more private moments.



SCOPE OF WORKS AND DESIGN APPROACH

The design used clean materials and strong lines with a sense of purpose and fun. Our clients like to entertain, whilst still seeking privacy; the planting and change in levels work to the garden's advantage.

The rear doors of the home create a clean connection to the dining and immediate entertainment area, whilst the timber day bed draws you to the elevated area to maximise the location's exposure to the sun, then gently steps you into the private sunken spa area and shower zone.

The bespoke BBQ bench top is both hard wearing and practical and is designed to

visually flow into the organic seating, creating both additional informal seating as well as a reclining lounge. It draws your eye like a visual ribbon from within the apartment and creates a smooth curved connection wrapping the side garden as one. Using the Accoya timber as an insert allows a visual connection of materials.

The design solution was to use the height variations that the services created as a way of achieving a sense of movement as well as level changes that don't just create a journey, but their own areas of privacy. The garden doesn't unveil itself all at once, so that sense of drawing the eye can be achieved.

- 1: A tree fern canopy provides privacy screening**
- 2: Steps to sunken areas**
- 3: A raised day bed surrounded by Ajuga and native violets**
- 4: A visual flow to informal seating**
- 5: Private shower zone amid tree ferns**
- 6: A bespoke BBQ flows to a reclining lounge**

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER PROFILE

ARTICLE: RUTH CZERMAK, BOTANICAL TRADITIONS



Ruth Czermak

Q: What education or life experiences brought you to Landscape Design?

A: My parents moved to Australia where they set up a farm growing organic berries, goats, and chickens. Then they moved to the Dandenong Ranges – to a property complete with stone walls, mature Rhododendrons and its own fern gully.

I worked at a supermarket from the age of 14 and was put in charge of making sure the plants didn't die. I enjoyed that and decided to get some experience at retail nurseries. I enjoyed it but, as I was quite shy, I was probably not a great salesperson. But people would ask me basic questions and I was able to answer them and I didn't feel at all shy talking about plants!

After Year 12 finished I went for an interview to do Landscape Architecture at RMIT. My memory of it was a

horrible experience with hundreds of other people, where we were divided into groups and had to pitch our design ideas. Of course I focused on plants, while everyone else spoke about paving and built structures. But shortly after I received an offer to study a Bachelor of Science at Burnley (Melbourne University) and accepted it straight away. I must say I still look back at that time as one of the most enjoyable in my life. The lecturers were engaging and knowledgeable and, with about 35 contact hours, the course was pretty full on. But I loved it. It was fantastic being surrounded by all these people with the same interests I had – plants, design

Q: What landscape education pathway/s did you travel, and were there any challenges in the system?

A: None of my secondary schools had any horticultural

subjects. But I did have my experience growing up on a farm and helping my parents garden and renovate, coupled with experiences at retail nurseries, and the supermarket job which all helped me at university and still do even today.

The three year Bachelor of Science (Horticulture), which was a very hands-on course, coupled with a requirement to do a lot of work experience to graduate, gave me a fantastic base level of knowledge and a range of practical skills I was able to utilise straight away. This I did and began, somewhat naively, my own gardening and design business. It was hard work. I don't think I made much money, but enough and overall I loved it. With my dream of running a retail nursery I opened one in Brunswick. But the big drought had just started and got worse, and it was a long way away from where I lived. After 12 months the work became limited and financially things looked bleak. I decided that if I wanted to get some formal training in landscape design then it was now or never. So I went back to university and enrolled in Masters of Landscape Architecture.

It was not the course I thought it would be. Coming from a hands-on science course where you got a good spread of theory and practical skills, I was not prepared for the very 'concept' style of studios and very limited technical subjects. I graduated the course feeling my skillset hadn't really changed that much.

The drought persisted and I felt disillusioned. I was teaching in Landscape Architecture and still had the business. I got a contract going into schools, implementing raingardens and running planting days. It was a lot of fun, but I was seeing these dusty, concrete places that children are meant to learn in and going to parts of Melbourne that I had never been to before. It was a real eye opening experience.

Q: How do you find and/or attract new clients?

A: I am fortunate that a lot of my past clients are also my current clients as we do multiple projects together. The big challenge I think in today's situation is getting new clients. How do you demonstrate your value and worth to a person before they have been your client? A lot of my repeat clients are repeat clients because I solve their problems – they might be after reliability, design outcome, or someone who they know will listen to their ideas, they might have a project that utilises my combined skillset. Like many business owners I probably don't pay enough attention to finding these new clients and thinking about how to engage with the right client for my business. Most of my clients come to me after having a poor experience, I'm glad they persisted and didn't give up.

Q: What differences do you find between private and commercial clients?

A: Most of my commercial clients want someone they feel can do the project with key input at particular times. They have set goals regarding what they want the brief to achieve, timelines and budgets and they want to be kept up to date with timelines. They are happy to discuss problems and work through solutions together should they arrive. They understand limitations. The repeat clients understand the value that a Landscape Architect can bring to a project if engaged early in the design process, but they also understand their responsibilities as a client

in terms of informing you and directing you and approving the design at key stages. Private residential clients are a bit different. I probably decline far more residential clients as I don't think I would be the best match for them. The main reason for this is I am simply too tired at the end of the day to do after hours consultations and I want to work in my own garden on the weekends. I do have repeat residential clients, but these projects run in the same manner as my commercial projects.

Q: What is the hardest client request to deal with?

A: The most difficult clients I think are the ones who don't really have faith in you as a designer, or those who really know what they want but don't have a matching budget available. The biggest warning sign I have learnt to watch out for is a client saying 'my friend, who is a gardener/landscape designer/architect had a look at the drawings and thinks you should...'. It is a big red flag and I quickly clarify with them why they asked for the feedback, did they feel I hadn't paid enough attention to their Brief....?

Q: Is there a trend or pattern in client requests today?

A: Certainly in our commercial work, there is a trend towards wanting well-presented landscapes and some understanding that, to get this, you need good design as well as good maintenance. Our residential clients are after liveable, usable spaces, previously a lot of our residential clients didn't spend a lot of time in their gardens.

Q: Is there a priority, key or starting point in your design solutions?

A: The key starting point actually starts when I am doing the Fee Proposal. I am trying to understand as much about the project and the client as possible. If you don't understand what the client wants to achieve and you really haven't thought of the project's specific opportunities or constraints, I don't understand how you can do a good design. To me the primary consideration to determine if something is a good design is to ask yourself if you have met or exceeded the client's expectations, and done so in a sustainable, aesthetic manner. Have you completed work that you would be proud to show your most admired designer?

Q: Where/how do you get design inspiration?

A: Design is around you all the time. Some of it might be unintentional, some of it might relate to nature. I just keep my eyes open as much as possible; I love visiting gardens and looking at other people's works and projects. Landscape design has been around for many thousands of years – each culture and each time period holds something of interest to me. However, as a business owner and a Landscape Designer only a small portion of my day is spent doing design and overall in a project there is only probably 10% of the time spent on doing 'design'.

Q: What do you think clients consider to be Landscape Design 'value for money' (and is 'value' an issue at all?)

A: If clients feel you have delivered the landscape they want or exceeded their expectations I think they feel they have got their money's worth. I think most of our clients feel that we do this, but also that we give them a valuable insight into ways to achieve things in a cost-effective manner.



Seasonal display Green Square, Sydney. Photo Celina Aspinall



Wicking garden beds, Marian College, Sunshine West (VIC). Photo Ruth Czermak

Q: If you could influence clients generally – what would you change?

A: In both the residential and commercial fields the expectation of what a Landscape Designer can do or should be doing has increased, almost to the point of being expected to do more than an Architect or an Engineer. Clients expect designers to understand plants, soils, the ecosystem, sustainability, construction, stormwater, drainage, electrical, planning overlays, Council regulations, the Building standards, State Government regulations, electrical, gas regulations, maintenance, pest control, pruning techniques etc. Although there are some very good designers who do understand all of these areas, there are also many that do not. The training of Landscape Designers has not kept up with the expectation of the client or the employer. I would advise clients to take time and consider their choice of Landscape Designer not just on cost or hourly rate, but demonstrated experience and how well they communicate with you. An experienced person may, and should have, a higher hourly rate. You are paying for the experience which allows them to generally do something faster, more thoroughly and to a higher standard. If the client doesn't like the projects in the designer's portfolio, they will probably not be happy with the outcome.

The other thing I stress is that without an actual client Brief there is no way that any designer can set a realistic fee or that the client can compare fees. When a client decides to engage a Landscape Designer they need to ensure they have a Brief. The Brief should outline the main aims of the project, the construction budget and the expected/available design timeframe and construction period expectation. As a client you can't go and speak to an Accountant, Doctor, Lawyer, Architect or Engineer and say 'I'm not going to tell you my problem because I want to hear what you think it is and for you to give me your ideas on how to solve it and what it might cost', which seems a very common type of conversation.

Q: How do you see the current state/health of the Landscape Design sector?

A: Opportunities in the Landscape Design sector are there. However, unless the training improves or there is the introduction of traineeships then the industry is going to

run out of skilled people. There also needs to be far greater flexibility provided in the training – I'm not talking about more online options, I am just talking about better timetabling. I think the comment can easily be applied to the entire sector of Landscape Design, Landscaping and Horticulture.

It's a great disappointment that there are very limited opportunities in schools at all levels for people to be involved in gardening, I am forever perplexed that there are Landscape Architects with Masters level Degrees, who have studied one plant ID subject, no soils, no pest control/maintenance, no CAD and no water-related subjects. It's very common to come across a graduate who has never planted a plant!

Q: Anything else or comment you wish to make?

A: People often assume and make all sorts of ridiculous comments about running a Landscape Design business. Most of it is along the lines of 'wow, it must be so great getting to design all day and playing with plants', which I feel really downplays the range and level of skills you need to hold, as well as the amount of persistence required. The reality for myself is that it wasn't easy, I made many mistakes and worked very hard and consistently to gain knowledge and skills and also to ensure I had a business that was viable and sustainable. I still ensure that I grow my knowledge and skills pretty much every week. I do get to design and I think I do that well, but that is certainly not what been a Landscape Architect or a business owner is all about.

The other thing that I think has to be discussed is the perceptions of females within the industry and how hard it is as a female. While over the last 25 years the improvement has been phenomenal, I can still walk onto a site, with my experience and grey hair and with a male student, and people will speak to them instead of myself. The expectation is still that any female walking onto a construction site has to prove their worth and knowledge, while it is still assumed that a male just has the skills and knowledge required for the job. Working part time within the industry is also pretty difficult, it greatly restricts the types of projects that you can participate in especially within the commercial field where design timelines are very tight.

DESIGNERS & LANDSCAPERS:

WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

ARTICLE: VANESSA WALSH, LDI DIRECTOR & LANDSCAPE DESIGNER, WE DREAM OF GARDENS

LDI is grateful to have been part of The Landscape Association's (TLA) successful inaugural Landscape Expo held at Ryde TAFE, Sydney, recently. A panel of LDI and TLA members was formed to discuss issues and tips regarding how designers and contractors can work better together.

Adam Robinson, LDI's Ambassador and Principal of Adam Robinson Design, hosted the discussion by asking pertinent questions of the panel. The panel included LDI Members Karen Staunton-Ross (Outside Living) and Steve Warner (Outhouse Design) and TLA Members Shannon Decker (Now & Zen Landscapes) and Luke Roodenburg (Sand & Stone Landscapes). Topics included:

- What is the designer looking for in a contractor? And vice versa? Answers included finding people who are trustworthy, transparent, an Association member, referrals via fellow designers/contractors, and looking on social media.
- The designers like to ensure the landscape contractors have horticulture training, otherwise they will employ a separate team to install the gardens and plants.

Contractors like specifications regarding garden installation e.g soil amelioration.

- What makes/contributes to a good relationship between designer and landscapers? Communication is the key, pick up the phone if you have any questions and designers should make regular site visits as part of their service. Provide clear documentation, including construction drawings if required, specifications, finishes etc.
- When do contractors typically get involved in a project? Typically a designer works closely with the client to determine the brief and develop a set of plans. Landscape construction contractors usually get involved once the design is complete. However it is important for the designer to establish the budget early and, if required, consult the landscape contractor to ensure the design falls within budget.

This is just a sample of what was discussed. The topic is obviously of interest as the event was one of the most popular events on the speaker's program of the day, so LDI and TLA are working together to provide more events on the topic in the near future.



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SERIOUSLY ROSES

Mention the word 'rose' to most landscape architects, designers or contractors and you'll likely get the same response – "yes, they flower, but they are a lot of work". These same words were said by the Paris City Council in the late 1970s intent on removing roses from their streetscapes due to high maintenance costs. French rose breeder Meilland International approached the council asking what they needed in an amenity rose. The answer was simple, 'long flowering, no spray and mechanical prune'.

Aligning their breeding program to fit these criteria, the 'Meiland®' series of groundcover and shrub roses were produced and immediately embraced by the City of Paris and other municipalities across the globe including in Australia. Adelaide's CBD and surrounding suburbs are testament to how selective roses can enhance a landscape.

The past 50 years has seen a continued refinement in rose breeding focused on both home gardens and larger spaces. High disease resistance, in line with community expectations of reduced or nil spraying, has seen an extraordinary number of new varieties released that can cope with fungal pressures. The blackspot-riddled rose is fast disappearing.



Rose Popcorn Drift® provides colour, coverage and sightlines

Consistent colour over many months is another feature of the modern rose. Gone are those spring/autumn flushes, replaced with an even covering of blooms throughout the growing season, some up to 9 months and beyond.

Pruning maybe a dirty world for some and a dark art for others, however if you can use a hedge trimmer, chainsaw or even mower, you've got these modern roses covered. Shear two thirds of the top growth off and job done.

Also, as more roses are being produced from cuttings, the risk of suckers from traditionally grafted rootstocks sprouting and growing into an ugly thicket will be a thing of the past.

From dedicated breeding programs, a number superior rose varieties and ranges have stood out as being immensely suited for landscape use.

ZEPETI

This is a once in a generation plant. Currently being successfully grown from The Whitsundays to Hobart to Perth, Zepeti® is a pocket rocket that's astounding everyone.

What sets Zepeti apart is its unique form, stunning health, incredible flowering capacity, low maintenance and amazing versatility.

This exciting and eye-catching plant is the missing link between the rose and hedging categories. Growing to only 40cm high and 30cm wide, Zepeti's compact upright habit is more Buxus than rose. Add to that a thicket of small, dark glossy foliage from the ground up and you have the perfect canvas to add a splash of spectacular colour.

Masses of attractive fire engine red blooms are continuously produced over each plant for 9 to 12 months depending on the climate – the more sub-tropical the longer the flowering and more evergreen it becomes. Forget the traditional rose tag, Zepeti thrives in a broad range of climatic conditions be it humid, heat or frost thanks to its inherent vigour and disease resistance. Few roses can boast Zepeti's ability to perform in practically every climate zone in Australia.

Stunning as a border or low hedge, the compact upright growth ensures paths remain free for traffic while the volume of flowers creates immense interest and energy, a far cry from the much used English box.

Balconies, decks and patios are perfect for a potted Zepeti helping add a beacon of colour and beauty. You can also bring that pot indoors for up to a fortnight and enjoy the blooms.

Group plantings, whether in a park entrance, median strip or roundabout, really highlight the Zepeti benefits of super tough, long term colour without the maintenance, plus it offers a great alternative to planting annuals twice yearly. Zepeti is a wonderful problem solver and attractive addition to any amenity landscape. (www.zepeti.com.au)

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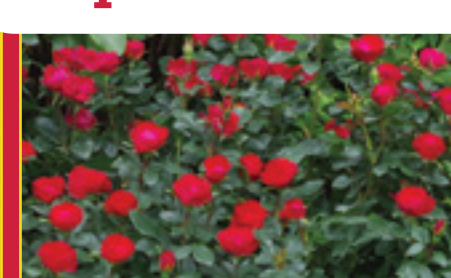
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- ✓ LOW & COMPACT



zepeti.com.au



DRIFT

Another high disease resistant and low maintenance plant, there's much to get excited about the Drift® range.

Aptly named, low mounding Drift create 'drifts' across the landscape. With dimensions of 50cm x 60cm, these groundcovers offer many and varied planting applications. Sight line is an important consideration, especially on roundabouts and streetscapes, Drift provide brilliant long-term colour and coverage without obscuring views.

Already making a splash across different climates, the super hardy Drift range continue to impress. Available in seven colours, more are hues and flower types are set for release over the few years.

KNOCK OUT

Flower-powered Knock Out® family are a range of super performing shrub roses that has grown from the original single red Knock Out, into a kaleidoscope of colours and flower forms to match any landscape décor.

Currently accounting for one third of the entire rose sales in the USA, Knock Out continues to fill home gardens and landscapes from Florida to California. An ability to cope with heat, cold and humidity has seen the same incredible climatically divergent results repeated across Australia.

Setting a new standard in disease resistance and

flower capacity for shrub roses, you can also add versatility. Knock Out make the perfect 'living fence' to 1.2 metres; row-out and let grow for a nine-month blooming beauty and once-a-year trim. Stunning massed, they also work equally well in mixed beds, including natives, to add a splash of much needed long-term colour.

MEIDILAND

The original designer landscape rose range, Meidiland® still finds a worthy space where larger spreading low maintenance ground covers are preferred. Planting distances on one metre make these a great value, high colour landscape option.

Next time you are looking to add pazazz to your landscape consider the new generation of roses. Long flowering and little maintenance equal a stunning result. Roses are back! Flowers are undoubtedly that special attribute which elevates both home gardens and amenity spaces.

Colour bursts from dedicated annual beds or nectar rich Australian natives, while spectacular, tend to be short lived. One plant type that delivers long term colour, which has fallen out of favour with many landscapers over recent years is making a big comeback thanks to decades of selective breeding and selection – prepare to welcome back roses big time!



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1. Roses White Meidiland and Red Meidiland are ideal where larger spreading low maintenance groundcovers are preferred
2. Rose Zepeti® is an easy care landscape stunner
3. Rose Sunny Knock Out®

PLANTS TO THE RESCUE BY REMEDIATING CONTAMINATED SOIL

ARTICLE: UTS, ABC

Two hours north of Sydney is Newcastle, a city with a rich industrial history. On a former steelworks site, a garden has been quietly growing solutions to fix the contaminated soil left behind when industrial sites close down.

The Delprat Garden has been growing for more than three years and is a collaboration between the University of Newcastle, UTS Phytolab and Landcom (a NSW Government-owned land and property development organisation).

There is a vegetable patch, a wildflower meadow, and groves of ornamental trees. The team involved are researching and trialling many common plant species often found in home gardens for their phytoremediation capabilities. Phytoremediation is the process of using plants to remove heavy metals and pollutants from soils.

Overseeing the pioneering project is Landscape Architect & Professor SueAnne Ware.

"Generally, in Australia how we deal with toxic sites is we scrape them and move the soil and make it someone else's problem. Or we put a cap over the top – that's not a long-term solution. Phytoremediation, by taking out the contaminants, basically takes them out permanently."

Landscape Architect Chris Johnstone is managing the trials.

"This site really suffered from wind-blown contamination from the steelworks. Anecdotally, apparently it was under a cloud for 30 or 40 years." When they first tested the soil, it was full of chromium, lead, zinc and more."

The plants are grown straight into the existing soil, with no fertilisers added, nor are pesticides or herbicides used, in order to get a clear understanding of how plants respond to the soil contaminants. Project findings are all shared online; the project really wants to engage as many people as possible. It's such a viable, low-tech, low-cost technique for remediating sites.

Environmental Scientist Dr Megan Murray has been conducting much of the testing on the plants, with exciting results.

"Sunflowers are a wonder plant at absorbing heavy metals." They draw up lots of lead, manganese and zinc but keep it locked in the rootzone; this means the above-ground parts, like pollen that bees harvest or edible seeds, are safe to consume.

"Being fast growers you can actually see quite a big change in soil pollution levels, plus you have the confidence of knowing that you're not going to be increasing any risks for biodiversity that's engaging with your garden."

When it comes to some vegetable species like mustards and tomatoes, they may be able to take the bad stuff out of the soil without storing it in plant parts you want to eat. However, this is not the case for all species, such as beans, which may be harmful to eat when grown on contaminated soil. And at the extreme end, watermelons, pumpkins and carrots have been shown to absorb huge amounts of pollutants effectively. This makes them inedible, however they could help clean up soils quickly and at a low cost.

NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH

Lots of Australian natives are also in the trial, from eucalypts to grasses and climbers. There is little data yet to understand their phytoremediation abilities and tolerance of heavy metals, however, so far kangaroo grass is at least thriving on the site.

Another area of study is what to do with waste plant materials generated by the site. Currently, they are contained away from the soil in compost bins to reduce the mass of waste, but there is still some contaminated waste left behind. The team say this is an exciting next area of research and hopes more scientists along with local and state governments can get on board with finding a solution.

While this project is still in the early stages, there is a lot of promising data already that could lead to big changes in how we deal with polluted land. And at the centre of this ground-breaking research is of course resilient, amazing plants providing practical solutions.

FEATURED PLANTS:

- Moreton Bay Fig, *Ficus macrophylla*
- Sweet Alyssum, *Lobularia maritima*
- Borage: *Borago officinalis**
- Sunflower: *Helianthus cv.*
- Kangaroo grass: *Themeda triandra*
- Crepe myrtle: *Lagerstroemia cv.*
- Mustard: *Brassica juncea cv.*
- Bean: *Phaseolus vulgaris cv.*
- Tomato: *Solanum lycopersicum cv.*

* Check before planting, this may be an environmental weed in your area

DECADE-LONG RESEARCH IDENTIFIES SUITABLE PLANTS FOR WET CONDITIONS

ARTICLE: TODD LAYT
PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED BY OZBREED

Research has evaluated the survivability of different landscape plants in various 'wet feet' conditions.

Waterlogging has become a significant horticultural topic, particularly as our industry observed much of Australia enduring three years of exceptionally wet conditions, including record floods. In a recent decade-long Australian study, researchers examined the impact of urbanisation and altered land use on ecosystems, particularly related to weather extremes, plant waterlogging, and increased flooding.

The study aimed to identify plant species that can thrive in extreme wet conditions, providing landscape architects with opportunities to create more resilient landscapes in Australian developments.

These selected plant species act as buffers against wet conditions, enhancing the usability of the landscape.

Additionally, the study highlighted the success of certain drought-tolerant native plants during flooding events. It also identified Lomandra and other species suitable for heavy wet soils, offering specific plant recommendations for Australian bio-retention swales and rain gardens.

Three testing procedures showcased extreme waterlogging over a 10-year period. Area 1 evaluated the plants' ability to withstand wet feet conditions, while Area 2 examined their effectiveness in bio-retention swales. Area 3 observed plant adaptability on floodplains.

Analysing data from six recent floods, the study employed statistical tools such as two-way ANOVA and

Pearson correlation coefficients to determine some factors influencing plant survival.

In testing Area 1, which had heavy clay type soil and extreme wet feet conditions, certain plant species showed impressive survival rates. Evergreen Baby Lomandra and Shara Lomandra had a 100% survival rate. However, commercial types of Lomandra confertifolia and L.longifolia performed poorly. Liriope species thrived in the wet parts of Area 1.

A root rot treatment trial revealed that treating L.longifolia 'Tanika' with Metcalf TdAVC1 & TdAVA2 and RhizoVital 42 from Organic Crop Protectants (OCP) significantly improved survival rates.

In the bio-retention swale testing Area 2, Liriope and Rhapsiolepis 'Cosmic White', along with native plants like Callistemons 'Slim', 'Better John', and 'Green John' thrived for 10 years. Wet feet loving 'Shara', 'Evergreen Baby', and 'Tropic Cascade' Lomandras also thrived. However, many plants, including Dianella and Tristaniopsis, did not survive the trial.

In testing Area 3, the study examined plant survivability on floodplains. Overall, the study emphasised the importance of selecting resilient plant varieties for floodplain landscapes.

The number of floods experienced correlated with plant survival, and mature plants had a higher chance of survival compared to young plants. Lomandra, Liriope, Dianella, Nandina, ornamental grasses, Agapanthus, turf grasses, and Callistemon viminalis generally survived well. Hibertia scandens, Murraya, Acacia and many other varieties showed varying results.

The study underscored the significance of breeding wet-feet-loving plants and testing plants to survive extreme wet conditions, highlighting the importance of variety over species when selecting plants. For example, both Grey Box and Mundi Westringia thrived in the wet, while other Westringia varieties did not.

These findings offer crucial guidance for landscape planners working in urban environments with wet conditions. They also provide nurseries with knowledge to recommend suitable plants for wet conditions.

For the full paper, visit www.ozbreed.com.au and search "waterlogging".



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1. Testing new Lomandra breeding for extreme waterlogging
2. Bio-retention swale testing, Area 2, after three years
3. Almost every day for a decade, the bio-retention swale received water runoff from nursery irrigation or rain



3

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WHAT INSURANCE DO I NEED FOR MY LANDSCAPING BUSINESS?

ARTICLE: MITCH O'CONNELL, MIDLAND INSURANCE BROKERS

All landscapers should carry public liability insurance. Similarly, landscape designers should carry professional indemnity insurance. What's the difference?

Public Liability insurance protects you and your business in the event a customer, supplier or member of the public is injured or sustains property damage as a result of your negligent activities, whereas Professional Indemnity insurance covers your legal costs and/or damages payable if something goes wrong with a landscaping project which leads to financial loss to your client.

All it takes for a Public Liability claim to be made is a trip hazard created by your work activities, or accidentally causing damage to your client's property. You're typically covered for:

- legal costs incurred for settlement of a claim
- cover for others acting on your behalf when the incident occurred
- loss or damage of goods
- loss of or damage to someone else's property
- first aid expenses
- injury to others while on the premises



Consider all situations and tasks when considering insurance options

Examples of Professional Indemnity situations include negligence leading to a loss of plants, or failing to pass on instructions that lead to a mistake during construction. It's wise to take up professional indemnity insurance if you provide services or advice in a professional capacity.

MORE TO CONSIDER

There are also additional insurance considerations. For domestic projects larger than \$16,000, you should also hold Domestic Building Insurance, which guarantees the structural components of the project for up to six years. It's like warranty insurance when building a house. Unregistered landscapers cannot take up domestic building insurance.

Contract Works insurance covers damage to the work you are doing while under construction from events such as flood, storm, theft of materials and fire. Although this type of cover is often insured by the builder on the project, there may be circumstances where this type of cover falls to you. To determine if this is required, we suggest you check your contract details.

Tools and equipment can be covered under a standard business insurance pack or a specific Tools Of Trade policy. Both can cover the replacement costs of your tools if they are stolen or damaged, however not all policies provide complete replacement due to depreciation. A broker will be able to advise on the most suitable option for you.

Liability insurance usually also covers legal expenses in the event of a claim. It is an integral component of a Public Liability policy. You will be covered for costs awarded to

the claimant if they bring a court case against you as a result, as well as cover for your defence costs, including legal expenses incurred in assessing or defending a claim.

Sub-contractors are not covered by your policy. If you work as a sub-contractor – even if you only work for one employer or company – you're considered to be running your own small business and are therefore responsible for your own actions.

UPDATE YOUR BROKER

Small changes in your business can make a big difference to your insurance. So it's important to update your broker or insurer whenever there's a significant change to your business. Things like a change of address, an increase in turnover, a company re-brand, or an increase in your level of cover, could all have ramifications for your existing insurance cover.

To find out what type of cover is best for you and your business, contact your broker.



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VEHICLE PURCHASE FINANCE: YOU HAVE OPTIONS

ARTICLE: JOHN FITZSIMMONS

Unless you have access to liquid funds or a very successful business, or relatively modest needs, procuring a vehicle for your business will probably involve borrowing money. Once upon a time to buy a vehicle you first accumulated money and then paid upfront. Later it was assumed you would use what was called Hire-Purchase. Then Leasing became more popular. Today there is a wide range of optional finance sources to suit different needs and situations. There is also greater competition between lenders. But choose carefully.

Like most big decisions you must determine what approach to vehicle purchase or finance suits your needs – now and looking forward. Identifying suitable vehicles is the first step (see separate article in this issue of LO). Unless you have a larger business with a fleet of vehicles these are not decisions made very often. And significant sums of money are involved for a small to medium business enterprise, especially sole traders. So do your homework well and pursue purchases in an informed way. The terms and jargon can be confusing. Your trusted accountant is a great asset here.

Everyone will have their own experiences and perspectives, everyone has a mate who can help and there will be many offers “too good to refuse”. My own contribution (Example 1) comes courtesy of an old school bank manager who advised “never borrow short to pay long” (in reference to using long term loan funds to buy a vehicle with a much shorter expected service life). Make sure you’re aware of ALL terms, conditions, charges and costs. Example 2: A new car finance deal that promised ‘guaranteed buy-back or trade-in prices’ was conditional upon maximum kilometres travelled each year – a number way below my driving needs in those times.

Don’t lose sight of any obligations along the way (e.g. who actually owns the vehicle under finance) and any obligations and costs at the end of the finance period (e.g. balloon payments, exit fees etc). Remember also that a vehicle is almost always a depreciating asset – losing value – and vehicle finance can be regarded as one of the less desirable forms of debt to carry. Thinking you can avoid this by buying a ‘classic’ or a high prestige marque is not really the way the market works.

Broadly, finance for vehicles can be sourced from:

- Financial institutions (e.g. banks, credit unions, building societies)

- Peer-to-peer (P2P) entities
- Vehicle dealers
- Lease/novated lease
- Rent-to-own products

Financing a vehicle through a traditional lender or financial institution usually means considering a significant range of offers – both sources and products, in this category alone. Then properly evaluate the options that might work for you, making sure you can budget for all fees, charges, scheduled payments, and payments should you transgress the terms or choose to exit the agreement early. Your credit rating – at the start and at the end of a contract – could also be associated.

Some of the advantages of using financial institutions are they are more likely to be regulated, familiar, widely reviewed and compared, and locally accessible; you might also already have a relationship with one or more. You might also have access to loan pre-approval to go ‘shopping’ with a known budget.

NEW AND USED VEHICLES

Vehicle finance can be available to purchase new or near-new vehicles from registered dealers, auctions and private sellers. However finance for used vehicles might be limited to Personal Loans with no security against the purchased vehicle. Finance secured against new or near-new vehicles offers the lender some protection against the risk of borrowers defaulting on repayments; this reduced risk can result in cheaper interest rates and therefore a cheaper finance deal. Unsecured Personal Loans to buy vehicles sees lenders rely more heavily on credit ratings and assessments of your ability to meet repayments. This can make Personal Loans more difficult to apply for.

FIXED AND VARIABLE INTEREST

With a fixed rate loans the interest rate on the loan stays constant through the contract. Repayments stay the same, budgeting can be easier although there could be penalties for changing payment schedules or exiting the agreement early.

Variable interest rate loans can see repayments fluctuate in tune with changing interest rates – great if interest rates go down but your budget could be blown if interest rates go up.

Ethical or ‘green’ loans may be available to purchase hybrid vehicles or EVs. Such finance may come with lower – more competitive – interest rates.

A relatively new concept in Australia, Peer-to-peer or P2P lending refers to direct loans offered from lenders to borrowers through secure online platforms. It is a commercial arrangement offered by non-banking organisations (P2P platforms) to borrowers allowing them to access spare cash that investors are willing to lend. Like bank finance, interest and fees can be charged; these costs vary between providers so, again, shop around and become fully informed.

CAR DEALERSHIP FINANCE

Many vehicle dealerships offer on-site financing for their cars through factory-related or other lenders. Their motivation is clear – they want to sell you a vehicle so they make it convenient, readily available, and often fast. But it can be difficult – especially given the apparent ease and convenience, to know if you’re really getting the best deal available. For example, an appealing interest rate and building in a lump sum ‘balloon payment’ at the end of the loan term could deliver attractively lower monthly repayments, but the overall total cost of the loan could still end up being higher than an arrangement involving higher regular repayments with no ‘balloon’ at the end.

SALARY SACRIFICE – NOVATED LEASE

‘Salary sacrificing’ a vehicle, also called a novated lease, has been widely touted and popular in recent times, sometimes offered as part of an overall salary package. This option may help you finance the cost of a vehicle, and possibly some running expenses too, while it could also reduce your taxable income and therefore also reduce the amount of (personal) tax you are have pay. It is a three-way agreement between you, your employer and a finance company. Under this agreement your employer agrees to make lease repayments for a car to a finance company using your pre-tax salary; the pre-tax deductions may also cover operational costs, such as maintenance, fuel and insurance. Under a ‘non-maintained’ version of this agreement you must pay the operational costs out of your own pocket. At the end of the novated lease period, your options may include:

- keeping the car and paying the residual value (as a balloon payment)
- extend the current lease, or
- sell the leased vehicle and use the funds from the sale to pay the residual value

Note that you do not own the vehicle, and that you may have to pay the residual value at the end. You might also be liable for the vehicle payments if you lose or change your job – your new employer may, or may not, agree to taking on your arrangement which not all employers offer. Novated leases can also often come with higher administration fees included in the repayments, plus interest rates on a novated lease could be higher than those applied in other forms of finance.

On the plus side, all vehicle expenses are combined into a single periodical deduction from your pre-tax salary which is managed by your employer and the finance

company. You don’t have to fund a large upfront payment for the vehicle or juggle multiple intermittent car bills – budgeting could be easier. There may even be the option of more easily upgrading your vehicle at the end of the lease for a newer or different model.

RENT-TO-OWN

With rent-to-own you agree to rent for a set period of time while making regular repayments as part of a commitment to buy it. Repayments contribute towards rental costs as well as the ultimate purchase of the vehicle (usually by paying a lump sum at the end of the agreement).

Rent-to-own can be fast and easy but there have been official warnings about some agreements that end up costing the renter/buyer much more than they expected. This can be a result of extra fees and charges, and/or insurances or warranties that might not actually be needed under Australian consumer laws. The devil is in the detail and the discipline.

MORTGAGE RE-DRAW

Homeowners might have funds for vehicle purchase through a mortgage re-draw facility or a separate line of credit. This can be cheaper due to lower interest rates and simplifies affairs in terms of not having a separate loan. However, refer to the “don’t borrow short to pay long” comment at this article’s beginning – this approach can compound interest commitments and extend the mortgage repayment period if repayments are not adjusted and managed accordingly.

Make sure you shop around and explore all car financing options available to you. It’s important to get qualified professional advice to understand the benefits, risks and fees involved to determine what’s the right fit for your needs.

Disclaimer: This information is general in nature and is not advice that has taken into account your objectives, financial situation, or needs. It is not personal advice.



Check you have the best insurance option before signing

BUSINESS VEHICLE SELECTION

ARTICLE: JOHN FITZSIMMONS



In our highly competitive market amid challenging times, identifying suitable vehicles for your business tasks can be daunting – even confusing at times. Unlike vehicles that are primarily passenger vehicles, commercial vehicles can represent a whole new challenge to the small business buyer.

As a landscape designer your first need could be a passenger vehicle to simply visit current and prospective clients, suppliers and sub-contractors or service providers. This can be a very personal choice as to size, style and personal comfort and amenity. It is often, after all, your second office and you are likely to spend a fair bit of time in this place.

Nevertheless, there are certain functionalities and aspects of ownership that need to be considered. As most people work through their smartphone today connectivity with the vehicle – especially for navigation and voice

communication – is almost essential. But make sure the system is easy to use and reliable; some new vehicles “boast” of connectivity but it may not be easily found or implemented in tortuous menus on a touchscreen. I have had a car that easily absorbed all my phone’s contacts into a Bluetooth system in one go, and another car that expected me to put all contacts into its system one by one! The latter was not easy, not good, and not done (even if the car was excellent in other areas).

Colour is a debatable issue. In Australia’s climate there are some people who buy nothing but (heat reflective) white while others insist on ‘classy’ black, and silver-grey metallic predominates on our roads. Other less common colours can represent your personality or complement corporate branding which may, or may not, affect purchase price and/or availability. One thing is sure, extreme or unusual colours, even when they might look

good on that make and model, will impact resale or trade-in value and not always in a good way. This is related directly to demand – it takes longer to find another buyer who may love the colour combination the way you once did when you bought it.

It then comes down to your preferences and priorities be it comfort, appearance, purchase price, running costs (fuel and service/maintenance), brand prestige, on-road performance in your operating environments, interior design fit and finish, the availability of parts and support, and insurance premiums.

The normal advice applies – do your homework. Read or listen to reviews and comparisons by experienced and credentialed people, talk to owners (or better still ex-owners), talk to your trusted mechanic. Most definitely sit in it, ride in it and drive it, even if you subsequently purchase online or otherwise remotely (*do beware of scams operating on these channels!).

One useful published review comparison concludes that small vehicle A is roomier, better on the open road and a far more engaging drive than vehicle B. However the latter has a more advanced and superior ‘infotainment’ system. Are you a larger person who likes the drive, or are you a more tech-driven person who just regards the car as transport? There might be a generational split amongst buyers there.

Does the vehicle’s manufacturing origin bother you? It may carry a familiar Euro-US-Asian brand badge but where was the factory that produced your model of interest? It may, or may not, be a concern. The value equation price-wise might mean more than the ‘brand’.

Get a trusted independent pre-purchase inspection of used examples AND factor-in the cost/s of remediation in any areas flagged as of concerns. In most states a registered vehicle trader offers clear title of ownership and often a statutory warranty on used vehicles. This may not be the case with private sellers and auction houses. ‘Statutory write-offs’ (e.g. severely hail or collision damaged) should be declared by the seller and are a category best avoided here.

TODAY’S FUEL CHOICES

‘Ethical purchasing’ today also extends to vehicles (see manufacturing origins above) and especially fuels. Diesel has many operational advantages but also some environmental downsides. Internationally some localities are limiting or even excluding diesel-powered vehicles from entering defined areas. So the future of diesel-powered vehicles could be restricted in some ways; it’s a consideration.

Carbon-based fuels like petrol are, in



Australia, slowly being displaced by electric vehicles (EVs). Oddly though, our enthusiasm for 4WD ‘utes’ (see below) is sustaining our emissions at a higher level even as EV sales climb steadily. As EVs head for 2% of vehicles on the road the challenge is to build the required re-charging infrastructure across the country. In Victoria there are still less than 150 charging points across the state and, anecdotally, arriving at a functional charging point is not guaranteed. So, ‘range anxiety’ – even as it is being reduced through improving battery, control and drive technologies – remains a factor for those commercial high mileage EV users transiting our large regional areas. If that is your domain and usage pattern then, for the moment, a fuel-less stranded (petrol or diesel) vehicle can recommence its journey with a couple of litres of portable liquid fuel whereas a bucket full of ‘volts’ remains on the wishlist.

Of course an appropriate hybrid vehicle, that uses a combination of conventional and electronic power, offers a practical and ‘ethical’ alternative to a pure EV. Hybrid and electric vans, trucks and utes are starting to arrive here and sales will probably follow the rising trend of passenger cars where there is a commercial advantage or a strong ethics driver. And other alternatives, e.g. hydrogen, are on the horizon but the arrival timing remains a bit vague.

One cautionary note about EVs concerns their weight. Batteries are heavy and many of these vehicles are significantly heavier than their traditional predecessors. Battery weight certainly affects handling and ride comfort, and some concerns have been raised that older carparks and support structures may not have been engineered with consideration

Above: Pre-production concepts turn vans and people movers into mobile offices. Photo: Volkswagen

of today's EV weights. Where site visits may involve traversing bare or uncompacted ground the tare (unloaded) and gross (loaded) mass of your vehicle may be a consideration at purchase.

WHEN FUNCTION BEATS STYLE

Beyond the primary passenger vehicles are the more functional categories.

Today in Australia 'SUVs' reign supreme followed closely by 'utes'. Because SUVs are so prevalent we will jump over them and go straight to (usually) the heavier stuff.

'Utes' in this country were traditionally based on locally built or assembled sedans. Originally 'cars' and 'trucks' used the same chassis to take advantage of assembly lines, and various bodies would be fitted by aftermarket producers. A real ute is different from a truck or a pick-up in that the tray back is made from one sheet of metal attached to the cabin; the Aussie ute idea (Coupe Utility) enabled companies to make pick-up-type vehicles without needing to do a new chassis. The usual history records that Ford Australia kicked off the idea in 1934 in response to a letter from a Gippsland (Vic.) farmer's wife wanting "a vehicle to go to church in on a Sunday and which can carry our pigs

to market on Mondays" and with proper weather protection and a smart appearance. Australian farmers supposedly wanted something newer and fancier but couldn't afford a full sedan or two cars; this was reportedly linked to bank lending policies of the time which would finance a working farm vehicle but not a passenger car as such.

Aussie-style utes never really took off in the USA. The relatively low prices of vehicles in the USA meant the practical and financial advantages offered by a local ute in Australia over a regular imported pick-up truck, albeit with better load capacity and ground clearance, disappeared in the American market.

But the wheel has turned full circle and the 'utes' popular here today are actually 4-door pick-ups with a separate 'tub' sitting on the back of a chassis. They really are today's version of the original multi-purpose ute only with room for some work crew or the family on weekends, and a load area that can also carry camping gear, bikes or other recreational hardware on weekends and holidays.

While 2-wheel drive versions are available 4-wheel (or 'all wheel') drive versions are the big sellers. Likewise 4-door (double cab) versions are the big sellers but single, 'extra' or 'super' and double (or crew) cab versions are also available from most manufacturers.

So what are your real needs? Is a 4-wheel driveline, higher clearance and more engine power – usually with commensurate higher fuel consumption – a necessity for your business? Or would a simpler and cheaper (and cheaper to own and operate) 2-wheel drive single cab version cover your needs?

While local production has ceased would a good used Aussie-style ute offer more comfort than a 4WD pick-up while retaining a useful load area? If so, where would a 2WD pick-up fitted with an aftermarket dropside or tipping tray sit in your considerations? An extra-cab version would include secure capacity for some tools, plans, computers or travelling luggage.

Carrying capacity can of course be expanded by adding a towing kit and a trailer – open or enclosed. Bear in mind the towing weight limitations of your main vehicle, the extra cost of the trailer – especially if enclosed or customised – and the extra registration and insurances. Trailers also require some extra driving skills, specially when reversing, more parking space, and may compromise access to some sites.

KEEPING YOUR STUFF SAFE

Speaking of security, theft from the back of open pick-ups and trucks has emerged as a major industry. So perhaps consideration should be given, if needed, to a 4-door version, or the fitment of a lockable canopy over the load area. Lockable tool boxes are now available in a wide range of designs, sizes and materials depending on the dimensions of the goods you are carrying.

Which brings us to some great secure vehicle solutions – the vans. Like today's pick-ups/utes, vans are now available with a host of creature comforts and great driveability. Plus their presentation has come along with the old boxes on wheels with some smart colour and trim options. Some can also be specified with some pretty surprising safety and stability option packs.

In addition to security of contents these considerations should be extended to weather protection. That means rain, hail, heat, impacts from sundry road gravel and flying rubbish or debris, and damage to greenlife while in transit.

VERSATILITY-PLUS

In fact there are a number of van versions, including prestige marques, available in crew cab-plus-secure cargo compartment formats, and others with variable seating systems and even rotating, removable or folding tables campervan style – ideal for comfortable, sheltered, private meetings literally on-site!

Long wheelbase and high roof options, extra seating, security and privacy screening, side doors, barn-style or hatch-type rear doors, steps, skylights – the option lists are long and make tailoring a van to your specific human and goods carrying needs easy and flexible.

IDENTITY REAL ESTATE

Another advantage of vans is the large area of mobile advertising space for your business on the panels. Well-designed large scale branding or illustrative 'wraps', easily removed when the vehicle is sold or replaced, can have

huge marketing impact on your 'mobile billboard'. They can also be surprisingly affordable and easily and quickly updated should your business image change.

Such signage or wraps can also be applied to all vehicles – as subtle or as in-your-face as you choose.

REAL CAPACITY

The size and carrying capacity of today's utes and pick-ups has grown significantly over the last decade. In the race to outdo your trade competitor a new vehicle category has emerged – the super utes. Mostly American-sourced (or locally modified) these machines are another level above the ubiquitous 4WD crew cab utes in size, power, towing capacity and price. They also take fuel consumption and emissions to another level. They are, literally, impressive. But do they create the right impression of you and your business?

Not surprisingly the traditional 'truck' category has extended downwards to also meet this need. Many Light Rigid trucks can be driven on a normal car Licence without an endorsement and like the modern utes and vans their driveability and comfort has improved enormously over recent years. What they clearly offer over their even lighter cousins however is significantly greater carrying capacity, trailer capacity, ground clearance, durability and implied durability and reliability.

The appeal is along the lines of 'less limits', more strength and all this for not much more in the way of running and maintenance costs. Which can be true IF you do need or utilise that greater capacity.

ACCESSORISE

Most vehicles' versatility can be extended by adding the appropriate accessories some of which have been mentioned above.

Roof racks and towbars are a basic start. The latter of those implies at least occasional use of a trailer of which there is an enormous range of types and sizes – general and specialist. Secure cubic capacity can be added as roof-mounted pods or chassis- or tray-mounted tool boxes in a wide range of sizes and types. Slide-out under-tray drawers can also be fitted. A huge range of optional accessories can be fitted to both the interior and exterior of vans, utes and trucks. Think various drawers, racks, shelving, access ramps and ladders, handrails, hydraulic or pneumatic auxiliaries, manual or hydraulic tailgates etc.

DECISIONS

The takeaway message is simple – search widely and deeply to discover your next vehicle option. While the majority might automatically default to one category what would some healthy lateral thinking throw up? While a modern 4-door 4WD ute might appeal, would a well specified van offer more capacity, security, more economy and just as much versatility? Petrol might be out, an EV too limiting – would a hybrid be the answer to questions of economy and environment?

Enjoy the search.

Below: Futuristic interiors make light commercial vehicles more comfortable.
Photo: Ford



Calendar

OCTOBER

DATES TBC
DANKS STREET TOUR
 WITH ADAM ROBINSON
 Sydney (time TBC)

11 OCTOBER
VECTORWORKS WEBINAR
 – PLANT TOOL CHASER
 12:30pm on Zoom

21 & 22 OCTOBER
HARTLEY VALLEY GARDEN
FESTIVAL, NSW
 Join LDI Members to visit
 the gardens

NOVEMBER

2 NOVEMBER
LDI DESIGN
AWARDS FINALISTS
ANNOUNCEMENT

2 NOVEMBER
AILDM/LDI ANNUAL
GENERAL MEETING
 Via Zoom (time TBC)

23 NOVEMBER
THE VALLEY CRAWL
 Queensland

FEBRUARY

22 FEBRUARY
JOURNEYS INTO DESIGN
 LDI Awards Presentation
 plus Special Guest
 Speaker Paul Bangay.
 Sydney.

MARCH

20-24 MARCH
MELBOURNE
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FLOWER & GARDEN
SHOW (MIFGS)



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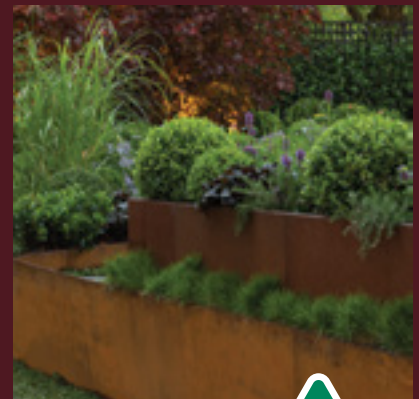
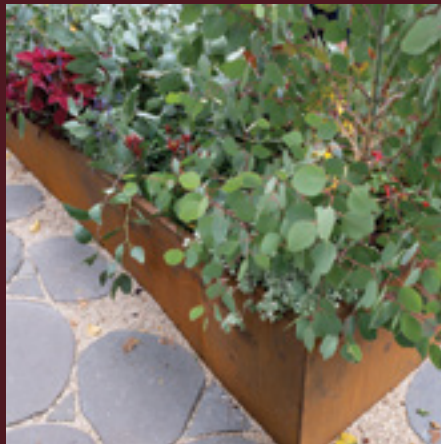
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