

Concept to Delivery

ProLandscaper

May 2019

DESIGN, BUILD
AND MAINTAIN

COMPANY PROFILE

**BELDERBOS
LANDSCAPES**

**FIRST
IMPRESSIONS**

LEE BESTALL

Let's hear it from

PAUL LYNCH
**ELMTREE GARDEN
CONTRACTORS LTD**

*Playing
with colour*

DEBS WINROW

Crownjewel

KENSINGTON GARDENS

COMPANY PROFILE

Pro Landscaper visits the new headquarters at **Belderbos Landscapes** to speak with founders Ed and Claire about the continual growth of the business

How was the business established?

Claire: We began business on 19 May 2004.

Ed: I studied Landscape Architecture in Manchester in the nineties and had always wanted to set up a landscaping business.

Our first project was a £3K 5m x 5m garden in Earlsfield. We had worked on private projects for friends beforehand, but this was our first professional job. From there, we completed a project in Tooting, followed by a large driveway in Buckinghamshire. We would travel wherever an opportunity took us. Initially, the gardens were designed and built in house, but then we started to involve designers. Since then approximately 50% of the gardens we build are on behalf of external designers.

Why did you start contacting garden designers?

Ed: It made sense to team up with designers in order to keep everyone busy. We were developing skilled and enthusiastic landscape teams. Once you have good people working in the team, you are in a position of responsibility

BELDERBOS LANDSCAPES *in numbers*

**Belderbos
Landscapes**

Established **2004**
Employees **40**
Breakdown **80% landscaping,**
20% maintenance
Awards **RHS Chelsea 3 Golds**
and 1 Silver-Gilt
Turnover **£4m**

to keep them occupied, and inspired by new challenges, so it drives you to get more work.

We regularly build for designers such as Shelley Hugh-Jones, Peter Reader, Sara Jane Rothwell and Olivia Rossi. We know how each other works and there is a strong element of trust which helps on all levels. Future projects include working with Tom Massey on a driveway in Richmond and building for Matt Childs at the RHS Hampton Court Flower Show.

Can you tell us about a memorable project?

A residential project, on a commercial scale in Marlow, which we won via Sarah Eberle, involved reshaping a chalk valley and major earthworks over a two-year period. The exhilaration of winning the tender was rapidly replaced by the daunting task of making it happen. However, the team rose to the challenge and Sarah was flexible and great to work with. For us, the completed project is definitely one of our key milestones over the past 15 years.



Claire and Ed Belderbos

What's the structure of the company now?

Claire: There are five managers, and about 15 people in the office. On site, there are 30–40 people, and 12 in our maintenance team.



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Are designers aware that you offer design facilities?

Ed: Yes, many like the fact that we're a bit of a 'melting pot' of ideas and enjoy the challenge of working with new materials. For instance, when we worked with Marcus Barnett Designs, we used precast concrete wood-embossed planters for a retro hotel project located near London's King's Cross. Black sprayed bamboo was selected for a Central London roof terrace, designed by Nicola Wakefield, and we installed bronze-sprayed stainless steel sculptures in a project for Andy Sturgeon in Holland Park.

Is the maintenance side of your work relevant to all your projects?

Claire: To begin with, maintenance work applied to just the gardens we landscape, but now this is an important, stand-alone part of our business. Around 90% of this work is domestic,



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and is for owners of high-end, residential gardens in London.

Ed: For us maintenance is a real selling point. Garden designers want to ensure their projects are developed in line with their vision, and this, of course, extends to maintenance.

Do you undertake any interior landscaping?

Ed: Yes, there is an increasing trend in indoor planting both in offices and restaurants and hotels. This has led to a variety of projects working with Sara Jane Rothwell including the newly opened Sushi Samba in Covent Garden.

For a typical build, how much of the work is hard and soft landscaping?

Ed: We split this around two years ago. When the hard landscaping is complete, the soft landscaping begins. Our hard and soft landscaping are separate teams. The great thing about having a soft landscaping team and a maintenance team is that they are fairly interchangeable – if we're short on maintenance staff, the soft landscapers are drafted in to help out, and vice versa.



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Is the design work a separate charge?

Ed: Yes, we have always charged separately for our designs.

What are your future plans for the business?

Claire: We have a clearly defined management structure for each business unit in place and this is working really well for the company as a whole. With some exciting recent projects, as well as our office relocation, there is a buzz and positive can-do attitude which emanates throughout the team. It's a real pleasure to come to the office each day.

Our employees possess all the right intentions – they're loyal, enthusiastic and hardworking. The team dynamic works well – and everything is falling into place. Of course, we acknowledge the Brexit influence, but obviously any subsequent loss of confidence is beyond our control. However, we will be prepared for it and do everything we can.

Ed: We want to grow and improve on all levels as we develop. Health and safety compliance is now looked on in a positive way, not just because it ensures that sites and staff operate

safely, but also because it increases efficiency through planning. Most of our team leaders have attended SSTS courses, and we are now CHAS accredited.

So, this time next year the business will be bigger?

Claire: Yes, if the market allows it. We're stronger than we were a year ago, both in terms of skills, talent and infrastructure.

We want to grow the maintenance because that generates a recurring revenue with local clients. We also really enjoy building for external garden designers, so we are always looking to expand our network here. We're not looking to make drastic changes.

Will the size and value of the projects change?

Claire: The size and value of projects have certainly increased, but we're still happy to design and landscape small gardens if the budget is realistic. Our client base is quite broad. A client with a realistic budget for a small garden, especially if they are local, is ideal.

Ed: The most simple work can often be the most profitable. The size of our projects varies hugely due to also having the maintenance team, so we will do a simple project with a value of £500 to a large project of about £1m.

Claire: One thing we have started doing is establishing more alliances and relationships with other companies. We have trusting relationships with developers, other landscapers and interior designers who frequently refer work to us.

- 1 Some of the team outside the new office
- 2 Marlow project with Sarah Eberle
- 3 South West London garden designed by Shelley Hugh-Jones
- 4 RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2018 designed by Sarah Eberle
- 5 Sushi Samba project team

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