

# Design For Maintenance

Wednesday 28 September 2011

Ashford International Hotel, Ashford, Kent

**“The Garden Design industry has lost its way... we’ve gone down the visual route predominantly and have become detached from the practical side of things - the practical side underpins the whole thing and we need to bring it back to this”, says multi-award winning designer Andy Sturgeon.**



Andy Sturgeon, 2010’s Chelsea Gold Medal winner and last year’s holder of Best In Show is looking forward to chairing a lively debate on “Design for Maintenance” at Palmstead Nurseries’ forthcoming Soft Landscaping Workshop on the 28th September.

Andy spoke to us about “Design for Maintenance” and looked forward to introducing the other speakers on the day; Professor James Hitchmough, James Alexander-Sinclair, Gill Chamberlain and Noel Farrar.

# Q&A

What are you looking forward to hearing at Palmstead's 2011 workshop in September?

We've all been aware of Professor Hitchmough's work for quite a few years now. I've been following what they've been doing at Sheffield and what's interesting to note is; this isn't a fashion or a "trend", what they're doing is actually feeding into people's consciousness and influencing designers work. What started off as an idea backed by lots of research has become something very real and tangible. I'm looking forward to hearing James Alexander-Sinclair, he's always good value and has an unusual take on things, he does fairly plant led schemes and provides great sound-bites that stick in your memory. I'm looking forward to hearing what Gill has to say on Garden Rescue too. I think that what's important on the day is – everyone's coming at this topic from a different angle and this should provide a lively debate.

Is it important to debate topics such as "Design for Maintenance"?

There are lots of talks and lectures that you can go to, but they're generally very visually driven, what Palmstead are doing is different - the day will be driven by practical information. The Garden Design industry has lost its way a little and we've found ourselves going down the visual route predominantly and become detached from the practical side of things - the practical side underpins the whole thing and we need to bring it back to this.



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Did your early grounding as a gardener help you to carve out the medal winning career you have as a designer today then?

I didn't have a plan when I started. I worked in landscaping; building gardens and digging holes but what I wanted to do was design, so I went off and studied tropical plants and in my middle year at college I worked at RHS Wisley gardens. After working for a garden designer I went freelance - to support this move I had a day job in garden maintenance which I did for five years. During those five years I learned a lot about gardens and gardening - even basic stuff like what the easiest shape of lawn to cut, which ones require most work etc. I didn't think much of it at the time, I was doing it to earn money, but that knowledge has been so useful. If you go straight into garden design it would be unusual to go and do garden maintenance afterward - it would be seen by some as a step down, but it's a very useful thing for a designer to do.

Do you still dig holes and maintain the spaces?

The two areas are totally different and difficult to combine in a practical sense. Designing and working in a space are two very different things and both have different mindsets - I find it doesn't help to switch between both. If you're simultaneously ordering skips and soil and compost and thinking of planning regulations and planting plants you get pulled in too many different directions.

Do you consider maintenance a lot when you're designing for someone?

There's no such thing as a minimal maintenance garden. You often find yourself designing a garden for someone who doesn't know a great deal about gardening, so that does inform plant choice. With regard to maintenance, one of the questions can be - will they have a professional gardener, someone who really knows what they're doing, knows plants rather than someone who comes to cut the grass.



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What projects are you excited about at the moment?

We're working on a project in Portugal to provide landscaping for a development of 71 luxury villas. The landscaping is important to the project and hasn't been tagged on at the end; the client has realised that the landscape is going to sell the development and that it's important. The contractor Jardim Vista that we're working with has brought great local knowledge to the project - knowledge of soil and how to irrigate - this has been exciting and interesting.

Where do you find inspiration?

I get a lot of inspiration from architecture; architects always seem to be looking forward. I've also become more interested in garden history of late. Recently I've been researching the Arts and Crafts period having done a few gardens of properties around that style and age. It's not typically what we do at the practice, but I've found through the research I've done that we do follow a lot of the same fundamental principles.

How would you describe yourself and your work to an alien who'd not heard the title "landscape designer"?

I'd say my work is about creating places that didn't exist before, and it's also about moulding existing places. I do it all with a pencil - I don't use the computers in the office - it's a creative outpouring and this element is important to me. Physically it's a totally diverse experience; you can find yourself one day going to see plants in their natural environments, the next day you could be visiting nurseries in Europe or sitting down with clients, putting pencil to paper to come up with a design and then the next you could be dealing with something tedious like planning permissions or getting on a plane to Russia.

Are you happy with where you are career wise?

It's been a long hard journey to get where I am but it's been fun; it's not an easy way to make money and all areas of the profession are grossly undervalued. It's such a shame that garden design was glamorised by the media in the way it was - it stopped people from becoming actual gardeners - and in the process so many courses got axed.

How important is it for the landscape/garden design industry to come together to debate?

As gardeners we all experiment in our own gardens and other peoples gardens and get a great deal from doing both, but sharing information and bringing people together who are analysing the topics that we face as an industry is absolutely vital.

And finally, what's your favourite space?

The beach.



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**Andy Sturgeon will be chairing the annual Palmstead Workshop on 28 September 2011 where there will be a lively debate about 'Design for Maintenance'. For more information about Andy visit: <http://www.andysturgeon.com>**

Palmstead Nurseries continue their successful series of Soft Landscape Workshops aimed at professional landscapers, designers, specifiers and managers, with 'Design For Maintenance' on Wednesday 28 September 2011 at the Ashford International Hotel, Ashford, Kent.

Now in their 4th year the workshops provide a great opportunity for the industry to come together and share their thoughts on the year and to hear the leaders in their field talk about the future of design and maintenance.

Chaired by Andy Sturgeon, the speakers for 2011 include: -

James Alexander-Sinclair, Gill Chamberlain, Professor James Hitchmough and Noel Farrar.



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