

NAUD BURNETT: CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN

By Naud Burnett, Dallas, Texas

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From its inception, the goals and policies of my companies were based on my personal experiences and observations while working for another firm, gaining invaluable experience over a seven-year period. I had the fortunate experience of being assistant to the president of a large landscape company, and sat in on all private business discussions and client contacts throughout the day. He was a master salesman, with impeccable taste, and I was an interested and observant student of his techniques and decisions.

When the situation occurred for me to leave and start out on my own it was necessary for a deep soul searching of what, where, and how, since my capital was limited. My success has been based on those past experiences, and the desire not to make the mistakes which I had observed of my previous employer. Needless to say, I have, unfortunately, repeated many of those mistakes, but have always recharted my course to correct them.

Basically, the business is built on a complete personal service of a landscape architect from beginning

to end. Personal taste, style, and experience of the landscape architect are extremely important, so that the landscape becomes an integral part of the entire, unified design. The design is based on the client's wishes and utilitarian needs, while being compatible with the architectural design, and reinforcing the architectural concept.

The landscape plan and installation become a personal art form for that specific client, and that particular design would not necessarily fit the needs of another client in the same house or building.

For an insight into our business, the following will explain how and why we do what we do.

I am a graduate landscape architect, and was teaching in college at the age of 19. Teaching did not give me the personal satisfaction I was seeking, so I chose to work in private practice for seven years. This is my twentieth year in business for myself. My goals have changed, and I have sold my business to my key personnel. I am now working for them for a minimum of five years.

Many people cannot understand my selling out and supposedly semi-retiring, but I am satisfied with a well-thought-out plan of financial security, more time with my family, and other business interests. It's now time for another generation to work 12 hours a day.

My interest also lies in the estab-

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lishment of a new Hydro-Culture industry for growing plants indoors and out-of-doors without soil. It is a revolutionary concept, and is very exciting and stimulating.

We are proud of our 20 awards over the years, but especially the personnel who are responsible for the hard daily work which bring these successful jobs to a completion. Without them, it would not be possible.

Actually, the overall business is divided into two organizations. One handles design and supervision on a professional basis, with a staff of six landscape architects. The other is a landscape company which only installs plantings, with a staff of 30 to 50 employees.

Qualifications for landscape architects are much different than for landscape company personnel. They must show a flair for design, good taste, and quick understanding of problems and solutions. They should be the type of person who would make a good future partner. They can be found only by many interviews with prospective employees, and proving to the specific person that you have something to

offer them as well. Always make sure they understand "no moonlighting".

Landscape personnel qualifications vary with positions, but always honesty, knowledge, and integrity are uppermost in mind. A company-oriented person is always sought.

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Actually, little business is sought on a landscape level, as 70% is self-generated from a complete package service, and 30% comprises miscellaneous work not involving plans. Two expert sales personnel handle these miscellaneous jobs and bids, as well as the contract work from plans. Only seldom would we bid or install a job planned by another landscape architect. We do no maintenance work.


Our landscape architectural firm keeps a current prospect list (computerized), with a constant update. A regular newsletter is mailed out to this list. It has been highly successful and creates conversation.

Seasonally (twice a year), the landscape company goes back to old clients and plants spring flowers or

bulbs in the fall. This falls into the miscellaneous jobs that are not sought after. It is beneficial in keeping the older gardens blooming and up-to-date, and it allows for corrections in maintenance performed by others.

Approximately 70% of the cost of the average landscape plan is involved in the installation of construction other than plantings. The design firm gets bids from reputable



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qualified contractors, and the figures are outlined on a format so the client can make the selection of the contractor.

Contracts are signed with each individual contractor, and we charge an inspection and coordination fee of 12% of everything except swimming pools, which are 6%. No fee is charged if our company installs the planting, but is charged if done by others.

Fees for work involved are billed monthly, based on amount of bill approved for contractors. Contractors' bills are sent to us for approval, and forwarded to the client to be paid direct to the contractor. Any

Any changes in plans are confirmed by letter to eliminate any misunderstanding.

changes in plans or quotations are confirmed by letter and owner's approval, to eliminate any misunderstanding when the job ends up with a different cost.

The landscape contracts are clearly outlined as to the services, warranty, and materials to be used with a flat quotation for the job. A 30% request for prepayment is made, and subsequent periodic requests for payment are made as work progresses.

Visual aids used are photographic albums, slides shown at the office conference room, and personal tours of existing gardens.

All estimates from both firms are broken down into detail. We have no sales pitch, but rely on our integrity, experience, and reputation. Low key sales: here it is — this is what it costs — you're buying it. We do explain that if they wish, the cost could go up or down with more expensive materials or smaller sizes. Clients seem to be pleased when you say here it is, study it, and we can get back together if you don't want to make the decision today. It is going to be more expensive next year.

All warranties on construction are by contractors. Landscaping warranty covers loss for one year, with a clause for exceptions due to "acts of God." Landscape architects are insured for professional liability for one million dollars.

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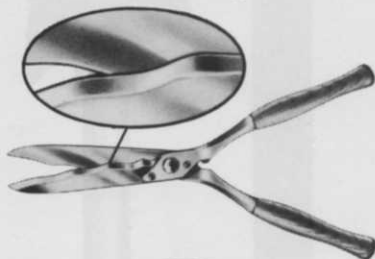
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where cost is not as important as quality and responsibility. It personally gives me the satisfaction of seeing beautiful jobs executed; that is as important an ingredient to life as making money. If there is any image we attempt to project, it is that we strive for perfection that is never attained.

Our personnel are trained in weekly meetings, and taking new employees along on appointments.

Charges for landscape plans and specifications are based from experience on time involved in solving a particular problem. In most instances, the fee is a flat fee, but we also do work on percentage and time

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basis. The plans and specifications are very detailed, and vary in cost from \$400 to \$30,000.

We normally work within a ten state area on landscape plans, and stay within the Dallas metroplex on landscape contracting.

Our sales personnel are urged to wear coats and ties (sometimes difficult in Dallas summers). Planting crews wear uniforms.

We have no sales yard, as we do no retail business, but we have a storage lot where typical specimens may be observed in container or permanently planted in a landscape setting. Our plant holding area is one acre in the central city, and 20 acres on the outskirts of the city. Our offices are well located, and expensively furnished.

We advertise in D-Magazine, newsletters, and Junior League Magazine. All hit the upper market. Our logos are used on all publications and printed matter, and are distinctive. Letterheads, business forms, etc., have been in a constant state of evolution over the period of 20 years. Signs are used on trucks that are identical to easels used on each job. These are excellent advertising tools at no constant expense.

I hope this gives you an insight into the inner workings of one Dallas landscape firm. Undoubtedly, these procedures are repeated by each of you, with variations, as no one does anything the same way.

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