

Design/Build May Dominate in Future

Three survey findings indicate a shift toward firms with both design and construction capability.

by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor

In the future more than half the landscape construction work in the U.S. may be done by design/build companies, according to the latest *Weeds Trees & Turf* industry survey.

This prediction is based on three findings. First, more than 60 percent of landscape architects polled are in favor of the design/build concept. Second, commercial/industrial work is considered the most recession-proof and preferred part of construction by both architects and contractors. Small contractors, who have done designs for residential work, are improving their design capabilities to reach the commercial/industrial market. Third, architects desire greater control over both construction and maintenance of their designs.

Surprisingly, the contractors surveyed are decreasing the amount of maintenance work they do for more construction and design work. Increased competition in maintenance may be part

of the reason. The contractors recognize the excellent potential of maintenance services but they have actually moved away from maintenance, according to the dollar volume of work they do in design, construction, and maintenance.

Architects are already heavily involved in the commercial/industrial sector. They prefer working as a consultant to the property owner over working for the general contractor or a subcontractor (that would include landscape contractors). More than two-thirds offer follow-up inspection and maintenance guidelines for an additional fee. Working with the contractor before, during, and after installation is their only way to assure their design is carried out as intended.

It was evident from the survey results that nearly a third of the architects want to stay away from the construction end of the business and concentrate on consulting governmental agencies in

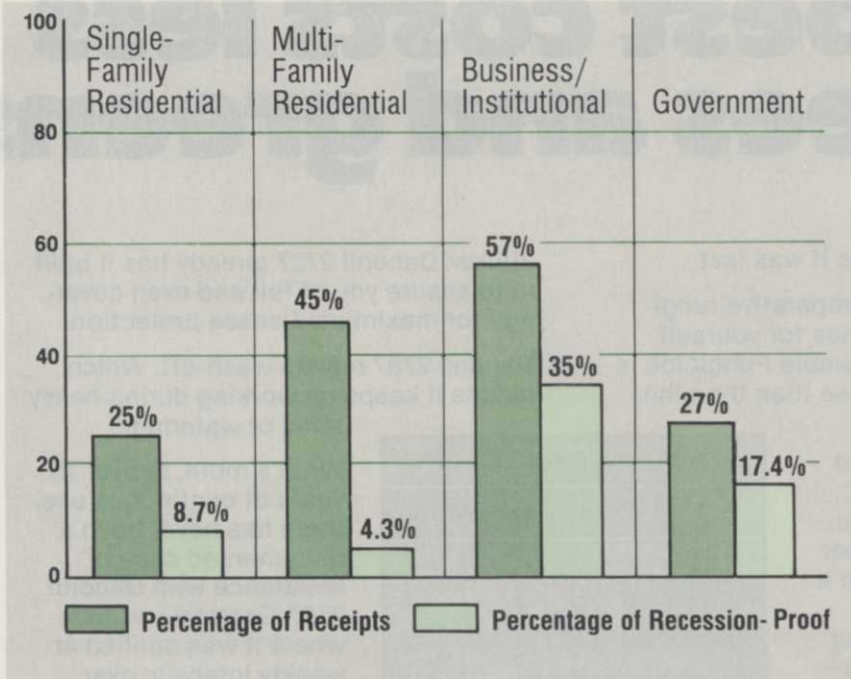
land use and other large institutions. They don't want the hassle of scheduling work crews, financing materials, and dealing with Mother Nature first hand. These are much the same reasons why building architects resist construction management.

The need for contractor and architect to work together is agreed. Yet it seems that contractors and architects are far apart in certain beliefs, particularly education. While landscape architects are strongly in favor of licensing, which requires a degree, more than two-thirds of the landscape contractors surveyed do not look for a college degree when hiring their foremen or middle managers.

The attitude of learning the business from the ground up is firmly entrenched in the minds of contractors. They are willing to pay young managers \$12,000 to \$18,000 if they have solid on-the-job experience.

Contractors recognize the

Types of Work by Percentage of Gross Receipts, Architects



advantages of college-trained people. "They tend to be good at decision-making and have good insight to problems when they arise," one contractor said. "On the other hand, they are not always willing to work every task or area, and at times seem more interested in salary or advancement than learning the work." Leadership, initiation, and understanding instructions are three other benefits of college grads listed by contractors.

No amount of education will make up for a lack of experience in the minds of contractors. "We find it takes one year to 18 months to get a new hire up to speed," another contractor said. "The best indicator of a good college grad is his willingness to do "all" types of work, to get dirty, and to be adept with equipment."

Contractors say the potential for design work is satisfactory but that the potential for construction is greater. The architects sur-



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Potential for Business, Contractors

	POTENTIAL		
	Great	Satisfactory	Poor
DESIGN	21.2%	54.5%	15%
CONSTRUCTION	54.5%	42.4%	3%
MAINTENANCE	51.5%	30.3%	6%

veyed predict design work to grow by 15 percent in 1984, 9.5 percent in 1985, 9.8 percent in 1986, and 12.3 percent in 1987. These are averages. Some architects expect business to grow more than 30 percent per year for the next four years. Others forecast reductions of 10 to 30 percent.

Layoffs were widespread the past three years with 49 percent of the contractors. Nearly a fourth of the contractors shifted construction crewmembers to other types of work to keep them on the payroll during the recession.

A fourth of the contractors said their work never slowed. Half said business is picking up and the future is bright. More than 20 percent, however, indicated local economic conditions were holding them back indefinitely.

Forty-four percent of the contractors said they are now buying equipment which they put off buying the past three years. That means everyone except the con-

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tractors held back by local conditions are buying as normal.

Architects say they do regularly recommend contractors for their work. The most important things they look for in a contractor are the quality of workmanship, following directions, understanding and accepting the purpose of the landscape plan, finishing all the work on schedule, and honest bidding. The architects want contractors to discuss substitutions and quality of plant material with them without fighting the plan.

Contractors deny that substitutions are a major problem but doubt if architects check with local nurseries before specifying plants. They also feel nurseries should share the risk of a guarantee with them more than they do. More than half the contractors said they would consider lowering the installed price of material if they received a one-year maintenance contract following installation.

WT&T

Type of Work by Percentage of Gross Receipts, Contractors

	1981	1982	1983
DESIGN	13.7%	15.6%	19.4%
CONSTRUCTION	44.8%	47%	50.6%
MAINTENANCE	52.7%	49.1%	50.6%

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