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PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN

Shilan is editor of FromDesign2Build.com. Contact him at 201/783-2844 or jshilan@gmail.com.

The unbiddable master plan

Q This might be a silly question, but is there anything that you can do to stop your client from taking your design, making copies of it and then shopping it around to your competitors to try and get a lower price? Any advice would be greatly appreciated.

— Danny Wantague, Dreamscapes LLC, St. Paul, MN

A The short answer, Danny, is yes! However, it is my opinion that if clients pay you for a design, they own the plan and can do whatever they want with it. You've been paid for your design services.

With that said, there are things that you can do to provide professional design services and still make it difficult for a client to shop your plan.

Unlike the alternative process, where homeowners hire an independent landscape designer or landscape architect to create a detailed set of plans that will be sent out to bid, design/build contractors are responsible for both the design and build processes. This gives them a tremendous opportunity to not only create a practical and affordable design that their clients will love, but also do it in such a way that it gives them a real advantage against their competitors. Unfortunately, most design/build contractors fail to capitalize on this opportunity.

At Rutgers, I was formally trained to provide landscape architectural drawings that required an incredible amount of detail. These plans were specifically created to have landscape contractors competitively bid on them, providing the client with an "apples-to-apples" comparison. While many landscape contractors are extremely successful in the bid/build environment, the bidding process clearly favors

the homeowner when it comes to pricing.

One of the main reasons that landscape architectural offices usually charge more for their drawings than design/build firms is because of the incredible amount of time and energy needed to create all of the details necessary to obtain accurate and competitive bids. A set of drawings will typically include a layout plan, planting schedule, grading and drainage plan, dimension plan, utility plan, irrigation layout, lighting design and a variety of construction details.

If the project is large or incredibly detailed, there can be an entire page dedicated to descriptions and notes, explaining everything from seed mixes to material finishes.

This is not the case in landscape design/build. We do not, and should not, spend as much time detailing the drawings themselves. While our process requires detailed information as well, I always recommend including this information in the proposal and not the plan itself.

You see, Danny, the more detailed your plans are, the easier it is for clients to get their apples-to-apples comparisons. Again, while this works quite well for the client, all it does is make the design/build contractor a commodity, forcing him or her to lower prices.

By specifying every size, quantity and material selection in your plans, you are practically begging your client to call other companies to check your prices. It's crazy.

Less work, more control

Think about it. Performing quantity take-offs (QTOs) and estimating labor hours can take an incredible amount of time. Why would you do all of the hard work and then create a drawing that makes it easy for your competitors to price it? If they want the work, let them do their own footwork. And the next time your client signs your proposal and says, "I can't believe it. I called five other companies and no one else would get back to me with a price," you can say, "Wow! I can't believe it, either. All they had to do was bid on the plan."

Profiting from Design is a quarterly column from award-winning landscape designer, consultant and former design/build contractor Jody Shilan. Shilan is also the president of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. If you have a question you would like answered in *Profiting From Design*, please contact Shilan at jshilan@gmail.com.

FIRST-CLASS CAB

Operator comfort takes center stage for engineers designing new cabs.

You arrive early on the jobsite, ready to work. You open the door on the cab of your new compact loader and climb in through the roomy opening. You put your coffee in the cup holder. Someone with shorter legs than yours was running the loader yesterday afternoon, so you quickly adjust the seat to fit your larger frame.

You close the door, muting the sound of the diesel pickup truck that has just pulled in next to you. You fasten your seatbelt, lower the safety bar, enter your password in the keypad and start the engine. You plug your MP3 player into the loader's stereo and select the new music you downloaded last night. Your mobile phone needs charging, so you plug the charger into the 12-volt power accessory.

It's been cool for this time of year, so you turn on the cab's heater and adjust the airflow. Later in the day, you may switch on the air-conditioning as things warm up. The sun still is below the horizon, so you turn on the halogen work lights. You look behind you to see who else has arrived on the jobsite, then grasp the joystick controls and head off to where a truck has just dumped a large pile of topsoil.

Ah yes, just another day at the office. But for



BY DOUG ZOERB

compact loader manufacturers, operator comfort and ergonomics have taken center stage in new product design as contractors battle to keep operators happy, productive — and on staff.

“It's hard to get good operators, and harder to keep them,” says Mike Fitzgerald, loader product specialist at Bobcat Co., West Fargo, ND. “Operator expectations have changed. They want to be comfortable, and they want to walk away from the machine at the end of the day and not feel tired.

“What was acceptable 20 or 30 years ago is no longer acceptable,” Fitzgerald adds. “Today, it's critical that we offer air-conditioning, radios and other items that we didn't even sell in the past.”

Listening to the customer

“Designing a new cab from scratch can take as long as four years,” says Josh Maus, senior design engineer at Bobcat Co.

Voice of the customer (VOC) plays a big role in the design and development of compact loader cabs.

continued on page 65



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CAB COMFORT

Long hours in the cab make control layout, visibility and comfort top priorities for compact loader manufacturers.

3D modeling software helps manufacturers design cabs for different sized operators.



continued from page 63

Listening to customers plays a large role in the cab design process, Maus says. Manufacturers call this the “voice of the customer,” or VOC for short.

“VOC plays a big role in cab design and development,” Maus says. “Manufacturers need to understand early on what customers want before they can implement new items into the design. This does not just involve the cab. VOC for the entire machine must be understood before designing the product.”

Gathering VOC data is a continual process for manufacturers, Fitzgerald says.

“Product specialists like myself, district field managers and district service managers all visit customers to see how machines are used in the field,” he says. “Dealer sales and service representatives also feed information back to us as manufacturers. In addition, engineering personnel may visit jobsites to look at specific machine features or specific size machines. So there’s a lot of ways that we can gather VOC information.”

Improved control access is a major VOC item. It was taken into account for all of the controls and throttle layouts within the cabs of new Bobcat M-Series loaders, Maus says.

Cup holders and storage locations also are major requests from operators, he said. By designing them into the cab early on, engineers are able to maintain good spatial relationships between these items and the rest of the functions within the cab.

A cleaner, quieter and cooler cab all were major requirements revealed by VOC. Knowing this, Maus says, engineers made a conscious effort to dedicate space and design time to cab seals, the heating and cooling system and air filtration of the cab.

The role of industry standards

Industry standards also play a part in cab design, Maus says. He notes that standards set out by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) are followed when it comes to items such as drive control locations, overall visibility, seat locations, seat belt requirements and display requirements.

Fitzgerald notes that while ISO and SAE create standards, they do not have regulatory authority.

Designing cabs that meet the needs of international markets is another challenge. One solution is to have a design

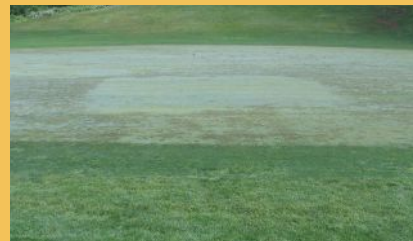
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This photo shows the same area the following spring. While the green kyllinga has reestablished most everywhere else, the area treated with Dismiss is lush and green.


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CAB COMFORT

that will accommodate all regions worldwide.

“There are always different requirements from various regions that must be met and taken into account,” Fitzgerald says. “Typically, we offer a kit or an option designed to meet regional needs. For example, in parts of Europe, they may need a road light kit, turn



As for controls, owners of compact loaders should choose a style that is familiar to their operators.

Contractors are taking fewer days off, so comfort and productivity are important.

signals, a beacon or strobe light. We design the cab to accommodate those variations in specific locations.”

Together with designing for international markets goes the need to accommodate operators of various heights and sizes. Most manufacturers now use computer-based 3D modeling software to analyze the space requirements needed to meet a broad spectrum of operators.

“Typically, what we do is enter the parameters of the ISO 5006 visibility standards into the 3D software program and evaluate the machine that way,” Maus says. “Then, when we feel we have a design that will work well, we build a prototype and evaluate it in a test lab.”

“We can use the 3D software to check for compatibility with what we would consider a ‘95th percentile’ individual,” he continues. “In other words, we check for someone who is 95% bigger than the smallest person and 5% smaller than the biggest person.” This kind of testing affects the location of controls and comfort features such as the seat, Maus notes.

Creature comforts

“During the last 10 years or so, the market focus seems to have shifted toward operator comfort,” Maus says. “Things such as cab pressurization, control



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SHOPPING TIPS

Here are three things that the operator and/or owner should look for in the cab design of a compact loader:

1. Does the cab offer all the features I am looking for? For example, a radio is something that the operator may want, but it may not be standard on many machines in the industry.

2. Is the cab size right for my team? Room is important, especially for larger individuals who may feel cramped and uncomfortable if the cab isn't big enough for them. The seat bar, seat belt, controls and cab threshold all will be factors in the operator's overall comfort level while sitting in the machine and entering and exiting. Similarly, some smaller operators may be uncomfortable in the machine if the cab does not offer enough adjustability to accommodate them.

3. Will my team be comfortable with the controls? There are many different control options available in the industry today. Be sure that the machine has a style of controls that is familiar to your operators.



access and operator space have become more prevalent in customer feedback than they were before.”

One reason why may be more hours per day and more days per year spent in the machine, both by operators who work for a contractor and contractors who operate their own machines.

“It's fair to say that in today's world, contractors are under the gun,” says Jason Magnuson, product function leader for cabs and interiors at Bobcat Co. “They need to meet tight deadlines, so they're trying to get as much productivity out of their machines as they can. They're taking fewer days off.”

The result is that the cab environment is becoming more important to operators, even something as small as a cup holder, Fitzgerald notes.

“The fact that we have one in there is the result of customer requests,” he says. **LM**

Doug Zoerb is a Milwaukee-based writer.

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PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Concrete ideas

THE MISSION

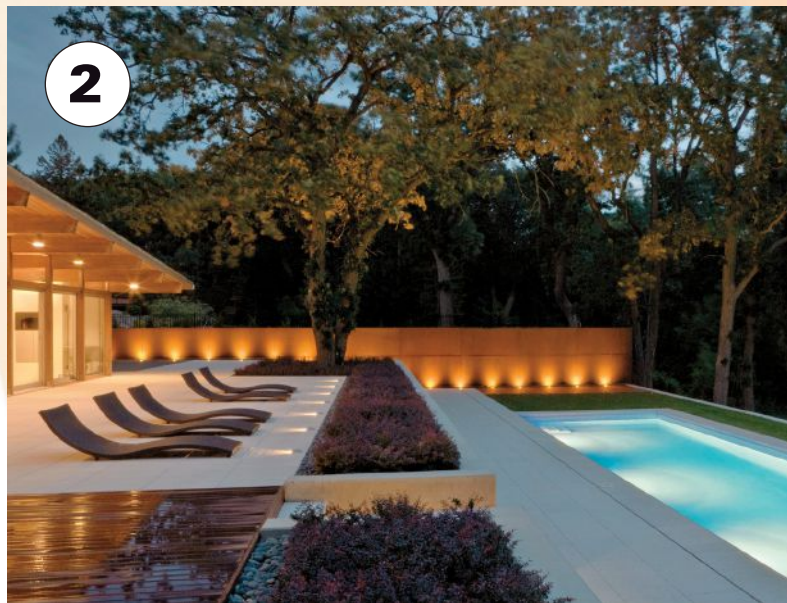
Create a series of linked site enhancements, respecting the home's modernist architecture.

"This project is a complete redesign of the entire 1.3-acre property to frame the 1950s architecture, provide dynamic usable exterior space, integrate a pool, and mitigate erosion stemming from a poor cut/fill balance when the home was originally constructed," notes Scott Frampton, CFO and project estimator manager for Landscape Renovations, Afton, MN. "With the exception of the beautiful oak forest, not a piece of the property was left untouched."

The landscape architect, Shane Coen of Minneapolis-based Coen + Partners, and the client worked together to develop materials and installation methods, discouraging cladding or masking of materials. The site is grounded by a circulation system of 12x24-in. white concrete pavers, with recycled glass and high fly-ash content. All paving is dry-laid in a stacked bond on a substantial aggregate base. Other surfacing materials include poured concrete (driveway), crushed aggregate (east garden) and Ipe wood decks with hidden fasteners.

"The client regularly challenged design ideas and questioned everything — from material selection and cost, to the spacing of plant material and cone ties for the concrete walls," Frampton reports, noting that weekly meetings and discussions resulted in an award-winning space. "Other important collaborations were with the general contractor, the metal workers, the concrete team and the arborist for integrating the large white oak in the upper terrace. We are particularly grateful to Laura Chaney of Hanover Architectural Products for her work on this project.

"All structural interventions within the landscape relate directly to the architecture," he adds. "Walls and paving extend from architecture transitions. These interventions create thresholds, plinths and boundaries that organize the site and showcase both plants and context."



PHOTOS BY: PAUL CROSBY, PHOTOGRAPHER, LANDSCAPE RENOVATIONS

THE WORK



1 | Front lines. A bosque of whitespire birch marks the lawn; a mass planting of crimson pygmy barberry frames the walk to the front door. Trees were spaded, and the walk consists of dry-laid pavers.

2 | Modern comfort. The COR-TEN wall along the east edge provides privacy and acts as the perimeter fence. Note the effect of low-voltage night lighting on the pool terrace.

3 | Valley vista. The south-facing upper terrace takes advantage of the view toward the Mississippi River Valley. The terrace, constructed of white concrete pavers with recycled glass, is sited at the same elevation as the home.

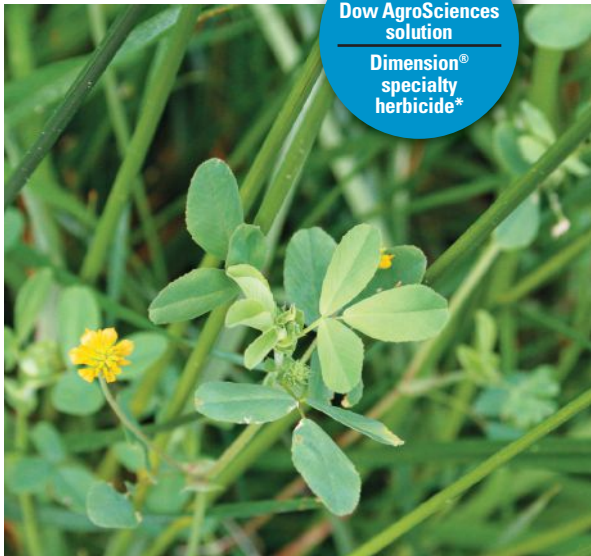
4 | Practical beauty. Pool terrace, facing west: The narrow trench drain handles runoff between the pool and cast-in-place (CIP) wall.

5 | Opulent orchard. Beneath the Golden Raindrops crabapple trees is 3/8-in. crushed aggregate.

Based in Afton, MN, Landscape Renovations is a full-service design/build landscaping company, specializing in natural stone walls and patios, concrete paver driveways and patios, water features, and planting design. This particular project garnered a 41st Annual Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit LandscapeRenovations.com.



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BLACK MEDIC

Medicago lupulina

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ This low-trailing summer annual can act as a perennial in some conditions. It is common in lawns stressed from compaction, heat and drought.

▶ Often confused with clover, black medic is easily distinguished by the bright yellow flowers and leaf arrangement. The leaf is similar to clover and other legumes with three leaflets, but black medic's center leaflet is on a separate petiole.

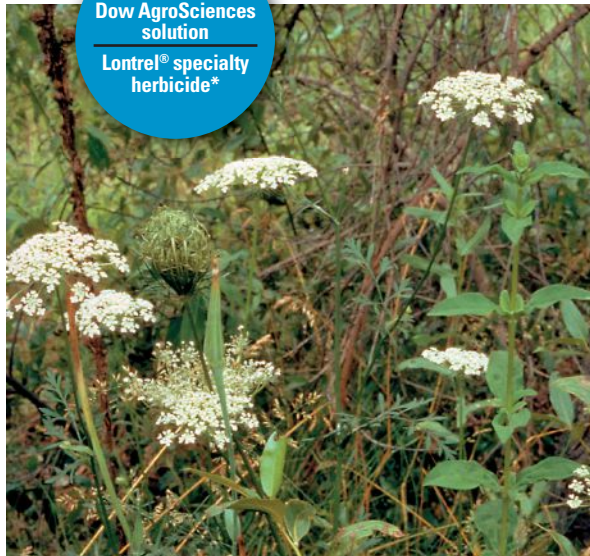
▶ Prostrate stems, 1 to 2 in. in length, grow from a taproot.

CONTROL TIPS

▶ Clean up any established black medic using a post-emergent herbicide containing two or more auxinic herbicides, such as clopyralid, triclopyr or fluoxypyr. Time your application in spring or fall.

▶ Control starts with elimination of seed production, as each plant can produce thousands of seeds. Black medic germinates when soil temperatures are between 50° F and 75° F. Apply a pre-emergent herbicide prior to germination, or just after elimination via post-emergent control.

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WILD CARROT

Daucus carota

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ This biennial resembles a garden carrot in its first year of growth. Also known as Queen Anne's lace, it produces a rosette of lobed, deeply dissected leaves in the first year of growth.

▶ Leaves have long petioles, hairless on the upper surface, but may have hairs on the veins and margins of the lower surface. The foliage has a carrot-like odor.

▶ During its second year, the plant starts producing stalks with umbels of

numerous small white, flat-topped flowers.

CONTROL TIPS

▶ Apply a post-emergent herbicide when the wild carrot is in the seedling stage. Yearly applications are necessary to control the young seedlings that emerge from the seed bank.

▶ This weed species thrives in sandy and undisturbed areas. A well-maintained lawn with thick dense turf can outcompete the establishment of wild carrot.

* State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension and Lontrel apply.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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