

THE DESIGNER

Landscape Ontario
DESIGNERS SECTOR

Spring/Summer 2026
Quarterly Newsletter



Joe Bidermann, CLD, CLT



Welcome to the second edition of *The Designer*!

Our first edition published in February featured insightful articles from Paul Brydges, Chris Lamer, Haig Seferian and other industry voices, along with topics such as the Certified Landscape Designer program, horticultural therapy and more. We also invited readers to share what they'd like to see in future editions, and your responses were incredible!

As landscape designers, we are in a truly unique position. We are more than designers — we are connectors. We collaborate with clients, suppliers, contractors, sub-trades, fellow designers and the many moving parts that bring outdoor spaces to life. We wear many hats and we rarely fit into just one category. That's what makes this profession so dynamic — we are multi-passionate by nature.

What inspires you most about your work? What drives your creativity and passion? Do you have a story you'd like to share in our next issue? We want to hear from you! If you're enjoying this newsletter, be sure to subscribe so you don't miss future issues, upcoming events, industry insights and inspiration along the way.

This is just the beginning.

Heather Jerrard

Owner/Designer at My Landscape Artist

Vice chair, Landscape Ontario Designers Sector Group

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EDITORIAL CURATOR:
Lexi Dearborn, CLD

MANAGING EDITOR:
Robert Ellidge

COPY EDITOR:
Karina Sinclair

TEMPLATE DESIGN:
Daniel Mazur, BLA, ADLD

The Designer is an initiative of Landscape Ontario's Landscape Designers Sector Group — comprised of member volunteers who promote and advocate the expertise and services of those within the sector and provide education, networking and learning opportunities to both members and non-members with the goal of elevating the profession. Learn more about this and other Designer Sector Group initiatives and events [online](#).

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membership@landscapeontario.com
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Design life

Skeletons in the closet Our secret thoughts!

By Lexi Dearborn, CLD

I think every landscape designer experiences doubts at some point in their career. I know I have.

That inner voice in the back of my mind that whispers, “You’re not good enough. What were you thinking? Someone is bound to realize you have no clue what you’re doing. Why are you selling yourself as a landscape designer?”



But that inner voice can also inspire and motivate you to be a better designer.

When I take a moment to reflect, I realize those moments of doubt were amazing growth opportunities. They motivated me to learn new skills, expand my knowledge, connect with like-minded people, take chances, shift from overthinking to focusing on results, hit the gym and unwind, find my balance or set strong boundaries.

I welcome moments of doubt rather than ignore or dismiss them. Use those doubts to inspire and propel you forward. No one will believe in you if you don’t believe in yourself.

Imposter syndrome

When talking with fellow landscape designers, I’ve come to realize that many of us face a similar challenge — impostor syndrome. Oxford English Dictionary defines it as: “The persistent inability to believe that one’s success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one’s own efforts or skills.”

I’ve experienced it. I spent years feeling like I was fooling clients into hiring me. The reality was I was capable, but I just didn’t believe in myself.

It’s eye-opening to me that even the most talented and successful designers, those I have admired and looked up to for years, have faced similar doubts.

How did I move forward? Earning the Certified Landscape Designer (CLD) credential was a rewarding journey that truly reshaped how I see myself as a designer. It felt like a homecoming — a moment of belonging that wiped out any doubts or imposter syndrome I had.

> *Continued*



Perhaps this could be your way forward too. Either way, it's okay to explore and see what feels right for you.

Getting unstuck

Everyone hits a snag at some point — it's just part of the creative process. But what we need to focus on is how to get unstuck.

Initially, I would spend hours at my computer trying to find the right solution to a complex design problem. That approach didn't work; it just wasted time. Now, I walk away. If I don't find a solution to a problem within the first half hour or so, I leave it alone. I go to the gym, take a walk, call a friend or have a nap (napping is good). The point is, I let the problem simmer on the back burner for a while. And you know what? During that break, the solution often comes to me. That's when, and only when, I head back to the computer and resume work on that drawing. It's okay to get stuck. You just need to find what works for you to get unstuck.

Embrace who you are

Not all landscape designers do the same work and that's a wonderful thing! It would be really boring if we all produced the same designs. Spirea and junipers for everyone! Not that I'm saying there isn't a place for spirea and junipers...

Having a diverse group with their own skills allows us to meet a wide variety of needs in an ever-growing market. Each of us brings our own unique style and twist to a design. Every design has a thousand solutions based on the client's wishes. Whether it's residential, commercial, parkside or roadside, there's a place for everyone to shine. As you mature as a designer, the right clients and projects will come to you. I know it's a bit of 'woo-woo' thinking; however, it happens. The right people will find you.

Remember, our competition isn't with each other but with other luxury items like a new fridge, a bigger TV or a faster car that clients might spend their available dollars on.

When you truly embrace who you are as a landscape designer — the good and the bad — you'll discover your unique niche, the people who resonate with your work and the projects that excite you. It's really about knowing yourself and believing the phone will ring again or the next email will bring a new and exciting opportunity.

Lexi Dearborn approaches life with enthusiasm and a strong focus on achieving results. She takes pride in providing unique solutions for her design clients and is passionate about design and the business behind it. As an award-winning landscape designer with Dearborn Designs in Barrie, Ont., she brings over 25 years of hands-on experience in design and construction.

We're looking for stories, ideas and voices from across Canada. If you have a story idea or want to contribute to a future edition, reach out to Lexi Dearborn at lexi@dearborndesigns.com

Feature

Designing with purpose

Reusing materials in the modern landscape

By John Bright, CLD



As designers, we're often challenged to create outdoor spaces that balance beauty, function, sustainability and budget. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through thoughtful material re-use. While repurposing isn't always the best or even a possible option — especially on technical builds or sites that require engineered solutions — when it is appropriate, the results can be truly breathtaking. Re-used materials bring story, soul and authenticity to a landscape, all while reducing waste and helping clients stretch their investment. Here are some refined, design-forward ways to bring new life to old materials.

Reusing lumber with character

Old fences, weathered decks and even packing materials like skids are often overlooked, yet their texture and patina offer a richness that new lumber can't replicate. Reclaimed boards can be transformed into warm, expressive design elements: cladding for a feature wall, or subtle screening that softens boundaries.

Their imperfections — knots, wear, weathering — become part of the design language. When sanded, sealed or stained with intention, reclaimed lumber shifts from “scrap” to boutique detail, adding depth, warmth and a sense of place to a modern landscape.

Extra concrete bags: Simple, custom solutions

Leftover concrete bags are a common, often forgotten material — but they can be turned into custom features that bring a refined, curated feel to a project. Even small amounts of concrete can be used to create:

- **Outdoor kitchen countertops:** With simple formwork, you can pour sleek, durable surfaces that feel handcrafted and high end.
- **Custom side tables or small surfaces:** A modest pour becomes a sculptural table, plinth or accent block that complements a modern aesthetic.
- **Stepping stones:** Casting your own stones allows for control over shape, scale and texture, resulting in pathways that feel cohesive and intentional.

Using extra concrete thoughtfully keeps waste down while adding custom, design-driven moments throughout the landscape.

Transplanting: Giving plants a second or third home

Reusing plants is one of the most rewarding — and often overlooked ways to repurpose materials. Relocating

> Continued



perennials within a site, transplanting shrubs from another property or incorporating donated plants can instantly enrich a design.

Mature plants offer immediate structure and softness without the premium price tag of nursery-grown specimens. Their history adds quiet character, and their established root systems often help them thrive in their new setting.

Transplanting does require consideration: timing, species and site conditions matter, and when it works, it beautifully marries sustainability with lush, full planting design.

Refurbishing site furniture

Before discarding old outdoor furniture, it's worth considering its potential. With a bit of sanding, a fresh coat of paint, new slats or updated hardware, dated pieces can be transformed into refined, functional additions that align with a new landscape vision.

Wood can be refinished, metal can be powder-coated and even older resin pieces can sometimes be revived or restyled. Not everything is worth saving, but many pieces are, and the transformation can be surprisingly elegant. This approach keeps items out of the landfill while contributing to a curated, lived-in look.

Reusing existing pavers or slabs

Lift-and-relay projects are one of the most practical and impactful ways to re-use materials. Existing pavers and slabs can be cleaned, re-leveled and given entirely new purpose.

Rather than discarding materials that still have years of life left, they can be:

- Combined with new pavers for a custom blend.
- Repurposed as stepping stones.
- Reimagined in pathways, courtyards or utility areas.

Blending old with new creates a layered, designer feel — one that's unique, intentional and budget-friendly.

Why re-use matters

Reusing materials isn't about cutting corners — it's about designing with intention. When handled with care, repurposed elements add character, reduce waste and help stretch project budgets without sacrificing style.

Giving materials a second life can lead to unexpected moments of beauty: reclaimed lumber adds warmth, leftover concrete becomes sculptural, transplanted plants offer instant maturity and reused hardscape provides structure at little cost.

When used thoughtfully, re-use never feels like a compromise. It feels personalized, practical and purposeful.

In the end, some of the most memorable landscapes begin with materials already on site — simply waiting for a fresh start.

John Bright, CLD, is a London, Ont.-based landscape designer known for crafting modern, forward-thinking outdoor spaces with a refined approach to small-scale living. As the owner and principal designer of BRIGHT design studio, he leads the creation of high-end, thoughtfully curated landscapes designed for real living.

Feature

Design, process and style

By Joe Bidermann, CLD, CLT

I've always had my own ideas about doing things differently. I questioned why the same materials and plants were used repeatedly, so I experimented and found success with using different materials. Being in the field and designing my own projects has significantly improved my skills as a designer. I'm constantly reinventing myself, discovering new sources of inspiration and, when the situation calls for it, incorporating what I believe is best for the client. I've experienced many successes and failures, from which I have always learned and continue to do so to this day.

Design process

I could talk for hours about my process and I still would miss important facts. First, it is not my design process, but ours. I am part of a large team and my work plays only one part in our design-build process.

At the initial consultation, I try to gather as much information from my client as possible. I also get to see their home, which leaves breadcrumbs for me about their style and taste. I explore family situations, children, pets, lifestyle habits and the predominant use of the future landscape as well as current site conditions. I take images



from both the ground and the air. If the client permits, I record an audio file of our conversation (aging doesn't help remembering!).

The next phase of the design process is collecting site data. Is there a site survey, building plans for a new build or renovation and so on?

With the information gathered, I start working on the base plan. > *Continued*





I use SketchUp for all my drawings because it is very user-friendly and allows me to customize keyboard shortcuts. It also gives me the option to convert my 2D drawing into 3D at any time, without having to start over in another piece of software.

After the client reviews the initial concept draft, I will incorporate any changes or ideas that emerge from this meeting. Each presentation is accompanied by a budget, ensuring the client knows the project's estimated cost at every stage of the design process. We start with a broader overview and provide more detailed cost information as we progress.

At the end of the design process, the client receives both 2D site plans with accurate measurements and elevations and, if they choose, photorealistic 3D rendered images or animations of their future landscape.

After the client signs off on the drawings, plans and estimate, I will work on the Issued for Construction (IFC) drawings for our crews. This doesn't take very long, as I am already organizing my files as I design. However, detailed construction drawings need to be added so the crews can efficiently execute the designs. This is also the time when I work on detailing the planting plans, lighting and woodworking shop drawings.

After the handover to operations, I am still on call for the crews to refine any end stage design decisions or changes that might crop up! That wraps up my design process on a very high level.

Design style

Lastly, my designs are driven by my client's style, not mine.



A well-designed landscape should reflect the client's taste and style; however, I sometimes suggest different style options when it is in my client's best interest. I see myself more as a facilitator. As a responsible designer and team member, I'm aware of my crew's skill levels. To be part of a profitable operation, they need to execute my designs efficiently and delight the client. That is ultimately what keeps the lights on.

Joe Bidermann, CLD, CLT, studied environmental sciences in Germany before relocating to Shelburne, N.S. He founded Joe Bidermann Landscaping in 1994, a company focused on creating natural landscapes that complement the East Coast terrain. Currently, Joe is a Red Seal Horticulturist and award-winning landscape designer employed at Trim Landscaping in Halifax, N.S.

Finding my path

Meaningful, impactful design

Landscapes grow into the stories of the people who use them

By **Dr. Ron Koudys**, FCSLA, FASLA, RLA, OALA, CLD

The beginning

My journey into this profession began early, long before I realized that “landscape architecture” was a recognized discipline. I spent my childhood working alongside my father and grandfather, mowing lawns, trimming hedges and learning to care for the land with simple tools and a lot of discipline. No string-line trimmers or blowers back then.

By grade eight, I was already sure this was the world I wanted to belong to. I wrote a letter to the University of Guelph asking what courses I should take in high school to prepare myself to become a landscape architect. Their reply — “It doesn’t really matter, do well” — set me on a focused path and from that point forward, I never wavered. The profession aligned with my love of nature, design, problem-solving and working with people. It felt inevitable. It still does.

My greatest joy: Positive impact design

I have been fortunate to work with wonderful clients who have presented challenging and inspiring projects over the years. Their trust has enabled me to explore new ideas, refine my approach and grow as a professional. I’ve also had the privilege of collaborating with an exceptional team at my firm, Ron Koudys Landscape Architects Inc. Their creativity, dedication and commitment to quality have driven many successful projects, and I am continually inspired by the incredible talent surrounding me. Today, one of the greatest joys of my career is seeing how the landscapes I’ve designed have positively impacted the lives of those who use them: families, employees, seniors, students and entire communities.



My dream projects blend ecological restoration, community engagement and compelling storytelling, bringing people together, restoring habitats and honouring the area’s cultural history.

Creating meaningful design

One project that remains especially meaningful to me is the therapeutic garden we designed for the Schlegel seniors’ community. This garden was created for residents living with a wide range of cognitive and physical challenges, and it needed to serve not just as a beautiful outdoor space, but as a place that supported therapy, comfort, dignity and daily life.

Designing the garden required us to carefully consider how seniors navigate space, how memory and perception change over time, and how outdoor environments can promote independence while still ensuring safety and clarity. We designed the space with gentle pathways, familiar plants, places to rest and opportunities for meaningful engagement, including a large pond that became a focal point of activity and enjoyment.

One story that has stayed with me involves a husband who came every day to visit his wife. During one of his visits, he noticed staff feeding the fish in the pond. Curious, he wandered over to watch and soon found himself helping. Over time, he took on this responsibility himself. Now, he comes each day not only to see his wife but to tend to the fish.



> *Continued*



What began as a simple moment of curiosity grew into a ritual that gave him a renewed sense of purpose. He became part of the community, greeting staff, talking with other families and adding to the joy residents feel when they gather around the pond. By caring for that small ecosystem, he contributed to the life of the place, and in turn, the place enriched his own life.

Designing the Schlegel Garden was meaningful because it brought everything I value about landscape architecture together: empathy, evidence-based design, interdisciplinary collaboration and the creation of spaces that genuinely improve people’s lives. Watching how the garden fosters connection, purpose and emotional well-being has been deeply rewarding. Even years later, the

garden continues to evolve and support the community — an enduring reminder that landscapes grow into the stories of the people who use them.

No place like home

The best place in the world to be is right here in Canada. Our diverse climates, cultures and communities offer endless opportunities for meaningful, impactful design. It is a privilege to contribute to the landscapes that shape daily life in this wonderful country.

Over a 43-year career, Dr. Ron Koudys, CLD, has advanced landscape architecture through teaching, industry involvement, lectures, publications, volunteer efforts and mentoring.



Click the video to learn more about the many career benefits of industry certification

Designer Spotlight

Jennifer Hayman

Crafting gardens that connect, restore and inspire

By Lexi Dearborn, CLD

For Jennifer Hayman, landscape design is more than a career — it's a way to create spaces that transform how people live, connect and experience nature. Known for her thoughtful, immersive designs, Hayman has built a reputation for turning gardens into extensions of the home: restorative, playful and deeply personal.

Her journey began with plants. After a season as a landscape designer at Weall and Cullen, she realized how much she loved applying her horticultural knowledge to real projects — and seeing families enjoy the spaces she helped shape. “What surprised me most was how much I enjoyed designing the other aspects of a project,” she says. “It was incredibly fulfilling to see people spending time outside in spaces I had helped create.”

A desire to deepen her understanding of design led Hayman to the Garden Design Course in Oxford, England. “Spending a year fully immersed in design was



transformative,” she recalled. “It confirmed that landscape architecture was the career I wanted to dedicate myself to.”

Gardening runs in her family. With relatives who owned apple orchards and grandmothers who tended large vegetable gardens, Hayman was steeped in horticulture from a young age. Yet it was her mother's devotion to cottage-style borders that left the strongest impression. “After she passed away, gardening became a way to process grief and stay connected to her,” Hayman said. “Over time, it evolved into a true passion.”

Hayman's dream projects reflect her love of history, scale and storytelling in landscape design. “I've always imagined working on a Heritage Trust property in England or a grand chateau in France,” she said. “There's something magical about gardens where every plant, path and material tells a story about the people and eras that shaped them. That narrative is at the heart of my approach.”

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Her design philosophy is people-focused. Hayman creates outdoor spaces that foster connections between family members, with nature and even within oneself. “I aim to harmonize a home’s architecture with the way a family actually lives,” she said. “I love designing gardens that encourage movement, spark conversation and engage all the senses. When clients tell me their garden has become their favourite room, I know we’ve succeeded.”

The process begins with listening. Initial calls and a landscape design discovery session help Hayman understand the client’s vision, followed by on-site analysis and collaboration with trades as needed. Concept plans, design boards and detailed working drawings guide the project to completion. She also offers online and on-site consultations for DIY homeowners.

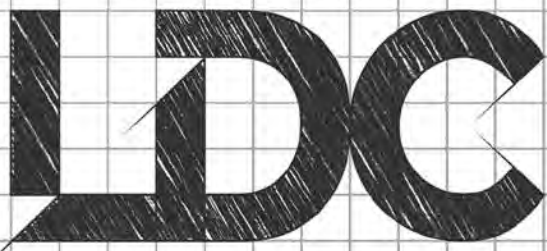
One standout project is the Urban Spa in Lawrence Park, Toronto, Ont. Initially a modest backyard, it became an immersive retreat for the family during the pandemic. Hayman and her team navigated constraints like a mature oak and its tree protection zone, transforming the space

into a series of terraces leading to a Fiji plunge pool, limestone lounging areas, a fire feature and lush, layered gardens. “The project combined creativity, problem-solving and continuity,” she said. “Seeing the clients enjoy their backyard — using it as a spa, office and sanctuary — was incredibly rewarding.” The design went on to win multiple awards, including the CNLA Circle of Excellence and the Neil Vanderkruk Award for Excellence in Design.

Though her work spans locations and styles, Hayman finds inspiration at home in Barrie, Ont. Surrounded by forests and overlooking the bay, she experiences the full drama of seasonal change — a perspective that shapes her pragmatic, nature-forward approach. “Wherever I am, I want to create spaces that connect people with nature and make life more serene and restorative,” she said.

For Hayman, landscape design is never just about plants or patios; it’s about crafting environments that enhance life. Every garden she creates tells a story, nurtures well-being and invites people to pause, breathe and reconnect with what matters most.





LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS CONFERENCE

SAVE THE DATE!
JANUARY 11, 2027
DELTA HOTEL TORONTO

Colouring Outside the Lines!

What happens when creativity refuses to stay inside the box?

The 2027 Landscape Designers Conference will celebrate bold thinking, fearless creativity and those designers who redefine what outdoor spaces can be. From innovative planting combinations and unexpected materials to emotionally driven design and client connection, this conference is all about pushing boundaries and designing with purpose, personality and passion.

Join industry professionals, creative minds and landscape visionaries for inspiring conversations, fresh ideas and practical insights that challenge conventional thinking and spark new possibilities. Because the best designs don't come from following the rules – they come from having the confidence to rewrite them.

Whether you're an emerging designer or a seasoned professional, this is your invitation to think bigger, design bolder and start colouring outside the lines.

Registration opens in September

Get Certified!

Becoming a Certified Landscape Designer is more than earning a title — it's a commitment to creativity, technical excellence, professionalism and lifelong learning.



Certification demonstrates proven industry knowledge, design ability, construction understanding, plant expertise, and the ability to create outdoor spaces that are both functional and inspiring.

Certification is not just a career milestone — it's a way to elevate the industry, build trust with clients, and turn a passion for outdoor living into meaningful, lasting design.

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