DESIGN
with
the
end
in
MIND

by

J. MARK SMITH
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................i

Introduction ...........................................................................................................iii

**CHAPTER ONE:**
What It Is .............................................................................................................1

**CHAPTER TWO:**
Lisa Finds Out Why .............................................................................................25

**CHAPTER THREE:**
Where We Use It ..................................................................................................41

**CHAPTER FOUR:**
Predictability & Sustainability ...........................................................................55

**CHAPTER FIVE:**
Growth Thresholds & Life Cycles .......................................................................73

**CHAPTER SIX:**
How Do We Do It? .................................................................................................93

Epilogue .................................................................................................................112

Afterword ..............................................................................................................115

Cost Comparison (Senario 1) .............................................................................121

Lifecycle Input Data ..............................................................................................122

Cost Comparison (Senario 2) .............................................................................123

Regional Plants Southeast ....................................................................................124

Appendix A:
The Missing Chapter On Water ..........................................................................133
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Nothing successful happens without two critical
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During the course of my life I’ve been fortunate
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We are a product of our past experiences and the people we have been fortunate to learn from. As you can imagine, there are too many to list here, but thanks to all who have helped me along this journey.
Life is change, they say, and that certainly includes technology. The tools we use for our jobs, the ways we do research, and our ways of communicating, all are changing at a fast pace.

The field of landscaping is no different. Doing things the same old way simply because it’s how they’ve always been done doesn’t make sense anymore, especially when there’s a better way. That new and better way is what I hope to bring to you with this book. It’s called Environmental Design, or as I refer to it here, E-Design™.

The new century finds us at a precipice of thought, in this country and the rest of the world. We have an opportunity to build a community of thought leaders – that creative class of people who have the insight and confidence to innovate and promote positive, practical
ideas — who can move the rest of the world to help protect our environment. Imagine a type of landscaping where maintenance costs were around thirty-five percent of what they are now. Imagine landscaping that maintains the great look of the original design while the plants live longer, require less watering and pruning, and lead to lower restoration costs — and with less collateral damage than you’d think is possible for traditional landscaping in the Southeast. Imagine landscaping that has an immediate impact on both the environment’s health and your company’s bottom line. E-Design™ is that new landscaping. E-Design™ provides all of those “imaginings” and more.

Now, scale that down a bit. Make it personal. Imagine a landscape design strategy that lets you and your family live in a more comfortable environment, and by “environment” I mean all the life situations that make up your daily experience. I mean saving your family money, time, and energy. Taking the time you spend with your spouse, your children, doing yardwork, tossing a football, washing laundry, whatever, and making it a pleasant, un-stressful
experience. How? You’ll have more time, and as we all know, time can have a huge impact on your emotions — especially when there’s not enough of it.

The E-Design™ model isn’t just a landscaping strategy. It’s a philosophy intended to conserve our most valuable resources: time, money, energy, and nature itself. I believe that, by designing with an end result in mind — as opposed to traditional design, which only deals with the immediate effect — we can control distractions, interruptions, and other unnecessary waste. If we’re able to think along these lines, we can improve our quality of life, our immediate environment, our bottom line, and our planet.

Landscaping today is a drain on money, the environment, and material and human resources. This book is a call to action to become involved in a movement. We are all here to grow a sustainable model for future generations. Simply put, we’ll choose to live in the past and destroy ourselves, or move forward and save ourselves. Buying and planting the wrong trees, shrubs, and grasses costs a lot, in both the short and long term. Landscaping in a way that’s environ-
mentally unfriendly saps your time every step of the way, be it planting, maintenance, pruning, or replacing. Misplanted trees and poorly chosen plants can be destructive, lead to more spending on man-hours and cause more wear and tear on equipment. Plus, the extra time it takes to manage traditional landscape designs gives us less control over our lives, not to mention the quality of the landscaping.

E-Design™ is a solution to all that. E-Design™ reduces waste, increases productivity, prolongs the useful life of landscape plants, and cuts costs, both monetary and human, for homeowners and businesses everywhere. In short, E-Design™ is a landscaping concept that is sustainable — from an ecological, engineering and conservation standpoint.

At its core, E-Design™ is a way for all of us in the landscaping industry to make the world a better place. Those of us in professions that work directly with the Earth — developers, architects, skilled providers, and so forth — have a tremendous opportunity to have a positive impact on our environment, and on the future. In fact, I believe it’s our
responsibility to do our part to protect the Earth. We can’t afford to keep doing things the way they’ve always been done, and I don’t believe the consumer will pay us to continue doing it. Traditional design wastes their resources, and ours. Owners wind up paying more than they need to for our services, and our margins are smaller because we’re paying more than necessary for supplies. In this new world, we need to build efficient, easy-to-maintain designs that cost less and use fewer resources. It’s the only way.

Developers and owners who make the changes I call for in this book will see easier maintenance, decreased production costs, fewer related expenses, and longer lives for their plants and tools. Landscapers, designers, maintenance technicians and homeowners will all benefit from E-Design™. Everyone — every single person — who uses this method will end up finding time during the day, during the weekend, during the summer that wasn’t there before. E-Design™ provides a holistic design service that protects their time, their money, and their planet, and looks as fantastic as our imaginations will allow.
But I’m not going to convince you without evidence. In this book, I’ll introduce you to two new friends: Paul and Lisa. Paul and Lisa own P&L Designs, a firm that offers both landscape design and maintenance, but is firmly entrenched in doing things the old way. Take a journey with them through the fundamentals of new, environmentally conscious landscape design. Together, the three of you will discover:

- **What E-Design™ is**
- **Why I created E-Design™**
- **How to use E-Design™**
- **When and where to use E-Design™**
- **The five pillars of successful landscape design**

At the end of this book, Paul and Lisa should be fully ready for the future of landscaping. They’ll be better able to save time, money, energy and materials, and they’ll be doing their part to help preserve our planet and our environment. It is my hope that you will read this book carefully and with an open mind. And if you pay close attention, you’ll be in the same positive position as Paul and Lisa. Let’s go!
We can easily learn to stop wasting resources, so let’s do it!
Waste isn’t just not using what you have. It’s also doing more than you need to do. Let’s say your car has an engine designed for 87 octane fuel; would you pay the extra money for 89 octane fuel, even if it didn’t benefit the car or your mileage? Of course not. So, shouldn’t the same strategy also apply to businesses? What I mean is that the market should only pay for what it needs. Desires are powerful, but they can’t be fulfilled at the expense of creating waste.

Lisa learned about gardening from her grandmother, so she came by her passion for nature and horticulture honestly. She watched her grandmother plant seeds, and afterward got to watch them grow while she gained a fine sense of the difference care can make in the quality of both plant and fruit. Lisa inherited an artistic eye from her father, who, she
always told me, could take a blank canvas and make it come to life. She is pretty with strawberry blonde, shoulder-length hair and an ever-present smile. Smart and driven, she is also nurturing; she knows what she wants and does what it takes to get it, but cares for and cultivates her clients as if they were her own garden.

Paul is more of a salt-of-the-earth type. A broad-shouldered ex-football player, he used his experience reading the opposing team’s formations in his work; “It’s all about the details” was his personal motto. He was the type of person you’d like to have leading your team, watching over your assets. After graduating college in three years with a degree in Finance, Paul wanted to work with his hands and see the effects of his work. When he met Lisa and learned of her aspirations as a landscape designer, he saw a chance to join his knack for numbers with his love of the outdoors. He jumped at it. Together, Paul and Lisa made a great team, one that was able to put together a successful small business.

Paul and Lisa own P&L Designs, or PLD. They
have a pretty good business and have been turning a steady profit during the six years since incorporat-
ing. But, like most other small businesses, they be-
gan to search for ways to cut back during the recent economic downturn.

While looking at PLD’s expenses for the previous two fiscal years, Paul realized the company was spending an awful lot on its own maintenance. Paul and Lisa had done all their own landscaping for PLD headquarters. They wanted potential customers to see a great design when they came to PLD — and they wanted to be able to tell the new prospects that, yes, as a matter of fact, we created that “wonderful landscape” you’re admiring. Still, the costs of upkeep on their landscape design were troubling. *If only I could reduce these maintenance costs*, thought Paul. *Maybe my crews don’t need to be mowing, trimming and pruning every week.*

As friendly competitors in the landscaping field, Paul and Lisa have occasionally run into me at net-
working functions and industry events. One of these events began on a cold, rainy evening in November,
just at the start of the horticultural calendar. By this time, landscapers have seeded their clients’ cool-season grasses, and are busy nurturing trees and shrubs through the winter rainfall, as their root structures prepare for the hot summer days to come. At this particular landscapers’ get-together, our encounter was anything but by chance. Paul walked right up to me and said, “You and I need to talk.”

Paul and I sat down at a table. “Mark, you and I talk all the time about this industry,” Paul said, “about common problems and ways to improve things. And for sure, we’ve swapped our fair share of gripes and groans about the pitfalls of landscaping. But, you know, I’ve never once heard you complain about high maintenance costs. Why is that? What’s your secret?”

I admit I thought about my answer very carefully. Should I share industry secrets with a direct competitor? Then I realized that if I didn’t, I’d be doing Paul, Lisa, and the entire industry a disservice. “Paul, I’ve developed a new approach to landscaping that I call E-Design™. Basically, it’s about designing with the
end in mind, rather than just the immediate aesthetic result.”

In other words, E-Designers aren’t just thinking about the immediate look. The overall life of the design — including its usefulness, its aesthetic life, and the length of time it can be reasonably sustained and maintained — are just as important as what the design looks like on the day the trucks and mowers pull away from the property.

When Paul asked why E-Design™ works, I answered with my own simple question: “Paul, what would you say is your chief concern right now, in terms of PLD’s cash flow?”

“I’ve got to reduce expenses, so I’m looking at my maintenance costs,” he replied. “We have to cut down on the time our crews spend taking care of our property. If I could get those costs down, we’d be seeing healthy cash flow and better profits.”

“I’m going to tell you something you’re not going to like,” I warned him. “You’re thinking about this all wrong. You’re coming at the problem backwards.”
Simply put, useful life ends when a plant ceases to be an asset to your design and becomes a liability. When a plant loses its aesthetic value — grows too large or too quickly, or grows an obtrusive root structure — it becomes a liability to your building and surrounding land. When the cost of maintaining a plant becomes unreasonable, it becomes a liability to your pocketbook. When a plant’s placement and growth begin to cause damage to surrounding land, structures or plants, it becomes a liability. Its useful life is at an end.
By the look on his face, I was right. Paul wasn’t happy. Smiling, I went on.

“Right now, you’re looking at your costs as payment for necessary maintenance, am I right?” He nodded, and I continued. “This is the part you really won’t like. I’m here to tell you that that maintenance is, for the most part, unnecessary. That what you’re doing is wasting time, effort, and money on maintenance you wouldn’t need to do, if you put more thought into the life cycles of your plants and where they’re placed.”

Paul still wasn’t smiling. I didn’t blame him. I continued.

“The waste of money didn’t begin with the maintenance, though. You started wasting money when you chose and placed the plants for your design. I hate to say it, but the landscape you designed was wasting money the minute the plants were picked.

“I know, because I did the very same thing. For years. Finally, I took a look at the plants I was choosing and considered some alternatives. After years of research and experimentation, I began to