

From stockbroker to the APL Awards' supreme winner this year – Landscapes by Design's Stuart Reid is reaping the rewards of trading the city for the outdoors

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When Stuart Reid put Landscapes by Design's project, Apollo, in for this year's APL Awards, he'd expected at least a Gold – but like everyone else who enters, he'd hoped to win Best in Category. What never crossed his mind was taking home the Association of Professional Landscapers' Supreme Award, which is exactly what happened at the ceremony on 14 March at The Brewery in London.

"Sometimes I still feel like we're this little landscaping company from Essex that no-one knows, so it's great to be recognised at these awards in front of loads of high-end landscapers," says Reid. "We thought the design and the build of the garden commanded an award, but when you're building it, that's not what you're thinking. We just built it to the same high specification and technique and attention that we do all our gardens."

He thought the spaceship – yes, you read that right – might make it stand out. The client, who Reid used to go to school with, loved the design by DesignScape's Paul Newman but wanted one more item added. He'd seen Apollo in Timothy Oulton's studio in London and wondered if Newman and Reid could fit it in.



"I thought it would be a mirrored sculpture at first but when he turned around his iPad, it was a spaceship. I told him I'd buy it the next day so it could be delivered as soon as possible for us to build the garden around it."

The stainless steel capsule is built to the same scale as Apollo 11, with a plush, padded interior surrounding a table with a chandelier dangling over it. It's undoubtedly a focal point, but the rest of the garden is equally as impressive.

Landscapes by Design had to overcome challenges with drainage, utilising a large soakaway area, and move a considerable amount of soil to create the sunken seating area. "Then there's the number of cuts needed to achieve the end result – the majority of the stone was mitred or bull nosed, which was all done on site and by hand. There were 12 people on site at times, from electricians to structural engineers. It was technically challenging, but we had a great client." The luxury entertainment space now features a ▶

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modern bar area, a large high-definition TV screen and a custom-built seating area with a fire pit at the centre – all unsurprisingly putting it firmly in the ‘Project Value over £250,000’ category.

This isn’t unusual for Landscapes by Design, though, which Reid says can take on anything from a quarter of a million-pound project to a garden path. He’s built up the company’s reputation over the last 25 years, founding it after leaving his job as a stockbroker in the city. With two children to support, his parents encouraged him to get a “proper job” as soon as possible and suggested landscaping.

“I’d always liked working with my hands and being outside, so it stemmed from that – no real thought went into it. I just started the company and enrolled in Writtle College on a three-year course, which I couldn’t even finish because I got so busy with work.”

Reid taking on a business partner five years ago has been pivotal for the company, though. “He’s not a landscaper; he’s my business mentor and one of my oldest friends who made me realise I was holding the business back by being too on the tools. I was losing money because I was being too fastidious in my approach and not realising

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the talent that I had working for me.

So, I came off the tools – under much duress and worry – and the business has grown ever since.”

It has sparked Reid to consider starting a podcast from a business perspective, aimed at young landscapers to help them understand where their skills lie – do they want to be artisans or run a business? “It’s very different, and that’s the way my business has gone. From a one-man-band with staff that came and went for 20 years to the last five years when it’s grown and grown. I’ve gotten people back that used to work for me and they now run the landscaping. So, I was definitely holding the business back.”

He’s now in the office full-time with office manager Charlotte Barrett, which has given him the opportunity to focus on the business, quoting, and going to see clients – as well as entering awards. “The company can sustain it now, whereas five years ago, I wouldn’t have had the time.”

Landscapes by Design became a member of the APL a few years ago to help the

business too. The cluster meetings offered a chance to speak to others running similar businesses to understand the challenges that they’re facing and to help set a benchmark for the company’s performance. It also boosts your confidence and credibility, says Reid. “We’re all



vetted and there’s a set of rules you have to stick to, so from my point of view, the APL is essential, especially for up-and-coming landscapers that need to build client trust before they even break ground.”

It’s certainly proven beneficial for Landscapes by Design which, far from being an unknown company, has become a hot topic and no doubt an inspiration for those hoping to secure their own Supreme Award one day.