

# “IT’S ABOUT TAKING SOMETHING FROM THE CLIENT THAT SIMPLY RESONATES WITH THEM, AND USING THAT AS YOUR INSPIRATION TO DESIGN THEIR GARDEN”



Pro Landscaper sits down with **Adam Vetere**, Supreme Winner at Pro Landscaper’s small project BIG IMPACT Awards 2022, as he reflects on travelling the world, seven-figure commissions and the art of self-promotion

**S**ome are born into the industry. Others follow a more corporate path before transitioning into the world of landscaping later in life. For Adam Vetere, it’s a little of both.

Founder of his own company, Adam Vetere Landscape and Garden Design, Vetere says his career can be divided into three phases. “When I was growing up, my father ran a landscaping company,” he says. “While taking my O-levels and A-levels – studying graphic design and technical drawing – I designed gardens for him. He was fantastic at building gardens, but he couldn’t design them for toffee!”

Having helped his father build some of the gardens he had designed, Vetere gained a foothold in landscaping from a young age, garnering an early appreciation of key components such as

drainage and soil. “I picked all of that up in the mid- to late-80s,” Vetere elaborates. “That was my grounding.”

Phase two saw Vetere take a completely different direction, heading into the world of corporate finance, where he remained for 28 years. He worked his way up from auditor/systems analyst at Ernst & Young in 1990 to Elliot Group’s global finance and commercial manager in 2015, yet landscaping was never far from his thoughts.

“Those roles allowed me to travel the world,” Vetere smiles. “I flew four or five times a month and visited gardens all over the world, from Japan and the Far East to the Americas and South Africa, and all over Europe. I built an understanding of plants, planting styles and landscape design in all four corners of the world.” ▶

Equally pertinent – and something that perhaps made Vetere’s eventual return to landscaping almost inevitable – was his continued interest in garden design, even as a hobby. “In my spare time, I used to design gardens for my friends and family,” Vetere explains. “I did that while sitting on a plane, and I would incorporate a lot of what I saw on my trips. I found it relaxing.”

**Hitting the ground running**

There are no prizes for guessing phase three. In 2016, while on a family holiday in Italy, Vetere finally made the decision to dramatically change his career path. In 2018, he studied for a garden design diploma at the London College of Garden Design, gaining a distinction. “It was probably two years of content squeezed into one,” Vetere says. “I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone starting out as a garden designer, because even with my background, I found that everything had moved on hugely.”

Sustainability, for instance, is much more significant than ever before. “There was much to learn about site analysis and investigation, taking design briefs, and how to make gardens personal and unique,” Vetere adds. “It’s so important to understand the inspiration for any given space.”

By 2022, Adam Vetere Landscape and Garden Design was already being commissioned work with over £1 million in construction value. Late last year, the business took on its first overseas client in Portugal. Vetere’s wife Heidi handles administration, deals and quotes, while three freelance designers have also been brought on board.

The question remains: how does one go from sketching friends’ gardens on a plane to



seven-figure contracts and multiple awards in such a short space of time? “I started the business while I was at the London College of Garden Design,” Vetere explains. “As far as I’m aware, nobody else did.”

He continues: “With any design-based job, Irrespective of which industry you’re in, images are all-important. Everything I designed at college was going straight up

onto my website. With the best will in the world, you’ve got to get yourself on the front page of Google. By having a website that was growing in maturity, filling it with content – be it images or blogs – my digital presence grew rapidly.”

This proactivity led to Vetere winning his first design contract before he’d even left college, which presented

a tricky yet altogether welcome balancing act. “I cannot overstate the importance of getting your digital presence and SEO right,” he says. “By the time I’d finished my diploma in the summer of 2019, I’d already designed two gardens and had another three in the pipeline.”

“It’s so important to understand the inspiration for any given space”

Having ostensibly mastered the art of digital marketing, Vetere quickly began to identify more physical opportunities. “I registered my own garden with the National Garden Scheme, which is a fantastic way to market yourself in two ways; ensuring people see your work while gaining plenty of face-time with prospective clients and contacts.” Taking his presence-building further, Vetere was featured in *Gardeners’ World* in September 2018 and began entering national awards.

All in all, however, Vetere believes designing “innovative, high-quality, uniquely personal gardens” have been the true key to his success. “It’s not just a case of putting a square patio here and a circular lawn there,” he says. “It’s about developing a relationship with the client, understanding their likes and dislikes, what motivates them, and taking something from them – whether it’s their life, or the history of the site – that simply resonates with them, and using that as your inspiration to design their garden.”

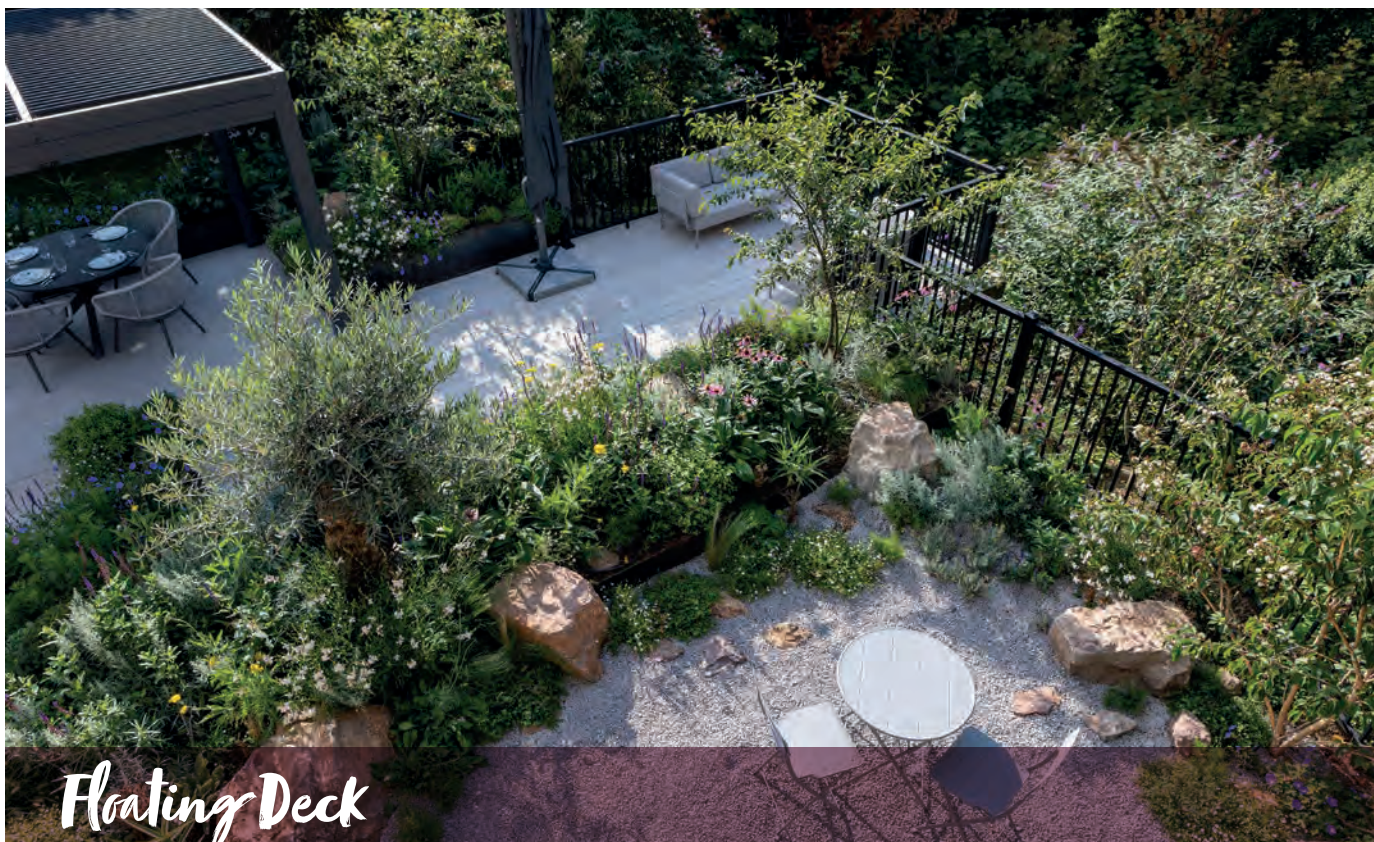
**Feathers in the cap**

This sonority evidently led to Adam Vetere Landscape and Garden Design being named Pro Landscaper’s Supreme Winner at the small project BIG IMPACT Awards 2022, with Vetere’s Floating Deck project receiving the highest total score from the judges across all nine categories.

The inspiration behind The Floating Deck was sparked by the client’s love of the Rocky Mountains. “The design and geometry of the garden were based on the silhouette of the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, explains Vetere. “When you took that vertically and transposed it horizontally, that gave you the shape and the geometry of the garden.”



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## Floating Deck

**T**his special feature not only created an impressive focal point within a unique and challenging setting, but also enabled the client to enjoy more of the garden. An escarpment within the garden dropped over 5m from the top to the bottom, and meant they were unable to use approximately 60% of their outdoor space as it was too dangerous.

Therefore, a sunken, cantilevered floating deck extending over the edge of the escarpment was core to the design. The structural integrity of the deck was paramount – all supporting structure was anchored into the ground within the level area of the garden and was structurally engineered by HLN.

The new deck covered 17m<sup>2</sup>, and the area which extended over the escarpment added a further 6.5m<sup>2</sup> to the usable space, allowing for an additional seating and dining area with pleasant views of the surrounding tree canopies. The seating area was screened for privacy by a pergola as well as multi-stemmed trees. An integrated water feature was also included to add even more interest, with three copper outlets flowing into a reservoir.

Provender Nurseries' Liz Hughes said of the project, "The Floating Deck is a fantastic scheme. The judges have called it 'a fantastic response to a significant problem', bringing the garden into use and removing the safety concerns. There is a high-quality finish to all aspects of this project.

"The clients of this fantastic deck now feel as though this addition, which simply added a very small usable space to the garden, has completed their outdoor space, and they now want to be outside in their garden all the time. A very worthy winner."

Speaking to Pro Landscaper shortly after the awards ceremony, Vetere was over the moon. "It's difficult to put in words: it's elation, it's joy, it's the recognition," he said. "Being recognised in the industry by your judging panel, it's a real feather in the cap and it's good for my business.

"As a collaboration with the contractor, which was really important, and for both of us to be there to receive the award, it really is a really special feeling." ▶



The accolade rounded off a strong year for Adam Vetere Landscape & Garden Design, having picked up the APL Designer of the Year award back in March. But just how much is business impacted by these honours? Vetere reiterates the importance of self-promotion. “If I didn’t do anything with them, I’m not sure it would have any impact on the sales side of the business. It’s vital to share that news as much as you can.

“That said, it does develop recognition within the industry. People stop and take notice; contractors and suppliers contact me now, rather than the other way around. Obviously, they want to sell their products and make money, but they also want to work with someone who’s creating gardens that are different, inspiring, and pushing the envelope. Good contractors like to have a challenge – something they’ve not done before, whether that’s simply different materials, or using more familiar materials in a new way.”

Business aside, Vetere adds that winning an award is “good for the soul”. “The buzz you get from winning an award is one you can’t repeat,” he says.

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**A post-COVID world**

Having managed such a successful year during a more than challenging economic period, what advice does Vetere have for those looking to adapt their businesses? “One of the first things I do now is establish the budget early doors,” he explains.

“You have to manage expectations while still talking up what a beautiful garden you’re going to design for the client. You can’t talk it down, of course – you have to win the contract in the first place! But you have to balance it with an element



of pragmatism and setting those expectations early.”

More specifically, Vetere points to a 200% to 300% rise in the price of steel alongside a multitude of cost concerns, be it wood, sand, cement, labour, machinery or transport, all of which have increased exponentially in recent years. “It costs so much to build a garden now,” he says.

“Aside from sustainability and biodiversity, it’s probably the biggest challenge for the industry – especially in the short term in terms of how much work there is to go around.

While the pandemic was (and still is) undeniably a significant drain on the industry, Vetere believes it led to people understanding the value of their gardens. “Both the mental and physical benefits of gardening were really brought to the fore,” he says. “Having a beautiful space outside helps to relax and get away from the stresses of life.”

**Looking ahead**

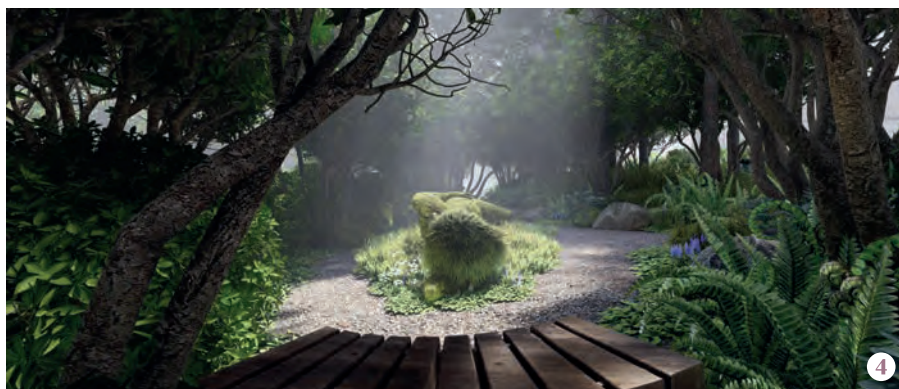
Vetere and his team are not slowing down since winning the awards and have a number of exciting projects, varying in sizes, coming up: an Elizabethan garden from the 15<sup>th</sup> century being remodelled into a more contemporary piece, a small Japanese inspired garden and a large project creating a garden reflecting the client’s childhood in Cornwall and work in Scandinavia.

Vetere says that while he is “not perfect, and never will be” a key focus for 2023 will be to “bang the sustainability drum more often”, with a particular focus on reducing hard landscaping where possible, and decreasing his use of cement-based products.

“I’m always looking to improve,” he says. “I do feel that sustainability in garden design is sometimes misunderstood. “For example, the use of steel can draw criticism due to the amount of heat and energy required. That’s absolutely true, of course, but you have to use a lot of heat in cement and concrete-based products too. And if you utilise steel retaining walls, you eliminate the need for concrete footings, blocks, mortar, and more.”

Vetere’s company is keen to increase the recycling of materials on-site, too. “I’ve had a desert garden for a number of years, and I need to get that into more of my client’s gardens. I’ve also been working on more drought-tolerant planting schemes, which I rolled out in 2022.

“You’ve got to work with nature; you can’t work against it.”



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