

# ADRIAN SWAIN

## FINDING THE RIGHT PATH TO LANDSCAPING



FROM STARTING OUT IN HIS DINING ROOM TO BECOMING DIRECTOR OF HIS AWARD-WINNING COMPANY, ADRIAN SWAIN HAS CLIMBED THE LADDER TO BECOME A RESPECTED LANDSCAPE DESIGNER AND ARBORICULTURAL CONSULTANT FOR HIS SYDNEY BASED CONSULTANCY COMPANY, ECODESIGN®.

Based in Beecroft, Adrian predominantly consults as an arborist for new development projects. He also provides input into various projects undertaken in the design studio and oversees landscape construction projects undertaken by The Other Side Landscapes Pty Ltd.

When he left the security of a regularly paying job, Adrian wasn't sure of what his

future career would be like. But he bravely took the plunge anyway. From starting out as a one-man company, he now employs 19 staff from ecodeSIGN and The Other Side Landscapes.

"I liken making the choice to leave employment and starting my company to standing at the edge of a cliff and getting ready to jump. The feeling of anticipation and

not knowing what's going to happen next was incredible but also like an adrenaline rush – maybe like a fight or flight instinct; the fear drives you forward," says Adrian.

"I started out in the dining room of a house I was house sitting at the time. I enrolled in the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme or NEIS program funded by the Federal Government. Having completed an extensive business plan through the NEIS program, I had a strategy to build my design business and I chipped away at that plan over time."

His past work experiences are definitely colourful, with some of them not having anything to do with landscaping.

"I was fortunate enough to have always wanted to work in the landscape design industry, my school references even mention this. Along the way, however, I've probably worked at more jobs than I can remember – washing dishes, waiter, cook, catering, operating theatre wardsman, service station attendant, pizza delivery, grocery delivery, among other roles."

When ecodeSIGN first started, Adrian would do anything related to landscape including weeding, mowing, hedging, and planting. "Basically, anything to keep paying the bills," he says.

"Having worked in several roles in the landscape industry, covering product and service research at the Outdoor Design Source, Estate Management during the Olympics at Sydney Olympic Park and Construction Estimator at Landscape Solutions – I had a good overview of how the different aspects of the industry worked together."

ecodeSIGN has been operating for almost 10 years now. "From just me in my dining room, I now employ 10 people in

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the ecodesign office. We predominantly provide landscape design and arboricultural consultancy, including expert witness in the Land and Environment Court, to all levels of government and the construction, property management and development industries."

He realised early on that networking and marketing were key aspects of development to creating a stable portfolio of work to build on.

"I recognised that building a design portfolio was not an overnight venture and to be in it for the long haul meant being pushy and asking for work not just waiting for it to come to me."

Contrary to most first impressions, Adrian says he isn't part of the Swane family of Swane's Nursery fame. He comes from a family of plumbers with his father and grandfather operating a commercial plumbing company for more than 75 years.

Adrian grew up with his parents, younger brother and sister in their home in Epping. He remembers a large parkland area across the road with remnant Blue Gum High forest verging on Turpentine Ironbark Forest. "Most of my time was spent building cubby houses in the privet undergrowth in the reserve across the road or helping in the garden, mowing lawns," he says.

"I think this is where my passion for the landscape, trees and natural area restoration came from. I have drawn my main interests from my parents. They both share a love for cooking and gardening, making Sunday lunches in their garden extremely enjoyable."

Cooking and landscaping definitely runs in the family. While Adrian studied Commercial Cookery and Landscape at Ryde TAFE, his brother finished his landscape trade while his sister completed her chef's trade at Ryde as well.

While he was first starting ecodesign, Adrian extended a helping hand to his brother-in-law Andrew Smith who also showed interest in entering the landscape industry. Because of this, Adrian decided to start The Other Side Landscapes Pty Ltd and put his brother in law through his landscape trade.



"Andrew has worked his way through the ranks from garden maintenance to Maintenance Manager to Construction Manager and now Director, managing a team of nine Structural Landscape and Garden Maintenance professionals," Adrian explains with pride.

His drive to succeed and keep working on his dreams comes from various influences. "I think aside from supportive parents, a history of small business owners in the family and growing up with Dad operating

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his company from home, it's the need to have influence over my life. I find that as a small business owner I gain satisfaction from assisting other people, both clients and employees, and also through my participation in industry associations in the broader landscape industry as well."

Adrian credits his company's success to hard work, attention to detail and a fantastic team of committed people to work alongside.

Several members of the ecodesign team have been with the company for around eight or nine years. "Having been able to provide security and stability of service to staff and clients without too much stress is a key factor for a service business' success."

He finds that the best part of his job is that there is always something new to learn. Although one might say that making mistakes is a down side of the job, Adrian says he has learned a lot from his, which helps with the future of the company.

Adrian remembers several highlights of his career including winning the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers and Managers (AILDM) award twice as well as winning a Hills Building and Design award in 2011.

As for his personal high, Adrian is enjoying

the laughter and challenges of the role he recently took on at home – being "Daddy Daycare" on Wednesdays, looking after their two children while his wife Alex goes to work.

"It's something I truly believed I would never be able to do but somehow I'm doing it and it's really hard work!"

Even with the achievements he's reached in his career, Adrian still hopes to improve himself professionally in the next couple of years, possibly gaining some more

qualifications, returning to university to finish his Landscape Architecture degree or studying building.

"I recently completed my Landscape Trade Certificate. This has given me a new approach to the detailing and an understanding of the practicalities of landscape construction methodologies beyond the theory I previously studied. It made me realise how much I didn't know and how much more there was to learn. I felt like I had wasted 10 years!"

Even if he hadn't ended up as a landscape architect, Adrian thinks he still would have been involved with something in a similar industry. "I would have liked to have studied architecture as the built form is so bold and the tangible landscape has parallels – the lines are blurred in some aspects with contemporary landscape structures."

Balancing work and personal life, like any other successful business owner, is a tricky juggling act for Adrian. There are many nights when he's up until 2am trying to get his day's work done, then getting up again at 5am.

"My work life balance doesn't exist at the moment as I am plugging some gaps in the office, but normally I'm able to keep fairly regular work hours and I generally try not to work on weekends. This became much more important once my kids Oscar and Elsie came along, but when the crunch comes and the work needs to be done, I can be in the office all night!"

There are still plenty of things Adrian wants to achieve in his life including renovating a house, visiting more places, seeing more gardens, "The list just keeps getting longer," he says. But right now, he is happily working in an industry he loves being a part of. **LC**

