

COMPANY

PROFILE



Helen Basson

Pro Landscaper talks to **Helen Basson** of Scape Design, a practice that puts sustainability at the forefront of everything they do

What is the history of Scape Design?

My husband James and I established Scape Design in 1998 in the UK. It was just the two of us, and we stayed in the UK for two years before moving to France.

We had always intended to make the move to France – we actually met there when James was on a work placement during his Garden Design degree. I studied French at university, so moving here was a natural choice! It was after we did Hampton Court in 2000 that we thought: 'if we stay here, we'll remain here and never go'. So, we left.

The company is based in Monaco, but James and I live about an hour away in Grasse. We were away in the Ukraine recently where it was -9°C, so it's been lovely to come back to the Provençal climate!

How is the company structured?

We have four full-time employees (including ourselves) and three regular freelancers. One of our employees, Bruno, has been with us on-and-off since he was 15, when he first came to us to do his work experience at school. After that he returned as an apprentice and now, 13 years later, he is still with us working as our top technical drawer. Then there's Christiane (who does everything to do with administration and accounting), James (who is the design brain) and myself (I deal with the clients and concepts). Our three freelancers do things like illustrating, maintenance consulting and graphic design.

What are your usual projects and clients?

Over the years we've worked really hard to get a reputation for doing dry, sustainable landscapes. Our ideal clients are ones that know that and come to us because that's

SCAPE DESIGN in numbers



Established **1998**

Employees **4**

Awards **RHS Chelsea 4 Golds, Singapore Garden Festival – 1 Silver; 1 Gold, GWC Japan – 1 Silver; 1 Gold, Philadelphia Flower Show – Governors Trophy, National French Landscape awards – 2 Gold, Russian National Landscape Awards – Gold, SGD Awards (several)**

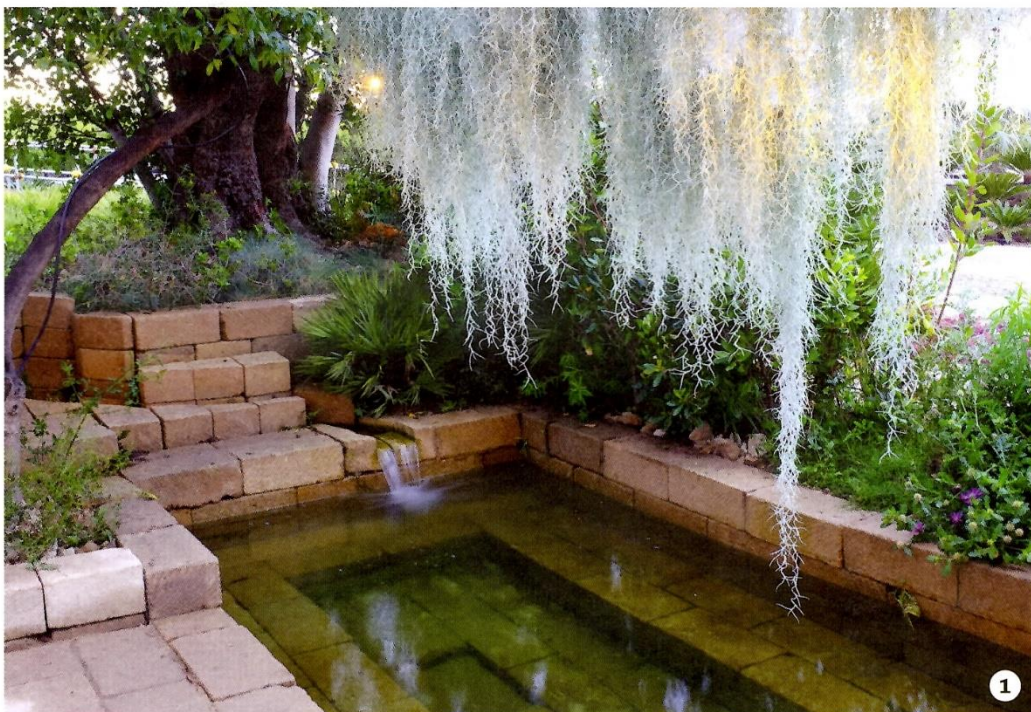
Turnover **c500 000**

what they want. We don't do lawns, or anything that needs watering in this part of the world. We're now in a very lucky position because the scale of the grounds and gardens here are quite big, with the average-size garden being around 3,000–5,000sq metres. This means a lot of our work is big-budget projects.

Interestingly, although most of our clients are in France, not many of them are French. We work with a lot of expats from places like Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, America – all kinds of places.

What are your company philosophies?

We're passionate about sustainability. It's all about the classic 'right plant, right place' – planting schemes that are high in biodiversity, to try and make sure we haven't got any block planting that's open to diseases, so we've got



something that's constantly adapting and evolving. We don't use irrigation, we make everything as natural as possible. Looking at the natural landscape is our main inspiration, because if it works in nature, it'll work in the garden.

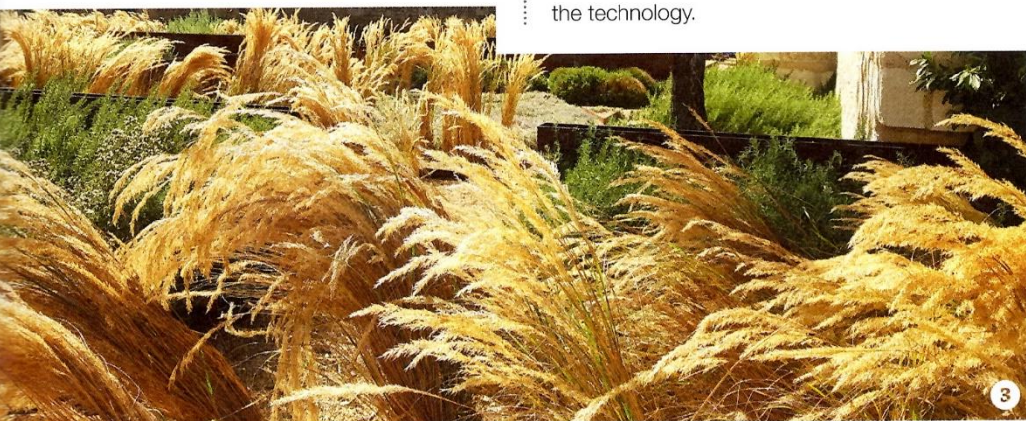
Can you tell me about any stand-out projects you've worked on?

We've just completed a project in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence which is shortlisted for the SGD awards this year. That project was great because the client really let us push the boundaries and be more creative.

We've also been super lucky on the show garden circuit because in the last six years we've done something like 14 show gardens. I guess Chelsea 2017 (last year) was a stand-out project, as we won Best in Show. Internationally, we've



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been to shows in Singapore, Japan, Philadelphia, Sicily, Moscow, and in 2019 we're going to China. If anyone had said to me 10 years ago that as garden designers you're going to be travelling around the world, I'd have thought they were mad!

For overseas projects we try to use plants from the natural climate, but for example at Chelsea we always like to do a Mediterranean-feel garden because we want to bring that message to a wider audience.

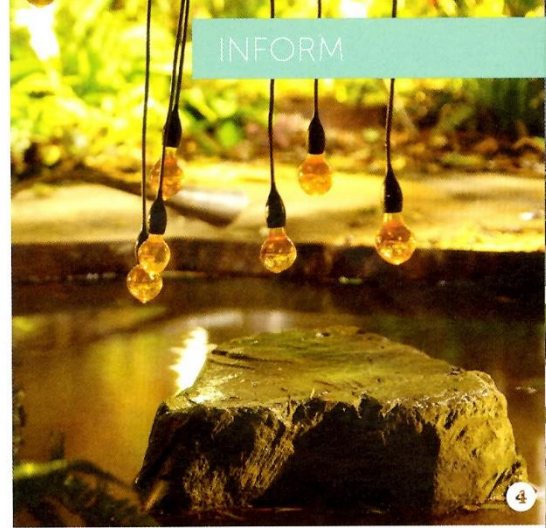
What are you working on currently?

We're working towards China and we've also got a couple of projects in Russia, plus all the work here in France. However, what we're really excited about is taking planting design into the next century.

Garden design is the ultimate big data problem, so we're working on using computer technology to push planting design a bit further. We would like to investigate how computer technology can help us make more dynamic and sustainable solutions for the physical constraints of a site, aesthetic requirements of the client and the natural properties of plants. For example, taking into account the evolution of plants over time. If we are able to estimate factors such as climate change and the effect it will have on the evolution of a garden, this could affect the plants used in our designs.

What's next for Scape Design?

We made the conscious decision a few years ago not to get any bigger, partly because in France the taxes are ridiculously high, and also because we didn't want to start taking on work just to 'feed the machine'. We like to choose projects that we can get really excited about, and this is what we'll continue to do. We're also really excited to continue to push the technology.



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- 1 Radicepura Garden Festival: Alpheus and Arethusa
- 2 Singapore Garden Festival: Where the lavender grows
- 3 Le Mas Vieux, St Remy de Provence
- 4 Singapore Garden Festival: Tartarus
- 5 RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2017: M&G Garden
- 6 The Scape Design team

CONTACT

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