



Sean Butler on the benefits of building a relationship with a local artisan forge – and shows us some examples of the great work they can do

Having an open mind and thinking outside the box will keep your ideas fresh and your gardens looking unique. Often overlooked, a local artisan forge can solve many problems for you. They are full of creative people just like you, with a fantastic positive attitude, and will hand-forge bespoke metalwork for your gardens from a simple sketch.

At Cube, we are lucky to have three such forges within a 15-mile radius, which we have been using for the last 24 years. Robby Cannon in particular has become a good friend – I am in his workshop almost weekly, and he rises to every challenge I put to him. A few weeks ago, I was designing a project and wanted a floating table to come out of a wall, so I sketched the dimensions down and then went along to see Robby. He raises his eyebrow as I walk in, but always with a smile. After looking at my sketch, he asked: “Why don’t other landscapers and designers use forges and artisans more?”, and we had a discussion about it. Maybe the obvious isn’t always so obvious, sometimes.



Image 1 shows the floating table during construction, created from a heavy duty box metal main frame and angle iron top frame. Box metal is used here to reduce movement once



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the angle iron frame is filled with a clear epoxy resin. We tested it with 127kg resting on the end of the cantilevered angle iron frame, and it only moved 5mm; when we set it into position, we offset the level to allow for the calculated load of 127kg.

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The forge also helped to create the infinity pool chamber for the water feature in our recent BALI Award-winning garden (Image 2). The metal main chamber had to have an inner and outer frame, with two smaller sub-chambers; one to house the pumps and the second to house the fibre optic lighting. Both sub-chambers are easily accessible, with recessed manhole covers.

I also used the forge to create water features for our RHS Chelsea gardens in 2012

and 2015 (Image 3), winning Gold and Silver-Gilt Medals and a People’s Choice Award. Using laser-cut steel sheets, both gardens had infinity pools. Hours of research and development went into the pools, and the forge ensured the steel was the right thickness and strength to create the effect required.

Other metalwork features we have commissioned include pergolas, stairs, gabion baskets and obelisks. These features often create focal points in the garden and can be powder-coated or allowed to rust for a warm tone. Once you find your go-to artisan forge, you’ll find the possibilities are endless.



ABOUT SEAN BUTLER

Sean Butler is a landscape designer and director of Cube 1994. With a background in civil engineering, Sean has an in-depth understanding of the design, construction and maintenance of the physical and naturally built landscape.
www.cube1994.com