

ESSENTIAL DECISIONS



In our constantly evolving industry, **Sean Butler** says we need to embrace recycled products and push ourselves to make them the norm

Is the UK landscape design and build market ready for the recycled products entering our industry? Are we ready to embrace these products and lead the industry with them, or will we wait until we are forced to use them through regulation?



As both a designer and landscaper, I believe that we should embrace them where we can. One of the main reasons that I believe we do not use them is due to design aesthetic. The word "plastic" is ingrained into our society as a synonym for fake. In our industry, we want to use products that are going to impress and aren't just the everyday sight. After all, we are a design-led industry, and it's one of the key visual elements that we must consider to satisfy the demands of our clients.

Essential vs desirable

We take for granted items that have long been in our gardens, such as water butts, GRP planters, benches, decking and artificial grass.



We probably class some of these as essential items and not exactly desirable. But as an industry we need to work on improving the value of these items. Essential and desirable typically make up the two most basic elements on any design brief. To make something desirable is to fashion it in a way that makes it fit the brief of your client. It's usually something bespoke like an outdoor kitchen, a sculpture or a water feature. As a designer we have to think outside of the box and make desirable items very different from what's been seen before.

It is possible to use pavers made from recycled plastics, however it is not common practice. I argue that this is because they do not have the natural stone appearance that is currently considered desirable by the industry.

The same probably applies to the world of composite decking. Some manufacturers have nailed the aesthetic, but not the price. In my opinion, composite decking's main selling point is not its aesthetic but rather its durability. This really nails the purpose of selling a product that is a low maintenance, once-in-a-lifetime-purchase option.

New to the landscape industry are materials that are manufactured from fully recycled

plastics and used to make highly desirable garden furniture, sofas, tables and rugs. We have started to use such products in our landscape projects. We used these items for three reasons:



1. to fit the clients brief
2. to keep in line with our eco-friendly design and build ethos
3. to be different and bespoke.

They added a real sense of the indoors-outdoors and the ambience that it gave to the space was quite magical.

Moving forward, it is important that we look to collaborate with manufacturers to bring the design up to our ever-demanding needs. We can do this by engaging with them at shows, or by contacting them directly with new ideas. We shouldn't always be waiting to see what comes next, we need to make intelligent choices on our own accord rather than being forced into making them simply because we waited too long.

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.
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