



DONNA STANISH

One-on-one with landscape designer Donna Stanish

Education/employment experience:

My grandparents were avid gardeners. Their veggie garden was huge and immaculate, the lawn a bowling green (literally!) — good memories that have definitely influenced my career.

I was working in telecommunications in an office environment when I heard through a friend about the Diploma in Landscape Design at Unitech. I was inspired and ready for change. I enrolled and have never looked back. Garden design is a lifestyle career; the line between work and appreciation of beauty in form and the environment becomes blurred. It was a natural progression to making a career out of my love for the garden.

On completing the diploma, I worked for a landscape construction company, helping to run the operational side as project coordinator. I gained valuable quoting and process experience on the job. As a result, I am now confidently able to lead clients through the process from budget and planning to completed construction.

I then travelled to Europe and visited many historic gardens. I was lucky enough to see a number of large private estates.

I created my own business seven years ago. I enjoy working with clients and, on occasion, with architects and other designers on the planning stage in both commercial and residential landscapes. I am on the executive committee of the GDSNZ (Garden Design Society of New Zealand) and regularly keep in touch with other designers sharing the same passion.

What's planned/coming up:

My husband and I are looking at travelling to Italy and the Croatian coast. We both have family heritage there and, as always, the gardens are a great drawcard. I'd love to see the great historical gardens, but I am really interested to see what people are doing with their own gardens at home. How they use what they have available. People can be amazingly creative using what is in their immediate surroundings. Food, wine and gardens are traditionally linked and where we can explore these in a different culture makes for a great visit.

Design philosophy:

I design gardens for people to live, love, relate and communicate in. Gardens are for people. Families and friends gather, communication flows in relaxed surroundings, people relate with each other and with nature. Creating spaces with this in mind gives me great pleasure.

Age, where you reside:

I am 41. I reside in Hillsborough in Auckland. We are very close to the coast and take advantage of the local park and beach at Waikowhai. There are great bush and coastal walks nearby — the place is teeming with birdlife. In summer, we watch the glow-worms and have a play on the flying fox. It's amazing as it seems so far away from such a busy urban environment.

Favourite thing about New Zealand:

I love that you can travel such short distances to get completely different experiences. We regularly travel to a family beach and gather shellfish, put out the net for flounder, trap eel to smoke and make pesto from ingredients out of the garden. It is such a diverse country, a skier and surfer's paradise. After a great day out, you can hop into a natural spring hot pool with a local wine to recover — absolute bliss.

Favourite thing about garden design:

Living a creative life in an ever-changing environment. Things aren't meant to be static. Life unfolds, as does the garden. I value stopping to notice the change in seasons and to be in touch with the senses. It is something simple that can get overlooked in a modern, busy lifestyle. I have the opportunity to share this and inspire others. I am pretty lucky.

Tip/advice when it comes to garden design:

Inject some of your personality into the landscape. Don't be afraid to use colour in the garden. Remember, it's going to be viewed from inside the house, so you can bring everything together or provide a sharp contrast. Make a feature or tuck in something personal to you; it can be beautiful or fun and quirky. Create or have commissioned a piece of artwork or sculpture that you love. It's your space and it should say something about you. ■