

30 MINUTES WITH A LEGEND OF LANDSCAPING



With Cherry being his surname, one could argue that Eric's fate was sealed – his genes decided that the floral kingdom will be his passion. Pro Landscaper Africa chats to the Legend of Landscaping 'Eric Cherry' about his journey thus far, accomplishments and advice to members of the landscaping community.

What did you want to be growing up?

When I was very young I actually wanted to be a train driver, but from about 10 years old I wanted to be a horticulturist.

What did you study to prepare yourself for the landscaping industry?

I studied Horticulture at CAPUT in the early 1980s.

What was your journey like after studying?

I started as a horticultural apprentice at the then named 'South African Railways'. It was the country's largest training facility for horticulturists in those days, and the railways had the biggest collection of

nurseries - 14 in total. By the time I left, I had not only acquired a formal education, but also close to 600 pot plants which I kept in my hostel room! I worked for a short period on a Protea, cut flower export farm in Stellenbosch, before working for Bardenhorst Landscapes in the early 90's under the guidance of Donovan Gillman.

In the late 1980s, I began work for Marina Landscapes, leaving to join Top Turf for the construction of the Lost City. This is my largest contract experience to date, and I am still friends with Brendan Fox and the Top Turf team who worked on this project. This project was an extreme adventure, where we worked 7 days a week solidly for close

to 2 years. We made landscaping history by making the Guinness Book of Records for the transplanting of the largest trees in the world. We transplanted four baobabs weighing up to 55 tons which were transported from Venda to the Lost City. The largest fig transplanted on site weighed a staggering 35 tons!

When and why did you decide to open your own business 'Urban Landscape Solutions'?

In 2003 I had partners in 3 landscaping companies. I decided to then sell my shares to my partners to create capital to start my own business 'Urban Landscape Solutions'.



2

Who has been your biggest professional influence from when you were younger up until now?

Fred Badenhost who I worked for in the 1980s for his entrepreneurial spirit. In the 1990s I worked for Dave Kirkby at Top Turf who taught me the most about landscaping by his systemic approach to projects and his professionalism in business and landscaping.

What are some of your favourite projects you have completed to date?

As I Mentioned previously the Lost City at Sun City built in the early 1990s still is the most amazing work adventure I have ever had. The sheer size of the project and working under Sol Kerzner, Patrick Watson, Dave Kirkby and Brendon Fox on the project was an unbelievable experience.

- Building Erinvale Golf Course in 1994 and preparing it for the 1995 World Cup which hosted some of the best golfers in the world.
- I was subsequently involved again with Sol Kerzner in 2009 with the One and Only in Cape Town in which the project was accelerated from 10 months to 10 weeks.

- I have also been involved in building Green Point Park in 2010-11 and the revamp at The Company Gardens in 2014. Both are world class parks in Cape Town with histories of 300 plus years.

Biggest challenge facing the landscaping industry?

My worry is, do the new generation of South Africans have the same culture and passion for gardening?

How many staff do you employ and how many projects do you work on at one specific time?

We currently employ 350 staff in landscaping, excluding ±75 staff employed on short term contracts. Our Nursery, 'New Horizen Nursery' currently employs around 50 staff as well. We have a big team, but we also have very taxing and demanding jobs.

Currently we are onsite working on 24 projects. ULS are about to commence work on an additional 9 new projects. This excludes the 62 maintenance sites we maintain. Four of these maintenance sites are larger than 10 hectares so we keep very busy!



3



4



5

You also bought and run a nursery 'New Horizen Nursery' who supply to yourselves... how do you co-ordinate with them on projects?

I bought the farm and the wholesale nursery from Robert Stodel of Stodel's Nurseries in 2004. My vision was to develop this nursery into an eco-friendly and sustainable farm-like haven where the nursery and the natural landscape would work in symbiosis with each other.

New Horizen Nursery grows lines for the retail sector which make up about 30% of our sales. We are more geared up to contract growing for large projects and supplying to landscapers. The nursery is involved in rehabilitation project growing, where we collect plants, seeds and cuttings from sites for the rehabilitation of these sensitive areas.

What is your advice to other business owners in the landscaping industry?

My advice to them is if you want to own your own business you must go and work for the most established landscapers for a few years to gain experience before starting your own setup. I learnt from Fred Badenhost, Donovan

Gillman, Rene and Jean Woutors and Dave Kirkby before working for myself. Their advice and guidance stood me in good stead moving forward.

The Key to running a successful business is probably a combination of: being stubborn, staying positive, maintaining the highest work standards, ongoing training of staff and what I class as paramount is being steadfastly passionate about your career.

You received a very special award from SALI in 2014, the 'Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award' ... How does it feel to have received this?

I was very surprised as this award is usually awarded to the very top landscapers nearing the end of their career. I have been in the industry since 1979, so that is 37 years. I believe this makes me a veteran. It was a proud moment.

How is sustainability embedded into your company?

I think it is important to invest in people and in good management systems. Make sure that your staff are accountable and that they

“ We made landscaping history by making the Guinness Book of Records for the transplanting of the largest trees in the world. ”



6



7

have the correct skills and the right tools to be successful. This makes for a well rooted company.

How can other landscapers better themselves to work towards receiving government tenders?

Government tenders are won by a combination of regulatory checks and so you would need to make sure your business is aligned and compliant with these. They include:

1. CIDB grading
2. BBBEE grading
3. Tax clearance certificates up to date
4. Letter of good standing with compensation commissioner.
5. Have insurances such as public liability
6. Price. You have to be competitive and efficient to win and implement this work.



What are some awards Urban Landscape Solutions has achieved?

We have really established ourselves and Urban Landscape Solutions has won 54 SALI (South African Landscapers Institute) awards of excellence up to 2015, of which we received 42 SALI awards of excellence over the last 4 years.

We also won numerous LIA (Landscape Irrigation Association) awards of excellence.

What do you do when you aren't working?

I love reading and studying plants books. The first thing I do in the morning is pick up a book and the last thing at night is put one down. My interest encompasses plants' medicinal properties, folk lore associated with them, and the birds, animals and insects that live with particular plants.



- 1 *One and Only Hotel and Resort surrounded by the V&A Marina.*
- 2 *Collection of Pachypodium at The Lost City Nursery.*
- 3 *Eric Cherry standing on the rootball of a Ficus transplant at The Lost City.*
- 4 *Machinery used onsite to transplant trees at The Lost City.*
- 5 *Planting large figs at The Lost City.*
- 6 *A young Eric Cherry posing at a tree.*
- 7 *Villa Island at the One and Only Hotel and Resort.*
- 8 *Bio-diversity Gardens in Green Point Park.*
- 9 *The 12.5 HA Green Point Park in Cape Town.*
- 10 *Eric enjoying a break from his busy schedule.*

About Urban Landscape Solutions



Multi award-winning Urban Landscape Solutions operates under the guidance of Eric Cherry, a highly qualified horticulturalist with over 30 years of experience. The company and its professional landscapers have a proven, all-inclusive landscaping record. Regardless of style or scope, Urban Landscape has successfully taken on a range of prestigious challenges, including complex designs and the fast tracking of enormous projects such as the Green Point Urban Park and the One&Only hotel and resort on Cape Town's Waterfront. info@urbanlandscape.co.za

www.urbanlandscape.co.za

www.newhorizennursery.co.za