

# Rick of The Trade

The brilliant, inquisitive and restless mind of Rick Scheen is the secret of LandWest's success

BY GENE MENEZ



Since being founded by Scheen and a partner in 2000, LandWest has thrived in the high-end residential landscape market.

According to people close to Rick Scheen, he does pause to breathe between sentences every now and then.

That's not immediately evident if you sit and talk with 49-year-old Scheen—the founder and owner of and chief designer at LandWest Design Group, the high-end residential landscape company with a client list so affluent that even affluent clients wonder if they belong on the list. Ask Scheen about, say, what information he gathers from clients prior to a project, and he'll talk for several minutes without stopping. The comma is Scheen's best friend.

"I gather information as far as the design styles, the concepts, the wants, the needs, the personalities, their dynamics for their structure, kids, no kids, dogs, entertainment, what they like, what they don't like, what they love, what they hate, what they like to touch, feel, see, hear," he says. "And then we quickly get the land, and we start doing the analysis of the land: What does the land have? What are the pros? What are the cons? What are the things that we want to enhance, hide, repair, fix, change, tweak? ..."

That exhaustive attention to detail helps explain the rise of LandWest into a local landscaping Goliath. A Louisiana native who studied landscape architecture at LSU "on a whim," Scheen left an Austin land design firm where he was running the residential division to start LandWest with a business partner in 2000. In its first year, the company earned almost \$2 million in revenue, he says.

Though the firm was successful from the start, LandWest had a major breakthrough after cyclist Lance Armstrong hired Scheen to handle the landscape around his 8,000-square-foot West Austin home. The

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ADAM MOROZ (SCHEEN); COURTESY LANDWEST (LANDSCAPE)



Scheen is proud of LandWest's ability to create different-looking landscapes and not having one predetermined design style.

Continued from page 40 project appeared on the July 2008 cover of Architectural Digest.

"That project was the turning point," Scheen says. "We learned how to take it to another level. Lance was so demanding. He had a great eye for detail. And he was tough."

Today, LandWest employs 80 people, and the average budget for a project runs \$1 million, he says. The company will take on any residential project—LandWest even designed and built a nine-hole golf course on a client's property—but does not take any commercial jobs.

"I like land," he says. "If I had to do a mall, I couldn't do it."

Though the firm has five degreed landscape architects on staff, there isn't a project that Scheen doesn't touch. Many projects begin "in my mind before I even sit down," he says. "And then hopefully the guys here almost don't have to draw anything."

One of the goals of each job is for people to not be able to determine what firm designed the project.

"You see companies that design with corten steel or this or that everywhere, and you can tell what company did the job," Scheen says. "When we walk into a project we never have a preconceived idea about anything. We don't have a style. We try not to ever design on top of something. We always try to integrate to where everything comes together seamlessly."

LandWest's projects can be described as beautiful, creative, detailed, high-end, complex, complementary to the architecture and harmonious with the land because of the complicated, thorough, curious, demanding, brilliant, inquisitive and restless mind of its founder. ■



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