

# LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT



## GREG ZOLL

Greg Zoll and his Wife Sara founded Landscape Dynamics in 2006 to fully utilize all of the knowledge gained their years of combined experience in Landscape Architecture and its related fields.

In the past 14 years, Landscape Dynamics has evolved and grown along with the landscapes they create. Greg is a Licensed Landscape Architect with fifteen years of experience in Landscape Architecture, landscape construction, landscape maintenance management, and water conservation.

He received his Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture from Cal Poly Pomona in 2003, where a significant focus of his study was irrigation design and landscape construction methods and materials. Landscape Dynamics services the residential, commercial and municipal markets in California and the Pacific Northwest.

We sat down with Greg to talk about sustainability, resource management, and the landscape industry.

### **What path led you to the landscape industry?**

When I was a little kid, my grandpa had land that he had subdivided, built a road, and then sold it off. Watching the action inspired me to take my Tonka trucks and create my own mini subdivision in my backyard at home. I had paths that were graded out, pipes underground that would drain areas, and so on. It was pretty sophisticated for a little kid.

My dad was a mechanical engineer, so I naturally thought mechanical engineering was going to be the way for me, so I took drafting in high school. Upon graduation, there was a considerable demand for drafting skills in the landscape industry, so I immediately started working for a landscape architecture firm.

I entered Cal Poly as a Mechanical Engineer student, but I had a keen interest in biology and was currently working for a landscape architect at the time. I transferred into the landscape architecture program as it offered the right mix of engineering, biology, and environmental studies. After I graduated from Cal Poly, I worked for a few different landscape architecture firms before we started Landscape Dynamics in 2006.

### **What excites you about working in this industry?**

I think it's the challenge of looking at a difficult site. We are not always lucky enough to have a completely blank canvas, and that's when things are the most complicated, yet fun.

It's taking a site and transforming it into something else that incorporates the existing terrain and surrounding environment that still excites me about the work we do.

There is always an opportunity to make improvements that have a significant impact on how a landscape contributes to the surrounding environment.

### **What does sustainability mean to you as a landscape architect?**

I don't think there is one definition of sustainability in our industry. It really comes down to understanding what the customer is really asking when they say they want a sustainable landscape. They often mean a native landscape or a "water-wise" landscape, thinking it will just maintain itself and always look beautiful.

One of the problems we run into a lot is when clients are planning a sustainable renovation, they generally only focus on one aspect of sustainability, water. That's where we talk about consuming fewer resources, reducing fertilizer runoff and leaching, reducing green waste, and all the other benefits that a sustainable landscape delivers.

Our approach to sustainability is creating a landscape that doesn't need to be butchered to be controlled. It's not about putting a plant in a spot where it is going to become overgrown; instead, it's about carefully selecting plant material that will continue to serve that same purpose for a long time and not become a problem as it grows naturally.

### **What role does water management play in a sustainable landscape?**

Appropriately managed irrigation and controlling runoff is a big part of sustainable landscape design. We try to incorporate bioswales in all of our renovations to divert the drainage flow away from storm drains and back into landscaped areas.

Incorporating water management strategies beyond irrigation design is a huge component of sustainability for us, but it's not something that clients think much about at first.

We also include the management of irrigation around structures as part of the sustainability equation. It's really about managing all of your resources properly and designing a space that allows for seamless integration of all parts.

### **What is the biggest challenge of working in this industry?**

The fact that we seem to be an afterthought. In most cases, the landscape is the last thing that gets done on a new build project. It presents a challenge for us, as the site needs to be looked at from a holistic design sense rather than in parts and pieces. The structures and landscape design should complement each other.

We will often come into a project where the structures are already built, and now we have to design the landscape around those structures. It hinders the overall landscape design in many cases.

In cases where we have the opportunity to work with the architects and builders from the beginning results in much smarter landscapes that complement the structure designs.

### **What does the future look like for the Landscape industry?**

I worry that the technical side of this business will slowly be removed from what we do as landscape architects. For example, I see more landscape architects not putting irrigation designs into their finished plan. They leave it to someone else to design and spec the irrigation system.

I think it's vital that landscape architects know the math and the science behind a design, and not just hand the technical aspects of a plan off to others. The ability to integrate the technical specifications with the design is what makes the landscape architect unique. We need to protect that differentiation and the leadership that landscape architects provide the green industry and the conservation movement as a whole.

More information on Landscape Dynamics can be found by visiting [landscapedynamics.net](http://landscapedynamics.net), or by emailing Greg Zoll directly at [gregzoll@landscapedynamics.net](mailto:gregzoll@landscapedynamics.net)

