

# AFTERCARE OR MAINTENANCE?



**NEW CONTRIBUTOR  
CHRIS STONE OUTLINES  
THE MUCH-DEBATED  
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
MAINTENANCE AND  
AFTERCARE**

I've been thinking about putting pen to paper on this subject since attending the aftercare panel discussion at last November's FutureScape event.

It was great to see aftercare of domestic gardens discussed, and that there are various designers who understand the importance of knowledge and attention to detail after the garden build is completed.

I think it's fair to say that garden maintenance and aftercare are design and build's ugly sisters. After all, it's pulling weeds, cutting hedges and mowing lawns, right? Well, yes, but there's a bit more to it than that.

Is aftercare any different to maintenance? I believe they are different offerings, and both seem to be undervalued. But why? Gardens don't look after themselves. Nature has a habit of reclaiming what we have colonised.

## Maintenance

We maintain a lot of gardens. Many are large, beautiful spaces with well-established trees, beds and borders, large lawns, areas of meadow and water. These are full of examples of gorgeous planting, much of it that has lost its way over the years, due to gardeners' overzealous use of hedge trimmers to round or square off anything that dares to grow in a natural manner. This treatment can take time to undo to get some relaxed form back.

I think it is fair to suggest that maintaining an existing garden is fairly formulaic. The seasons dictate the work you can do to a large extent. This doesn't make garden maintenance dull or

lacking in skill. The thrill is partly experiencing each season from start to finish, and reaching its full potential in each cycle.

## Aftercare

Aftercare, on the other hand, is taking a freshly created space from its embryonic stage, and nurturing it over time to reach its full potential. It's seeing it through the teething stage into the formative years, setting the rules and

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boundaries, practicing tough love, when necessary, so that it reaches adolescence in rude health.

It's never once losing sight of the designer's vision that they convinced the client of in the first place. Too many gardens so beautifully designed and built by craftsmen, never have the chance to fully develop due to poor aftercare.

I don't understand why people invest so much money in a garden, and then fail to take care of it. Would they invest similar money in a luxury car and never wash or service it? I don't think so. Clients pay the going rates to have their cars serviced by the manufacturers' strict guidelines, paying dealer prices rather than

using local independent garages. They do so knowing that the skilled technicians are trained to do it, and buy it knowing how much it will cost to maintain. So, why isn't it like this in our world?

I think it's because we are slow on the uptake. Many parts of our industry have experienced massive changes. So many new materials and techniques, but we don't look around to see how other industries deal with clients.

People want to be sold the dream, but they need to understand the practicalities and costs. The majority of clients will have a business background, and this is a business transaction, but just like the example of buying a car, 'buying' a garden is an emotional purchase. They buy the dream from a designer, the garden from a landscaper, and an insurance policy on their investment with an aftercare specialist.

So, if you are a designer, ask yourself – do you have open conversations with your future clients about overall budgets, or do you shy away from the cost of professional aftercare?

It's hard enough to convince a prospect they need to 'up their budget', so why would you throw a spanner in the works? But when you have completed a garden, is it ready for photographing straight away, or does it always look better a couple of seasons in?

Any garden you have designed that has been brought to life, reflects your talents for years to come. Why leave this growing and ever-evolving business card to chance?

## ABOUT CHRIS STONE

Chris Stone is founder and managing director of Bushy Business Ltd; an RHS and APL award-winning company, which carries out garden design, hard and soft landscaping, maintenance and aftercare in domestic gardens throughout the south east of England.

[www.bushybusiness.com](http://www.bushybusiness.com)