

# PROFILE



## CREATIVE LANDSCAPE DESIGN IN NEW YORK CITY **TOWN AND GARDENS, LTD.**

When Don Sussman and Chris Fitzpatrick formed Town and Gardens, Ltd. in 1995, they fulfilled their dream of improving landscapes in New York City. Sussman, a biologist by training and former high school teacher, and Fitzpatrick, an arborist, took to the streets of Manhattan with a simple mission of creating beautiful gardens – all while driving a refurbished, green school bus. As the newly formed company gained local recognition, the partners added employees in the field and office, and they began building an experienced, diverse design team.

Today, this design/build firm has found a niche for itself that clients, subcontractors, and collaborators all appreciate. As one of the premier landscape companies servicing New York City, Town and Gardens' 50 employees beautify residential, commercial, and public spaces, and a fleet of trucks, which can be spotted at sites across Manhattan and the boroughs, has replaced the once famous green bus. The company's founders still get out to the multitudes of gardens across the city – Sussman with camera in hand to document the progress and Fitzpatrick supervising

installations and cranes that lift mature trees into the backyards of various sites. Their continued passion and care is contagious among employees, all of whom take immense pride in what they help to create.

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Town and Gardens, Ltd.



*Taking advantage of the great space below the office's open loft, designers gather weekly with the operations team and field crew to discuss current and upcoming projects.*

### COLLABORATION IS KEY

Clients come to Town and Gardens in various ways, but they all have the same desire – to have an outdoor (or the occasional indoor) space that provides a touch of greenery and beauty to a space, whether it is a home garden, a green wall in a retail store, or a communal space for a building. The company frequently works with architects, landscape architects, building management companies, and general contractors, as well as directly with private homeowners. As a design/build firm, Town and Gardens offers each client the peace of mind that their project will run smoothly, and it meets those expectations with a dedicated team involved every step of the way.

The nature of the firm offers the same peace of mind to the design team. Senior Designer and Head of the Town and Gardens Design Department Michael Franco highlights this attribute as one of the benefits of working there. “What attracted me to Town and

Gardens was its hands-on, integrated approach,” he says. “I was tired of being separated from my designs.” Fellow Senior Designer Hanna Packer echoes the sentiment, stating, “We are fortunate as designers to remain engaged and involved from design, to installation, and to maintenance.”

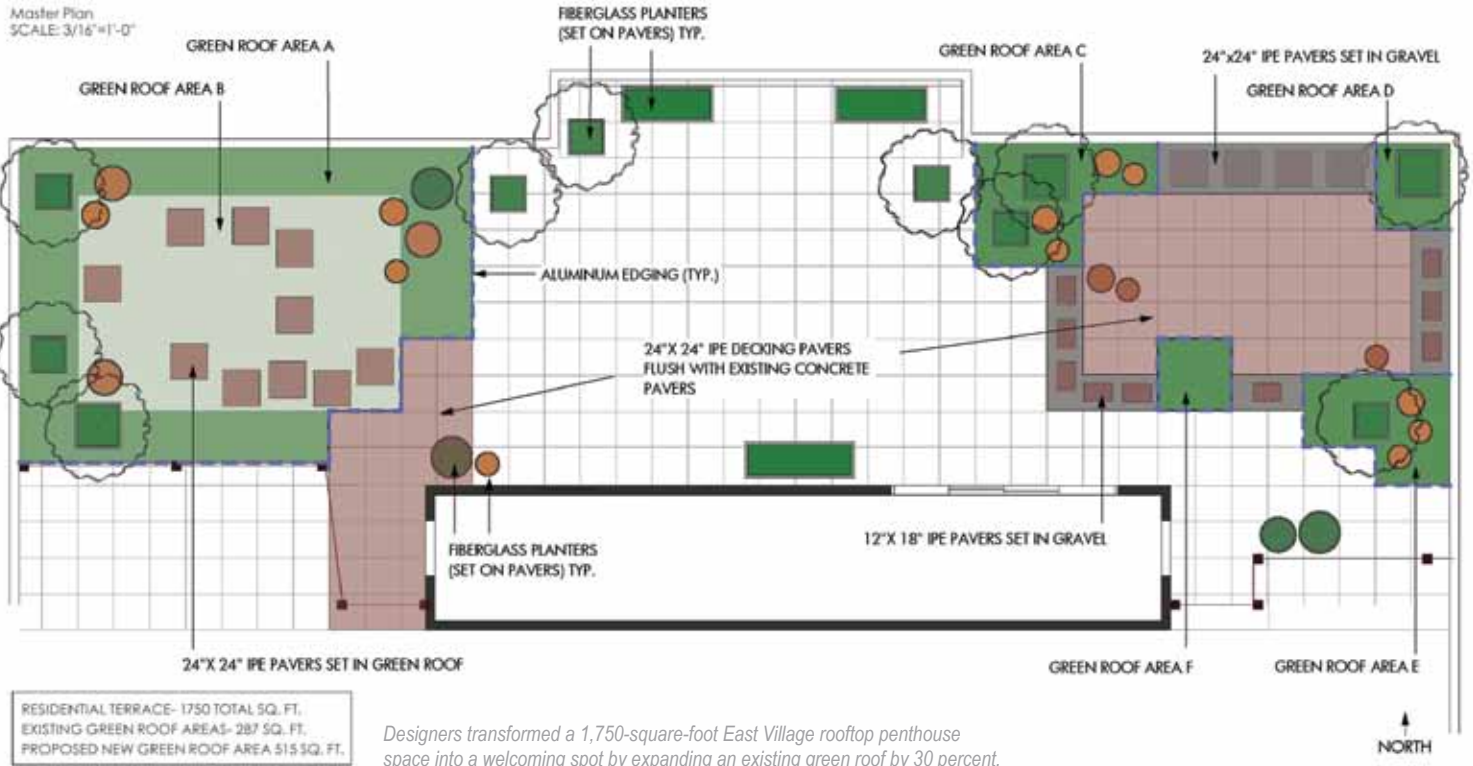
Town and Gardens places a great emphasis on a collaborative approach, utilizing the creative design sense of their experienced team combined with the practical know-how of a well-seasoned operations team and field crew. Every Wednesday, at the conference table below Town and Gardens' open loft space and experimental green wall, the teams convene to discuss current and upcoming projects. The feedback and dialogue has proved invaluable to the success of the firm's projects. The forum provides an opportunity to work through any problems that arise for an urban landscape firm. It also helps bridge the gap between design and installation.

“When we approach a project, we're very supportive of one another, and it's sort of like a barn-raising event the way we come together and work like a tight-knit family,” remarks Packer.

The Town and Gardens family not only works together to face challenges out in the field but also within the office. Until 2012, the whole company was confined to a small warehouse on Manhattan's East Side. Plants were kept on the roof of the building and were carried up a narrow staircase to get there. Describing the sight, Franco says, “One day, the roof would be bare; the next it'd look like a forest had grown as trees awaiting a job were brought up by crew members.” In 2012, the company renovated the office space and moved the plants and trucks into a yard across the street. Eager to share the space with others, the team often invites clients and collaborators into the office to share how the company works.

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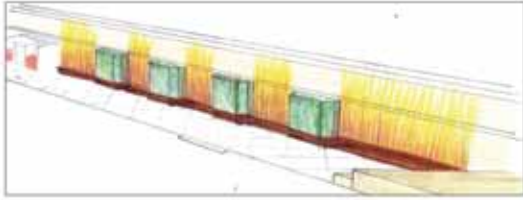
## DESIGN/BUILD: A FULLY INTEGRATED PROCESS

Franco, Packer, and the company's other four designers have learned that the integrated approach truly helps develop client relationships, particularly when it comes to budget concerns. Design Associate Michelle Lin describes how they "work to stay in sync with a client's budgetary goals by considering their design choices and material selections." She and the other designers "then prioritize this feedback to design something clients have a part in and will be happy with." Landscape Architect Liz Pulver adds, "Budgeting is a transparent part of client discussions from the beginning. Budgets push us to think outside the box and make something happen in a different way."

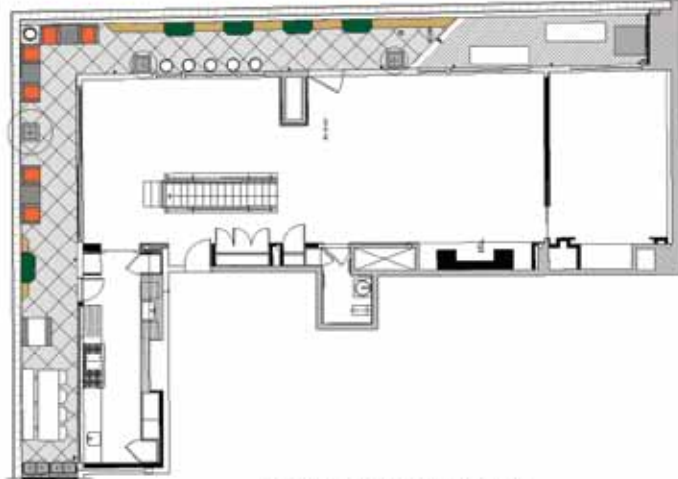
To express that "outside the box" thinking, the design team uses Vectorworks® Landmark software. Drawings and plans produced with the program play an integral part in both the design and installation phases, and allow the team to articulate initial concept sketches and precisely plan each site. For example, the firm uses its drawings to generate materials lists and create construction

documents for its skilled team of project managers, foremen, specialists, and crewmembers. The generated files clearly show each layout and plan, and enable the field staff to execute the exact vision for a project. The software also aids in the team's ability to work with other industry professionals. "We collaborate with various design disciplines, so it's beneficial to be able to import partners' PDF or DWG files and work with them in Vectorworks Landmark," Lin says.

In addition, designers appreciate the software's rich variety of colors, which saves them from exporting files into a separate image editing program, as well as the silhouette plant feature, which aids in section design and elevations. They also use the Renderworks® application to create 3D perspectives. Clients appreciate the designs presented in this way because they can visualize the proposed scale of all aspects of their project and get a sense of the relationship between different garden elements.



Perspective illustrating new option for the west terrace wall with shaped evergreens, tall reed grasses and Boston Ivy growing behind.



Proposed table bench and chairs



Example of the Yew Hedge with a very controlled shape.



Very upright perennial Reed grasses growing to 4' tall.



Example of an accent container.



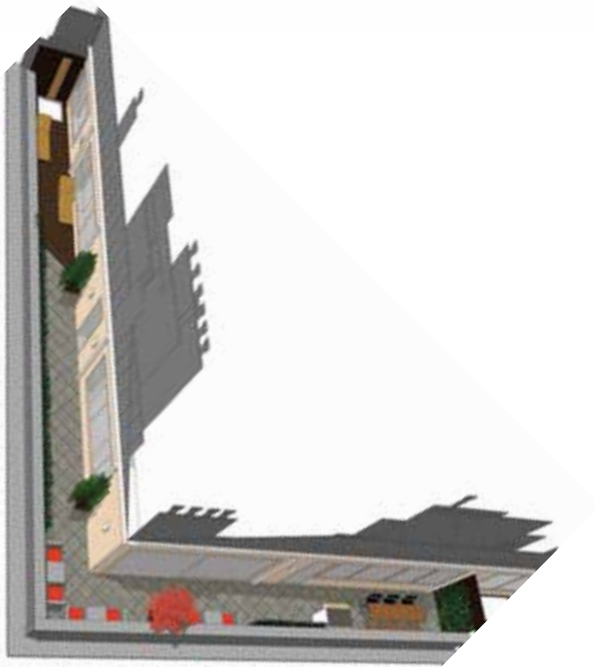
Boston Ivy leaf colors.



*Town and Gardens relies on Vectorworks Landmark with Renderworks software to articulate its design vision and create 3D perspectives for clients. Shown here is a 5.5-foot-wide terrace for a penthouse apartment in Tribeca.*

### A DIVERSE PORTFOLIO

The Vectorworks Landmark platform has helped Town and Gardens design and install many diverse projects throughout the city. One such project, a terrace for a penthouse apartment in Tribeca, illustrates just how creative designers have become with gardens in Manhattan. The terrace, like many others the firm has tackled over the years, is long and narrow with a maximum width of only 5.5 feet. When Senior Designer Packer was called in, the terrace had unimaginative rubber tiles and little plant life. So she devised a cohesive solution and created a landscape that felt like a natural environment with custom planters, a dining area, and a variety of plants.



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*Landscape Architect Liz Pulver worked within the building's LEED certification framework to achieve a design that softened the urban feeling of the space.*

Clients and industry professionals alike recognize the cohesive vision produced by the Town and Gardens design team. As a result, the firm has won numerous awards, including many from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). In fact, the firm's work on an East Village penthouse rooftop won a 2011 Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the organization. Landscape Architect Pulver worked on the project from the beginning when the rooftop was just a blank slate with concrete pavers and no greenery. Pulver created a landscape that turned the rooftop into a welcoming spot. "Our design softened the urban feel, and turned the large terrace into a

place to relax and take in the city views," Pulver says. To achieve this look, her design divided the large terrace of 1,750 square feet into three defined spaces. The first space was a large green roof area to create the feel of a private garden. The second space was an open gathering area in the center. The final area provided room for entertaining and dining. All attempts were made to be as environmentally friendly as possible, a notion important to the client, and to Town and Gardens. This included working within the building's LEED certification framework and expanding an existing green roof by 30 percent.

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*The two-level Royal York Condominium project spanned the roofs of two parking garages, totaled 14,000 square feet, and earned the firm a 2012 Green Roof for Healthy Cities award.*

Another widely recognized project is the firm's extensive green roof at the Royal York Condominium on the Upper East Side, winner of a 2012 Green Roof for Healthy Cities award. While the Town and Gardens design team has a great deal of experience developing communal spaces for commercial clients, this job presented an interesting challenge. The site spanned the roofs of two parking garages and totaled 14,000 square feet. Senior Designer Franco was called in when the building had to be reroofed due to massive water damage. Franco accepted the challenge of the large, undefined space.



"We had bold ideas for this space," he says. "As we contemplated the project and how best to create pathways, we started to consider other naturally open spaces as a design framework." Eventually, Franco settled on open water as a comparable space and began to map his design the way the ocean is mapped as two-dimensional, angular spaces. "We used this framework to delineate the landscape's pathways and voids with a series of bisecting lines," Franco adds. "We then carried this nautical concept through raised planters and sculptured lattice panels that mimic giant sails and serve as screens for residences situated at the base of these gardens."

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*The Royal York features an LED light show that radiates from white to dark blue, much like waves pulsing through the space. The unique feature complements the design intent, which mapped the large space the way the ocean is mapped as two-dimensional, angular spaces.*



Vectorworks software proved to be particularly useful for this job. Its features and all-in-one capabilities saved Franco from having to use multiple programs to achieve the various aspects of the garden's design. Plus, the ability to use different colors within the drawing allowed Franco to create and clearly visualize the varied paving pattern used in the design. He also used the software to explore the fabrication of custom planters and other elements. The designers find the Add, Clip, Intersect, and Combine Surfaces tool set to be extremely useful in this work, as well as the Plant and Hardscape tools.

The design process, which lasted nearly a year, was filled with many challenges, including earning the approval of the building's six-member board and meeting the budget constraints. Despite these issues, Franco and his fellow designers produced a concept that met the building's program requirements for screening, waterproofing, visual interest from above, and a strong link between the site's multiple buildings. They also added a special feature only seen at night – an LED light show that radiates from white to dark blue, much like waves pulsing through the space. Franco used Vectorworks Landmark software to design every aspect of the award-winning landscape at the Royal York.

It's the talent behind Town and Gardens' strong design team that has made the firm so successful. "We never present generic designs, even for the smallest of spaces," says Pulver. "In fact, we thrive on pushing the envelope of what's possible." Keep pushing. We like what we see.

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