

How to Win & Delight Six-Figure Landscape Clients With Perfectly Straight Edges



A valuable read for designers, installers, specifiers who are searching for a product that is guaranteed to deliver perfectly straight garden edges more quickly, more safely, more surely, and more beautifully.

In this interview, former landscape gardener and Straightcurve co-founder Dan Depiazzi talks with Chris Reynolds from Bridgeman Kent. Chris is a self-confessed perfectionist Landscape Designer, based in Hertfordshire, specialising in high-end (£100-150,000) landscaping projects for private clients around London and the Home Counties.

Chris is very particular about delivering a high-quality result for his clients - a philosophy that's evident in his meticulous approach to the design process, material selection, and delivery of the finished outcome. Having first spotted Straightcurve weathering steel garden edging at a UK trade show, Chris used the Zero-Flex 100mm product on a project requiring 130 lineal metres of perfectly straight Corten edging. In this interview, Chris shares his (and his installation team's) experience of using the precision-engineered product for the first time.

"We used Straightcurve Zero-Flex for the first time on a big garden project that called for 130 lineal metres of absolutely, perfectly straight edging. The team laid the whole garden in a day - when I looked at the original quote, I'd allowed 4 days of labour for just the edging!"

CHRIS REYNOLDS FROM BRIDGEMAN KENT

In the interview you'll learn:

- ✓ What this self-confessed perfectionist landscape designer was looking for
- ✓ What it was about our products that really sold them (not what you might think)
- ✓ How our products stacked up against other close rivals in the market place
- ✓ The side-benefits of working with a confidence inspiring fit-for-purpose product
- ✓ The unexpectedly positive impact of choosing an edging system optimised for easy installation

Read the full interview →

DAN: "OKAY, THAT'S RECORDING. SO LET'S START WITH A FEW WARM UP QUESTIONS - I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT HOW YOU DECIDED TO USE OUR ZERO-FLEX 100MM EDGING. CAN YOU RECALL HOW YOU FOUND US? WHICH OF OUR MATERIALS YOU LOOKED AT DURING YOUR RESEARCH PHASE? AND WHAT MADE YOU THINK, "YES, THIS PRODUCT IS GOING TO DO THE JOB FOR ME"?"

Chris: "Yeah, okay. So I guess ironically, I saw you guys at a trade show about a year ago when a lot of clients were asking for Corten. I was aware that Corten can be very expensive, especially when you're looking at things like raised planters and such. One solid Corten planter can be really expensive, and they look really expensive. But when I saw your planters, (even though I was more interested in the edging), that was one of the things that really sold me on Straightcurve because your products have such an expensive look about them and you've designed them in a really smart way. And that applies to the edging because it looks really thick. And don't get me wrong, it is relatively thick, but there's thicker stuff on the market which is a lot more expensive. But because of the way you finish your products, they look really, really fantastic. When I started doing the research looking at the cost-benefits of going with you over the majority of the other guys, you were coming out cheaper. And the finish was better. And the rigidity of your product was much better. A lot of the other companies I got in touch with had a simple sort of spike into the ground, which I just knew wouldn't work in a family garden or anything with heavy footfall. Just wouldn't do the job. So after researching Corten garden edging, in terms of the cost and the quality of the finish, Straightcurve was by far the best."

DAN: "IN TERMS OF THAT RESEARCH. SO YOU WENT AWAY FROM THAT TRADE SHOW AND DID ONLINE RESEARCH, COMPARING COMPANIES, GETTING PRICING, THAT KIND OF THING?"

Chris: "Yeah, yeah, exactly. I went online. I spoke to probably half a dozen suppliers. The big suppliers - I took the top four from Google, for example. I went through a couple of trade magazines, looked at a couple of designers who have used Corten, you know, spoke to all of them, got trade accounts setup where I needed to. And still the quality wasn't there. I mean, a lot of them were trying to push mild still because it was cheaper. And obviously their argument was, oh, well, you'll get a similar Corten finish eventually, but I've had your stuff on site for a month, and it's gone from looking like a mild still to looking like Corten. And so the client can get quite excited about that, whereas the reality is, with a mild still, you're never going to get that speed of change that you kind of promise when you're designing a garden with Corten in it. That's what clients expect. They don't expect to wait a year."

DAN: "OKAY. CAN YOU CAN RECALL ANY INITIAL CONCERNS YOU HAD, WHEN YOU WERE LOOKING AT THE ALTERNATIVES AND TRYING TO DECIDE WHICH WAS GOING TO BE THE BEST?"

Chris: "So I guess my concern initially was, having looked at all of the stuff on your site, is that everything looks like Corten, but when you first receive it, it doesn't have the Corten patina already. And the concern then is the client questions it or says; "That's not Corten, it doesn't look right". And then there's that argument. But that was alleviated almost immediately because they can see it changing, and then they like the narrative - they like the fact that it's going to change, it's not going to look the same, and it's going to happen relatively quickly. So that was, I guess, my concern with your product. I guess the concern more widely was about costs - as in the cost of Corten. But again, that was alleviated pretty quickly because you were actually coming out cheaper than 90% of the guys I was getting quotes from. So, I guess very quickly, I didn't really have too many concerns and I still don't, quite frankly."

DAN: “OK GREAT. SO FOR US TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHY YOU CHOSE TO TRY THIS NEW PRODUCT, COULD YOU SHARE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE, CHRIS? AS IN, WHEN YOU’RE FACED WITH NEW IDEAS HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THEM?”

Chris: “I think it’s fair to say that I’m a bit of a perfectionist, so I’m also probably overly obsessive compulsive. I’m quite happy to say that, like a lot of us, I suffer with obsessive compulsive disorder, so things do need to be perfect for me, quite frankly. I have a real issue with straight lines. A lot of my designs have hard (straight) edges and I guess if I’m going to be creating a garden, then I need to know that the product which is creating these straight lines is fit for purpose. If a client comes to me and says, ‘I want loads of reclaimed sleeper edging’ that’s an absolute nightmare for me because there’s no way you can get a straight edge on a natural product like that, or you can try, but it’s always going to be slightly warped and such. So something like Straightcurve (Zero-Flex) is perfect for someone like me because you can create any kind of angle you want. I’ve created gardens with all manner of angles. They’re not just 90 degree angles, I’ve got 120 degrees and 111 degrees and all kinds of stupid angles, which, quite frankly, most landscapers would look at and have a little cry to themselves. But your product is so easy to manipulate and gets you such a great straight line that for someone like me, that wants to create that sort of thing, it’s perfect and it’s a product which I don’t worry about, if I’m honest. In the garden that I’m building at the moment, we’ve got timber, we’ve got natural stone, we’ve got porcelain like sawn edged stuff, mitered edged this, that and the other, all that sort of stuff. I’m not overly simplifying the use of your material, but I’ve got carpenters who have found some of the stuff I’ve designed challenging. I’ve got stone guys who have struggled to get miter edges on porcelain because, again, it’s quite difficult. You need the right materials. But I’ve used your stuff, your Straightcurve (Zero-Flex), and no one struggled with it because actually, it’s a really user friendly piece of kit. And you also make it very easy to use because you’ve got a really good online platform you share with us designers and contractors so that we can review how to do something. We can watch a six minute video, and then we’re good to go.”

DAN: “SO YOU HAVE JUST USED THE ZERO-FLEX 100MM GARDEN EDGING ON A LANDSCAPING PROJECT FOR THE FIRST TIME, CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT THE PROJECT FOR CONTEXT?”

Chris: “Yeah sure, so this one was a very challenging site (and project) actually because it’s a new build in St Albans, on a converted farmland property that overlooks a paddock. And from the initial brief stage, it was clear the client wanted a bit of everything. He wanted a very contemporary garden with hard (straight) edges. He wanted a very large entertaining space. He wanted a pergola and a sunken fire pit. He even wanted a basketball court at one point. So I designed everything so that all of the spaces in the garden are defined almost as individual spaces but if you have a lot of people to entertain, they’re all quite subtly linked to one another. And your product has actually been really useful in doing that because it’s a consistent element throughout the garden - in essence, each of the areas are semi-defined by your product. So I’ve created a very contemporary garden, you know, in a very rural space, but it actually works. It works as an entertaining space and it works as a space that’s fit for the needs of the client. And again, your edging has worked really well. Because it adds an element of interest to an area which actually you know, if there weren’t those little touches, it could just be quite a simplistic garden. But in actual fact, it’s these details and finishing touches that link everything together and make it quite a unique space. And the client seems very happy with it. He’s got everything he wanted. He’s got his sauna, his plunge pool, his hot tub, his pergola, his kitchen gardens, his sunken fire pit, his naturalistic sort of space. And because he’s that sort of character, he’s a really sociable chap, he wants a bit of everything. And, if you spoke to most designers, most designers would have shied away from the project because there’s so much going on in that space, but again, going back to your product, what your product does, really is, it’s a really easy way of defining space in a really quick and effective way.”

DAN: "AND HOW DID THE (ZERO-FLEX) EDGING PERFORM IN TERMS OF ACHIEVING AN UNMOVABLE STRAIGHT LINE IN YOUR PROJECT? IN WHAT WAYS WERE YOU IMPRESSED OR DISAPPOINTED?"

Chris: "It's probably the best edging I've used and the contractor using it said it's one of the best edging he's ever used in terms of ease of use. I love its stability - because the bonus with the Zero-Flex 100 is the base has that kind of (inverted) T-shape which then obviously just pegs straight into the ground. I also loved the corner piece which we're able to use as a template to make our own corners without adding cost. Yeah, the contractors loved the product. They genuinely loved it. And the client, even without it having the full Corten look yet, they can already see over the course of a week a change in colour, which they were quite excited by that. So in terms of usability - excellent. In terms of visual impression - excellent. And in terms of ease of use, yeah, great."

DAN: "I'D LOVE TO HEAR JUST A QUICK LITTLE COMMENT ON THE CREATING OF CORNERS. WHAT YOU WOULD SAY TO ANOTHER LANDSCAPER IF THEY WERE DECIDING TO BUY CORNERS OR JUST MAKE THEIR OWN WHERE THEY NEED THEM."

Chris: "I'd say the great thing is that actually (you) were really upfront about the ease of actually creating your own corners. You gave us one of your pre-made corner pieces and then we used that as a template to create our own, which in a garden (a really contemporary garden like the one that we've just created) is perfect because we've got lots of edges, lots of corners, lots of right angles. And actually you know, whilst the product isn't super expensive, let's be honest, the client likes to see value for money, and for me that was something that I could even communicate to the customer. I was able to say actually, "You know, as well as doing us a great deal on the Corten (which is cheaper than a lot of the Corten that is on the market), they've also thrown in an example of how we can make corners without added cost."

DAN: "THAT IS HELPFUL IN TERMS OF REDUCING WASTE TOO, RIGHT? DID YOU FIND THE METERAGE YOU ORDERED WAS SPOT ON FOR WHAT YOU NEEDED TO ACHIEVE?"

Chris: "Yeah, we've literally had zero waste. I think we might have had one off cut. I don't even think we added 10% on to the order, which you know, you normally do with most materials. I think we went for the exact amount and we were bang on. Which again, clients don't like to see lots of leftovers and lots of spare bits and lots of off cuts and there wasn't any, essentially, it was perfect."

DAN: "WHAT WAS THE MAIN REASON YOU CHOSE TO GIVE THIS PRODUCT A GO, ESPECIALLY AS IT IS THE MOST PREMIUM GARDEN EDGE WE OFFER?"

Chris: "I did my research, in so much as I looked at a lot of the Corten in the market. I looked at the thickness of the Corten. I looked at you know, the installation process. A lot of them still have that kind of spiked finish, which is fine, I guess in certain situations but in the garden that we were using it in, where there was potentially going to be quite heavy traffic on the path as well as the chance that quad bikes might be driven up at some point. We needed a product which would take the weight of a small vehicle basically and I just couldn't see that any of the spiked finishes would do that or give us even a chance of doing it. And so when we found your product with the (inverted) T shape profile it has, it just seemed like the obvious solution for the paths we had to create. As well as, the rounded finish on it just looks great, which you don't see much of, you see more of a square finish which is a harder finish and I think, even though the Corten isn't super thick, because it has that rounded finish to it just looks more expensive. So it was a bit of a no brainer really."

DAN: "CAN YOU THINK OF ONE PRODUCT OR APPROACH YOU HAVE USED TO ACHIEVE STRAIGHT EDGE LINES IN THE PAST? WHAT WOULD YOUR TEAM IDENTIFY AS SOME OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES OR DIFFICULTIES WITH THAT APPROACH? HOW CAN THAT IMPACT YOUR BUSINESS BOTTOM LINE?"

Chris: "I guess people need edgings for a lot of pathways and a lot of people want this kind of compacted gravel finish so you need an edge on it. A lot of people want a cross between a contemporary look and a kind of a rustic look. And if you're running a long edge run, like one of the paths on the garden that we used your product for was approximately 30 metres long. So if that's not dead straight, it looks dreadful. And with a lot of the spiked finish Corten or mild steel edging it just, you know, even when you're putting it in the ground it's bending but with your product it joins almost invisibly and straight. So obviously you run a line, but you know you don't even really need to run a line for the sake of actually getting it perfectly straight because the product kind of does it for you. Because again it has that overlapping join. So like all of this, you know, there's a lot of straight lines in this garden. It's a big garden. So again, quite often a concern if you have a contemporary garden, you need straight edges and your product gave us it, kind of effortlessly."

DAN: "WHAT WOULD YOU SAY WERE THE MOST NOTABLE BENEFITS OF USING THE ZERO-FLEX 100MM, IN TERMS OF THIS JOB AND ALSO IN COMPARISON TO THE ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE?"

Chris: "In this job, as I mentioned, it was a contemporary job. And we had lots of right angles. And it's going to be a busy garden and one of the paths in particular has the potential of having sand buggies and stuff running up and down it. So we needed a robust material and we wanted one which gave a contemporary finish and to be honest, having looked around on the market and compared prices, I think yours to me was the obvious solution. And if I have contemporary gardens again in the future that require a Corten look, you'll be my first port of call from now on."

DAN: "AWESOME. SO WOULD YOU PITCH THIS TO FUTURE CLIENTS CONSIDERING THEIR EDGING CHOICES?"

Chris: "I will pitch you to every client quite frankly. It will be my number one choice. I think because again, in terms of the cost of other materials, I think it's comparable. I don't think you're excessively more expensive. I certainly found more expensive out there. But I didn't find anything which was as easy to install and a lot of the costs for you know, as a designer, when you're costing something, a large part of the cost is the labour involved in installing. And the labour time taken installing Straightcurve is negligible because it's a really, really fit for purpose product. So if you're not saving on the cost of the edging itself, you certainly save on the cost of labour."

DAN: "OK FOR THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT - WHICH WAS A BIG ONE IN TERMS OF THE AMOUNT OF EDGING YOU PUT IN - CAN YOU PUT A NUMBER ON THAT IN TERMS OF POTENTIAL TIME SAVING VERSUS WHAT ELSE YOU MIGHT HAVE USED?"

Chris: "I mean for the whole garden we used 130 lineal metres and the team (of two installers) layed it all in one day (14 hours total). And when I looked at the original quote, we'd allowed for four days (56 hours) of labour! That's a reflection of the ease that the contractors find working with the (Straightcurve) product - even your online resources, you've got a really, really good online package which they all watched. It was super, they'd never come across the product and yet they managed to install it all in a day after watching one six-minute installation video."

DAN: “SO BY SAVING TIME WITH THIS APPROACH, WOULD YOU REDUCE THE QUOTED LABOUR COSTS NEXT TIME YOU INCLUDE ZERO-FLEX 100MM IN A PROJECT?”

Chris: “Yeah, so we significantly reduced the labour cost. And I guess moving forward if I was to use the same contractor, then there would obviously be an expectation that the labour time required for installation of your product is considerably less than other ones on the market. Obviously, contractors want to make as much money as they can out of a product, but from the designers perspective, you know there is an expectation from clients that you give a rough estimate of the cost of materials and the cost of labour and the overall budget. Using your product now would be much easier for me to estimate the cost of the material and the labour.”

DAN: “HOW DOES ZERO-FLEX COMPARE WITH OTHER METHODS OF GETTING A PRECISE STRAIGHT EDGE YOU’VE USED IN THE PAST?”

Chris: “Trying to get a straight line with a gabion is virtually impossible, trying to create the right angle and the time taken to stop the thing from bulging and getting the lines right. It’s really really hard. But with your product, which we’ve got in an eco garden, we’ve got all manner of angles and things going on. And these aren’t just square rectangular beds. They’re like most random angles you can think of, I’ll have to send you some of the specifications because it gives all the angles and then you can see the way it looks. I’ll send you the design, the construction detail for the angles of all the beds and you can see what I’m getting at because it’s all like funny old angles but it looks amazing. And I knew it would, but you couldn’t achieve that hard edge with a lot of the Corten on the market or you could, but you might have to get a proper steel worker to do it for you and get it premade as opposed to just putting them together on site.”

DAN: “HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE OR CHARACTERIZE YOUR IDEAL TARGET CLIENTS AND WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT?”

Chris: “I guess the ideal client needs to be someone that also trusts that you’re interested in achieving the same thing. And I think that’s why I get on quite well with the clients that I’ve got at the moment. As a designer, you have a vision and you want the client to be bought into that vision or you have to share the vision. There may be times when your opinions differ, but generally you kind of need to have the same vision in place and you need to be able to see it all the way along. I’m interested in creating beautiful spaces that are really fit for purpose. And there’s lots of designers out there and there’s lots of garden design & build firms that will build you anything you want. But I don’t want to just build something which is like, oh, well, that’s beautiful. I want to build something which is really fit for purpose and beautiful. There’s no point to me, building something which I know as soon as we’re off site isn’t going to get used properly. And that might just be a me thing, and it might be linked again to me being a bit of a perfectionist. But I think I’ve been quite lucky. I’ve got some challenging clients, but the clients are definitely on the same page as me. So I think the perfect client for me is someone who shares the vision, someone who trusts you to do a good job and they don’t challenge you on everything. And that also then goes into materials, as in, they’ll challenge you on, well, is that the best material? Is that the best place for that tree? Actually, you’ve suggested this stone, or is that the best stone? Again, I’m not against the fact that we should all have an opinion, but you’re paying me to look at not just one entity, it’s every element of the garden. And that’s where it gets quite challenging, I think, as a garden designer, because you may get paid by an hourly rate, or you may get paid a fixed sum, but ultimately there’s so much that goes into every hour that you spend on a garden. And that’s the satisfying thing, really, when you can walk around a garden and take ten pictures from different angles and you could almost be in a different garden for each angle because there’s so much going on. But not that there’s so much going on that it’s just oh my God, it’s so beautiful. But also that it works for the family that you’ve built it for or the individual that you’ve built it

for. So I like building spaces which I could see that that person will use. And I've had clients who want this, that and the other. And I will say to them, I think that's a bad idea. And nine times out of ten, actually, they've kind of come round to it. There's been some backwards and forwards, but ultimately they're happy. And so I guess the answer to your question is that I want clients to trust my judgment that the material that I've sourced for them is the best material for them. And the great thing about yourselves at Straightcurve is not only is it the best in terms of value for money, but it's the best in terms of quality and it's the best in terms of usability. If every product was like yours, then I'd probably spend half the amount of time I do on the phone with clients who were just checking."

DAN: "THAT'S AMAZING. OK AS A FINAL QUESTION, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ZERO-FLEX 100MM PRODUCT IN TERMS OF THE OVERALL RESULT ACHIEVED WITH THIS PROJECT?"

Chris: "Now that I've used it, I would rate it as being a core element of the garden now actually. I'd say it's fundamental to the design, fundamental to the needs of the client, which was a contemporary hard-edged garden. We wouldn't have achieved that without the product. Well, we might have achieved it with another product but we would have taken twice as long, probably cost twice as much money, and wouldn't look as good."

DAN: "BRILLIANT, I THINK THAT GIVES A REALLY GOOD SENSE OF YOUR EXPERIENCE. THE OTHER THING I WAS GOING TO LOOK TO GET FROM YOU IS A BIT OF A BIO. IF YOU WANT TO SAY SOME THINGS RIGHT NOW - WHAT ARE SOME THINGS ABOUT YOUR LIFE THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?"

Chris: "I guess I'm relatively new to Horticulture and new to garden design. I spent the first 15 years of my working life in public service as a police officer and working in government. And now I've moved into a career where I can be creative and make things beautiful and fit for purpose for people, which is something I love doing. And I've graduated at London College of Garden Design. I've done diplomas and postgrad diplomas in garden design with Westminster University. I've done all my RHS accreditations. And now I'm enjoying being a garden designer and building beautiful spaces. And that's about all I've done so far, quite frankly."

DAN: "THAT'S A FAIR BIT. THANKS HEAPS FOR HELPING OUT AGAIN."

Chris: "It's a genuine pleasure man."

DAN: "TOP STUFF - I'LL LET YOU GO. THANKS, CHRIS."

Chris: "Take it easy. Cheers. Bye."

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