



"Example of using color in DynaSCAPE."

Making the Most of Your Presentations

By: Eric Gilbey, Professional Member, APLD

Have you ever heard the saying, "presentation is everything"? This little saying is significant for landscape designers, since presentations help them sell their ideas. The more compelling the presentation, the better it will communicate the design intent to potential clients.

The Power of CAD

Incorporating computer aided design software (CAD) into your workflow can open up a variety of opportunities to make your presentations stand out. With hundreds of colors, symbols and text formats to choose from, you can really sharpen your creative sense of style, whether your plans are hand drawn or designed solely in a CAD application.

When creating a presentation, one component that can never be downplayed is color. So if you're working in black and white media, add some color to give your design a brighter visual appeal. If you're already using color, try choosing a design style like artistic, realistic or conceptual. For those already using a style in 2D, consider incorporating various 3D aspects such as elevations, perspectives and other 3D views. And if you're already comfortable using 3D, take it even further with walkthroughs, solar animations or photorealism.

Enhance Your Hand Drawings

Although we live in a digital age where technology reigns, hand drawing is not a lost art. For those who prefer hand drawing, your drafting doesn't have to end when you put down your pencil. In fact, that is just the beginning. For years CAD applications have had the ability to scan plans to images, which create digital versions of your work. From this starting point, you have the ability to edit and enhance your drawings quickly and easily by adding color, textures, objects or notes. Graphic enhancement software, like Adobe Photoshop Elements or Corel Painter Essentials, can be used for this process. There are also several free resources available, such as GIMP, Artweaver and Pixia. By incorporating your hand drawing style into a digital product, your designs will be convenient to archive, reproduce, exchange and store. In addition to more effective presentations, this can make for better communication in your work environment, allowing you to e-mail your drawings to clients or other members of your team.

There are several programs ideal for incorporating hand drawing with CAD, such as Vectorworks Landmark and DynaSCAPE Design. Dedicated hand drawers may also want to consider the option of a digital input device, called a "tablet," which allows the designer to use a "pen" to hand draw directly into the CAD application.

Utilizing 3D Workflows

As you may already know, working in 3D can be very beneficial in helping you to decide the best way to approach a site. It can also be a great visualization, analysis and presentation tool, and can convey more accurate estimates when length, height and width are important in quantifying areas and volumes. 3D is also important in determining if proposed design elements are of the right scale or if they achieve the appropriate effect.

Adding 3D features to your plan enables your drawing to really come to life. With databases like Google 3D Warehouse, you can import hundreds of 3D objects into CAD programs to present your drawing with a realistic effect. Programs with 3D capabilities can also be used for visual walkthroughs and solar animations, which help convey a well-conceived design that addresses the client's wants and needs. In some cases, the use of 3D may also aid in solving issues your client may not have otherwise noticed.

Landscape architect and author Daniel Tal, ASLA, prefers Google SketchUp for his designs, and he agrees there are many options for designers to improve the presentation of their project concepts, especially when generating more photorealistic renderings beyond a basic model.

"There are many new or updated plug-ins for SketchUp that generate these types of renderings with minimal effort, time and expertise," said Tal. "These integrated plug-ins, like SU Podium and Shaderlight, have two or three menus, and the process of going from a flat SketchUp image to rendering is literally about applying the right textures, giving the textures some rendering values and hitting the render button in SketchUp. They are worth checking out and using."



"Before image drafted in Google SketchUp."



"After rendering in Shader Light to create photorealism."

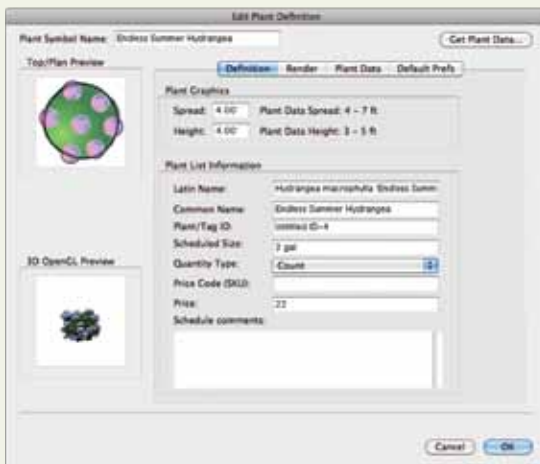
Making the Most of Down Time

Let's face it, even with the capabilities of CAD applications, most designers have trouble finding the extra time to transform their presentations into works of art. Thankfully there's such a thing as "down time" to aid in preparing for the busier part of the season. For some regions, the slow season starts in late fall and goes into winter, and for others it may just be circling around the holidays. Either way, taking advantage of these open windows of time will enable you to work more efficiently and easily throughout the busier times of year, particularly in streamlining the creation of client presentations. This is the time to look into additional training and better resource management, preparing templates and exploring alternative uses of technology to take your presentations to the next level.

"Even though you'll get a professional presentation right out of the box, you can spend some of your down time modifying existing, or creating new symbols and titleblocks to make your drawings stand out from your competitors," said Len Hordyk, LAT, Product Manager at DynaSCAPE software. "You don't even have to give up the quality of a hand colored presentation. Instead, the software can produce a rendered masterpiece that mimics pencil, crayon or watercolor, while still benefiting from all the other advantages of technology."

Proper Preparation

When using CAD software for landscape designs, preparing templates can really give you a time saving advantage. For example, creating and customizing palettes will save you an immense amount of time when detailing each project. To start, first take note of design elements that will remain consistent throughout most of your drawings and establish the font styles, labeling techniques, plan graphics, 3D graphics, and pre-named plant and feature symbols you plan to use in all plans. For instance, if you know that your plans will always have a light green representation for turf area and a texture that emulates grass for 3D views, then make those classes or layers a part of your template file, so that each file does not have to be a “start from scratch” effort. You can then apply this same technique for title blocks and other plan details.



“Predefining plant symbols during downtimes helps make quick work of illustrative planting plans.”

Creating a template can be as easy as re-saving the file for a completed project with the word “template” in the title and deleting the project-specific content while maintaining the settings. Many programs offer the ability to save your work as a template file, but if the program you use does not have this capability, you might consider saving a template file as “read only” so that you can never accidentally save it with project-specific content.

Beyond Basic Training

Staying ahead isn’t always easy to do with busy schedules and demanding deadlines. So the slow part of the year is the perfect time to take advantage of training opportunities. CAD software training for your design team is a great way to discover shortcuts and more efficient workflows and to keep current with the latest trends and best practices in your industry.

Some specific areas in which to seek training to improve your ability to create effective client presentations include 2D digital rendering, 3D modeling and 3D rendering. Different formats of training options include workshops, classroom instruction, online

training webinars and self-paced training manuals.

Most CAD manufacturers, such as Nemetschek Vectorworks, Autodesk, and DynaSCAPE offer some kind of direct or online training. Resources vary in price and range from free tips and tricks to paid one-on-one instruction. In the search for training, it is often best to go to the company who sold (or will sell) the software to you. This will grant you secure training packages that will maximize your experience while allowing you to maintain a relationship with the people who want to ensure your continued success in using their product.

Taking advantage of the capabilities offered by CAD software can do wonders for your design presentations. By learning how to make the most of these tools and using down time wisely for training and preparation, you will be able to pull together a compelling, impressive presentation in practically no time at all.



Eric Gilbey, Professional Member, APLD

Index of CAD programs:

Artweaver

<http://www.artweaver.de>

AutoCAD

<http://www.usa.autodesk.com>

DynaSCAPE

<http://www.dynascape.com>

GIMP

<http://www.gimp.org>

Painter Essentials

<http://www.corel.com/painter>

Photoshop Essentials

<http://www.adobe.com>

Pixia

<http://www.pixia.com>

SketchUp

<http://www.sketchup.google.com>

Vectorworks

<http://www.vectorworks.net>