



Stu and Jodi Baines have worked hard to build a strong team that helps customers better enjoy their outdoor spaces

## FROM THE GROUND UP

Wellington's largest landscaping business believes hiring the right people puts everything in place, and keeping them happy has a knock-on effect for customers

RML PROFILE

It all started with a mailbox drop. When Stuart and Jodi Baines decided to take the plunge and start their own landscaping business, Aspen Landscapes, they weren't really in a position to take massive risks. With three kids and a home in Wellington, they decided to limit landscape work to the weekends until they were sure it would take off.

With a new trailer hitched to the family car, Stuart and Jodi managed to build up enough capital after two years to recruit staff and purchase a dedicated work ute.

"We didn't get to see a lot of Stu in those first few years, as he was still working full time as Wellington Parks and Gardens Portfolio Manager," says Jodi. "That wasn't ideal, but within four years we had built up a fairly good client base, so we could focus solely on the business."

Seventeen years later, Aspen Landscapes is the capital's largest landscaping company, employing 40 staff and providing design, landscape construction, horticultural and maintenance services.

### NAVIGATING WELLINGTON TERRAIN

With extensive experience in construction and horticulture, Stu was no stranger to landscaping,

but he admits that Wellington's topography threw up a few more challenges than he anticipated.

"It took a while to work out how to efficiently deal with the steepness of Wellington properties, while sticking to a schedule and making sure the end result was aesthetically appealing. At the same time, the tricky terrain is the bread and butter of landscaping, as almost everyone needs a retaining wall or a few!" He says the job has also provided a great way of getting to know the city he calls home, and he was amazed by what he discovered.

"Sometimes you have no idea what type of property is hidden around Wellington. Even after 17 years, I'm still blown away by the pockets of

paradise that people have – and to help them improve or maintain those areas is quite a rewarding feeling."

He says discovering these gems was part of the inspiration for the company's tagline – 'be proud of your outdoors'.

### INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION

A former apprentice himself, Stu now invests in up-and-coming landscapers; the company usually has at least half a dozen in training. Jodi works closely with Primary ITO to make sure they receive the additional support they need.

"We currently have seven on the go and it's great to help them develop their skillset, while giving back to the industry," says Jodi. "It's really rewarding to see them come into their own, and to hear how much they enjoy the work."

Aspen's apprentices are offered experience in all the services the business provides, with some starting in planting before moving to landscape construction, and vice versa.

"It's all about playing people to their strengths and ensuring they are happy with the job they're doing."

### KEEPING THE CULTURE

While going from a one-man band to a 40-strong team has been a great success for Stu and Jodi, they admit it hasn't been without some teething issues.

"It takes a while to get to know what type of person is going to be right for the job – both skill set-wise and personality-wise," says Stu. "But now we feel like we really have it nailed and have a very strong team on board."

To ensure the team morale doesn't

suffer with the team spread across town on different jobs, everyone comes in Monday morning, every Friday everyone finishes at 4pm and comes to the office for drinks, and every 8 weeks there's a breakfast get-together.

"We believe our company is only as strong as its employees," says Stu. "If we ensure our employees are happy, it's fair to expect them to ensure our customers are happy, too." ■

**Aspen Landscapes is a long-standing supporter of Registered Master Landscapers, having been a member since 2011. Stu and Jodi are proud to be affiliated with an industry association committed to providing professional development, networking and educational opportunities for them and their team.**

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