

taking a chance

Having fallen into landscaping by chance, this new HIA member is now making big impressions. Annie Reid reports

Living Environs is just three years old, but is already making a big impression on the housing industry. Young and bold, the landscape design and construction company operates at the high end of the residential and commercial markets, with a growing portfolio of impressive projects.

And no-one is happier than the owner, Sam Keats. 'I was looking to start a business and I wanted to be in the property game, whether it be residential or commercial,' he explains.

Sam had just moved from Adelaide to Perth, having gained experience in various marketing and business development roles.

'I was talking to a friend who was renovating their entire backyard with a pool and outdoor kitchen, but who was

Below: Sam Keats offers a full concept-to-completion landscaping service.



having real issues with the contractors engaged. He was also time poor and asked me to help out. I was astounded by the lack of service and lack of communication from the guys on site. No-one knew what anyone else was doing and there was no coordination, so I came in and sorted it all out,' he recalls.

As he wrapped up, someone else asked if he'd help out on a job suffering the same fate. 'Something just clicked and it all started from there,' he says.

Sam operates the business with a core team of four: an administrator, construction supervisor, leading hand and a landscape designer

And that something was the desire to create professionalism within the traditional building industry.

'We wanted to offer a complete concept-to-completion rather than just contract service where everything from the initial meeting, to the design, council approvals and construction is managed right the way through,' Sam says.

Now Living Environs has both sectors covered. It specialises in high-end



residential and small-to-medium commercial projects, from its brand new office in Perth's Osborne Park.

'We previously had two offices and have just moved into a bigger premises and warehouse,' he says.

Sam operates the business with a core team of four: an administrator, construction supervisor, leading hand and a landscape designer. He has a network of subcontractors as well as a handful of casual employees that he uses depending on the project.

'Not being from a landscaping background, I felt I needed to set up the business with key landscape and design personnel,' he explains.

With those positions in place, Sam focusses on his key role managing business development and tracking the company's strategic position.

For the customer, the framework means that there is only one point of contact and more importantly, one contract. All inquiries are managed by Sam and his team, rather than having to contact numerous subcontractors, which leads to greater client satisfaction.

In the beginning, the company was careful not to take on too much work. Sam felt it was important to get the fundamentals right.

'We've done the hard yards in setting up the business, and now we're ready to scale rapid growth'

A major milestone was completing the company website. Potential clients can book appointments directly through the contacts page and Sam also utilises search engine optimisation to direct online traffic to the site. Once customers are engaged, the company can also produce 3D renders of their project so they can easily visualise the final design.

'We have worked very hard on our marketing and branding. Essentially, we want to offer high quality and service,' he says.

Initially, the team started with smaller projects as a way to test the market's response to their business concept. But as Sam says: 'We then landed some larger homes with swimming pools, patios and outdoor kitchens and have never looked back.'



HIA benefits

Living Environs joined HIA from the very start.

'We recognise it's important to have some involvement with the industry, and we've been a member from day one,' says business owner, Sam Keats.

In the early days, Sam sought some legal advice and help with contracts, and found the assistance invaluable. His site supervisor has also completed HIA courses.

'It's great to know that if we ever have a problem, we can turn to HIA first and take it from there,' he says. It also helps clients, providing peace of mind that the company is aligned with a top industry association.

The company has been slowly building its project portfolio, and Sam believes he is almost ready to begin entering award schemes.

'We're getting a bit of an arsenal together,' he laughs.

At the moment, all his focus is on growing the business.

'We just want to keep over-servicing our customers and constantly developing and growing,' Sam says.

The team will build anything outdoors, and now with a commercial component, have begun working with leading builders and developers too.

'We also deal with landscaping contracts for commercial and industrial developers and have just started submissions to local government tenders,' Sam says.

With the fundamentals of the business carefully bedded down, Sam is ready to begin the next stage of his plan. 'We want rapid, strategic growth,' he says.

In the short term, he expects to double his staff by Christmas this year to cater for the larger contracts coming through. He's currently seeking a project and operations manager and qualified landscaping trades.

'We need to be ready to take on these new contracts. We've done the hard yards in setting up the business, and now we're ready to scale rapid growth,' Sam says.

While he admits the company was quiet during the first half of the year, the second half experienced a growth spurt and is now on track to double its turnover this financial year.

'Because we started from nothing, any work has been great for us. We've always been steady, and now we're really starting to grow.'

It's good for staff morale too, who are seeing their hard work pay off. 'It's great

for the confidence,' Sam says. 'It is very rewarding to know that while we've got a long way to go, our forward planning is working.' 📍