

## Horticulture and Arboriculture will not Cease to Evolve, with Education as the Key

INTERVIEW - I

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*Mr. James Ian Robinson is an experienced professional in the Horticultural and Arboricultural Industry. He was a member of the Steering Committee for the ISA Hong Kong Chapter in 2012 and is currently a Board Member and the Vice President of the Chapter.*

Fortunate to have an interview opportunity with Ian, I was curious to know more about the path he had taken to date.

Back in 1974, Ian started his studies for the Higher National Diploma in Landscape Technology at Askham Bryan College of Horticulture and Agriculture in North Yorkshire. At that time, the industry was shouting out for people with related qualifications for management positions. As soon as he graduated three years later in 1977 as an early cohort of graduates of the course, he immediately gained the position of Landscape Manager in Tilhill Forestry Advisory Limited in the UK.

In Ian's opinion, Landscape Architects and Arborists are not two individual professions, instead, they work together to make Hong Kong look better and improve the overall standard of Horticulture and Arboriculture. "We need Landscape Architects, they need us too! There's definitely going to be some synergy." "It's not all about trees, there is landscape in there as well".

Mentioning about trainers for new blood in the industry, Ian thinks that there are several good trainers in Hong Kong but there could



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**To him, the industry in Hong Kong is on the right path with the establishment of the Tree Management office, identifying two separate streams and having individual sections handling landscape issues and tree management issues. And with the ISA coming over here in Hong Kong 10 years ago, when there were only 5 or 6 people becoming Certified Arborists before the number started to snowball. "There's still a lot ISA can do, I think we can help a lot more with its qualification framework."**

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still be more. "In time it will snowball but there are probably not enough trainers at the moment to train all of those people that we need throughout the different layers of the industry. There is a lot of work needed to bring grassroot gardeners and maintenance contractors up to a professional level of proficiency. I think that maybe in the short term we have to bring more trainers in from overseas in order to produce a critical mass of suitably trained workers.

One piece of advice that Ian gives to people who are ready to join the industry is to look for a mentor, someone who is willing to pass on skills and knowledge. "Try to find somebody who is knowledgeable and latch onto them, follow what they do, learn from what they do and try to get them to coach one on one. Try to find somebody who is looking for an assistant, somebody who has been in the industry for a while who can transfer the information to you."

He is glad to see that there are more vocational trainings courses related to horticulture and arboriculture now when compared to the past years. He could see the number of horticulturists who are really knowledgeable about plants has substantially increased over the last 20 years. "That can only be a good thing. That is a change for the better. It is a slow process but still changing. It's always good to have more technical knowledge."

Speaking of his favourite tree species, there are five in total. They are ***Cinnamomum camphora***, ***Lagerstroemia speciosa***, ***Senna surattensis***, ***Plumeria rubra*** and ***Liquidambar formosana***. He reckons that it does not matter whether the species is indigenous or exotic, the 'right tree for the right place' should prevail let alone that a large portion of plant material is in fact introduced to Hong Kong.

For greening in the metro area, he points out that rooftop greening is a good way to improve the built landscape in the city. "All new buildings in the urban areas should be designed with green roofs," He



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As a Chartered Horticulturist and Certified Arborist who has handled thousands of projects in Hong Kong since 1982 until the present, Ian said that most of the problems brought about in Landscape Design are abiotic, they are generally caused by inappropriate species selection. For instance, some plants could not grow well in certain locations due to unideal environmental conditions which were not expected. "...eventually found that it's too shaded or it's too windy or there's air conditioner...areas get too compacted or the drainage doesn't work properly."

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understands that the loading capacities in many existing building rooftops are not enough for rooftop gardens because those structures were not designed for it. However, in the future, this technique should be greatly incorporated into newly designed buildings to balance the temperature inside buildings and reduce the 'heat island' effect.

In his eyes, Hong Kong has a beautiful natural landscape worthy of appreciation. The country parks are well-managed and act as places for people to destress themselves.



As for the future of the industry, he expressed that although in the 80s, there were a lot of working opportunities created out of new towns' infrastructure development, all such areas as highways, parks, public recreation areas, podium decks and every property that has a landscape area still needs to be maintained forever. This remains a prosperous industry to get into. "I don't see work drying up anytime soon for horticulturists and arborists at all," he said. In addition, the type of work has moved more from infrastructure to high-end residential, indicating people are realizing that a lot of the social problems — high anxiety, for example, can be relieved with a greener environment to live in or with somewhere shaded to sit out. Property management offices are also starting to take up

more responsibilities of removing the ticking timebombs of dangerous trees by commissioning more Tree Risk Assessments. All of these situations create job opportunities for the industry.

It is hoped that the benefits of having a professional systematic education programme in Hong Kong will deliver many more knowledgeable and qualified individuals in the coming 20 years' time.

**Ryden LI is a Year 2 student of the programme "Higher Diploma in Conservation and Tree Management" at the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education**

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Fig. 2 – Flow chart for urban forestry development including resources and involvement of professions.