

An aerial photograph of a swimming pool with a curved edge, surrounded by a wooden deck. A large tree with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of red, orange, and yellow stands to the right of the pool. In the foreground, there are planters with various flowers and a small yellow sculpture. The background shows a brick building and more greenery.

bsq **BSQ**
LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTS

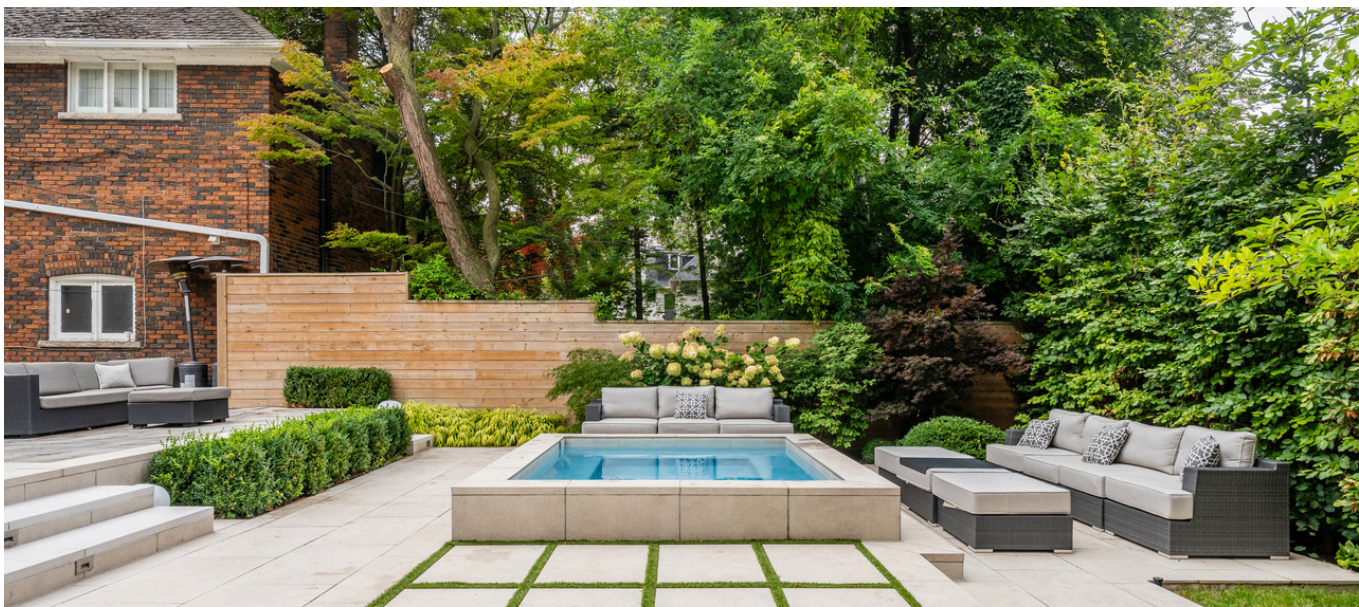
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bsq
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS



Founded by classmates Robert Boltman and Alex Bartlett in 2008, bsq Landscape Architects has represented Canada at international garden competitions in Japan and Singapore, and now applies the same design-first discipline.





bsq Landscape Architects has spent nearly two decades building backyards, condominium landscapes, and commercial sites across the Greater Toronto Area, work that has twice taken founders Robert Boltman and Alex Bartlett to represent Canada at international garden competitions in Japan and Singapore. The firm has stayed deliberately small, five people on a good year, and deliberately design-first: no proposal goes out, the founders say, without a drawing behind it.

Boltman and Bartlett met as classmates at Ryerson University, now Toronto Metropolitan University. Both worked at established firms first, a traditional development-focused planning practice he found unfulfilling as a senior project manager. The two reconnected when Boltman emailed his old classmates and Bartlett was the only one to respond, after finding the message sitting in his junk folder.

bsq launched in 2008. Within two years, the firm was competing at the inaugural Gardening World Cup in Nagasaki, Japan, an early validation Boltman says told the founders they were doing something right.





"We went through ups and downs, having our own crew, not having our own crew, and here we are, eighteen years later. Seems like yesterday, but that's how life goes."



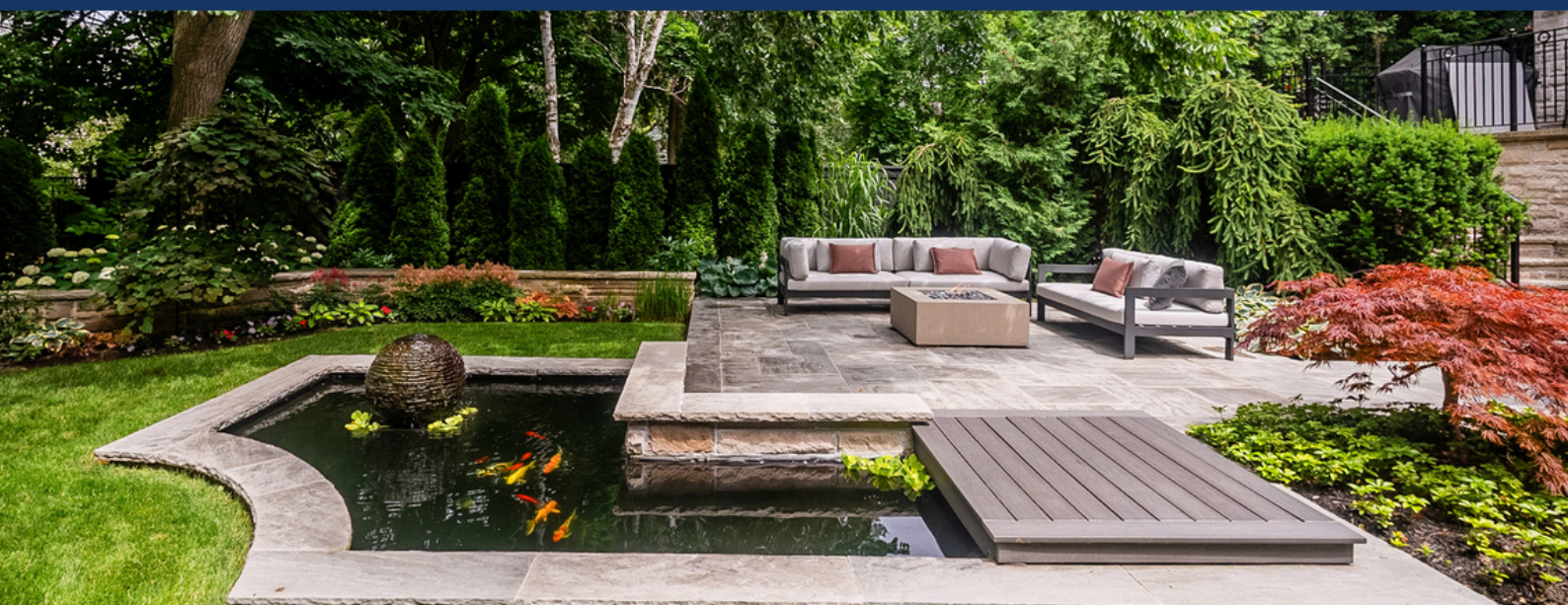
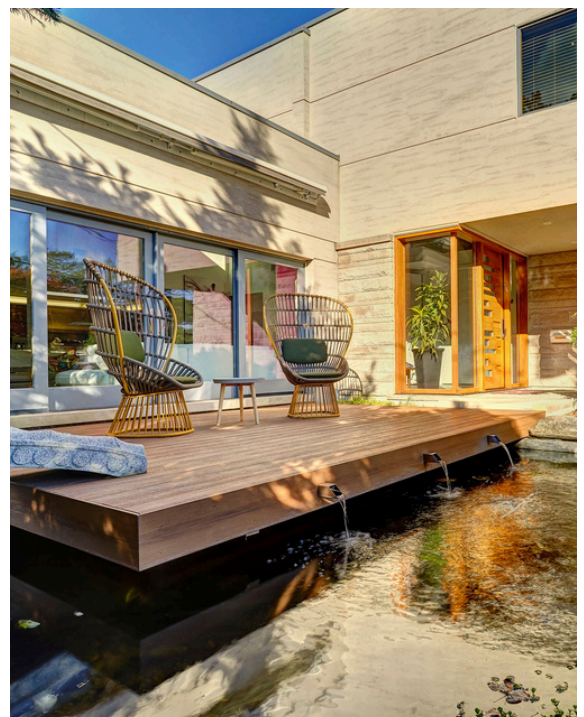
DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT.

bsq's model differs by sector. On residential work, the firm handles design and project management directly and positions its long-standing network of subcontractors, plumbers, electricians, stonemasons, and carpenters, as effectively its own crew, even though those trades are not bsq employees. On commercial work, Boltman says the firm's role is almost always project management rather than hands-on construction. Most projects arrive as inbound inquiries through the company website; because the firm is small, Boltman says it can size up a project's scope quickly and write a proposal to match.

A GOLD MEDAL, TWICE REMOVED

bsq has competed and medaled at the Gardening World Cup in Nagasaki and the Singapore Garden Festival across multiple years, including a gold medal win at the Singapore Garden Festival in 2012. Preparing for those competitions, Boltman says, mirrors a client commission almost exactly: design drawings, approvals, materials lists, and final construction, in this case roughly two and a half weeks of on-site building before each show opened. The difference, he says, is the client.

Boltman makes a point about the competitions themselves: without a client to answer to, changes happen the moment the firm decides to make them. bsq's last competition appearance was at a Canada Blooms show in 2016; the founders have not returned to Nagasaki or Singapore since roughly 2014 or 2015, partly, Boltman says, because family life got busier for both partners. He hasn't ruled out competing again.



DIGGING EIGHTEEN FEET FOR A HOT TUB

bsq's largest active project sits in Scarborough: a swim spa set beneath a steel-framed deck, which required excavating about 18 feet down to pour concrete footings before the spa could be craned into place. A steel structure and deck were then built above it, alongside a separate sports court on the same property. Boltman describes it as one of the largest residential landscape builds the firm has undertaken. Construction began the previous September, with completion targeted for November, a build cycle of just over a year.



THE TRADE NETWORK BEHIND THE DESIGN

bsq works with a consistent group of trades rather than rotating suppliers project to project, a choice Boltman ties directly to communication, both in coordinating on site and in how those trades interact with bsq's clients. The firm is also firm about sequencing: Boltman says he declines to provide a quote to prospective clients who haven't yet committed to a design.

"Would you build your house without a drawing? You're spending a quarter million dollars or more. I don't suggest you proceed in this way."

Boltman says that conversation, explaining why design, permitting, and trade pricing have to happen before a number gets attached to a project, is a recurring part of the job. Some clients take years to come around to it; he mentions prospects who returned to bsq a decade after an initial proposal, once they were ready to commit to the process.

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AWARDS WITHOUT THE EGO

Beyond its international competition results, bsq holds multiple Canada Blooms medals and OALA design honours dating back to the firm's founding year. Asked which award or project meant the most, Boltman didn't point to a specific one.

"I don't think the award really matters, in my opinion."

He points instead to the experience of representing Canada internationally as a young firm, describing the Singapore and Japan trips as a career highlight independent of how any single project placed.

TWO PARTNERS, A LOT OF HUMOR

bsq has stayed intentionally small: Boltman describes a typical team of five, himself and Bartlett plus three full-time staff, a size the firm has held to by choice rather than necessity.

"We think keeping people is really important, so we'd rather keep it small."

Boltman says the partnership itself runs on humour as much as process after nearly two decades of working together. He puts the firm's potential growth ceiling around six or seven people, which he says would likely require restructuring how the practice runs today.





TEACHING AI TO UNDERSTAND A LANDSCAPE

bsq has experimented with AI-generated 3D rendering tools, with mixed results. Boltman says the software struggles with the kind of nuanced, spatial instruction a designer gives intuitively.

"I wish I could take my finger or a stylus pen, circle something and say, make this blue."

Where AI has worked reliably, he says, is narrower edits: moving a shed, adding a seating area, swapping a railing for glass, tasks that take five to fifteen minutes with the right prompting. The firm has also used AI tools for cleaning up technical writing and is evaluating AI-assisted surveying software as a possible alternative to manual measuring on site.

WHAT COMES NEXT

bsq's near-term growth has leaned into two areas: condominium landscape renovations, driven in part by a real estate market where more people are staying put and reinvesting in their existing homes, and custom garages and carports, a niche the firm now markets as its own service line after fielding repeated inquiries.

Boltman says the firm remains selective about which commercial work it takes on, and continues to rely primarily on word of mouth and its website for new residential clients. He describes the practice's approach to growth as a habit of finding a niche, doing it well, and letting that work lead to the next one.





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