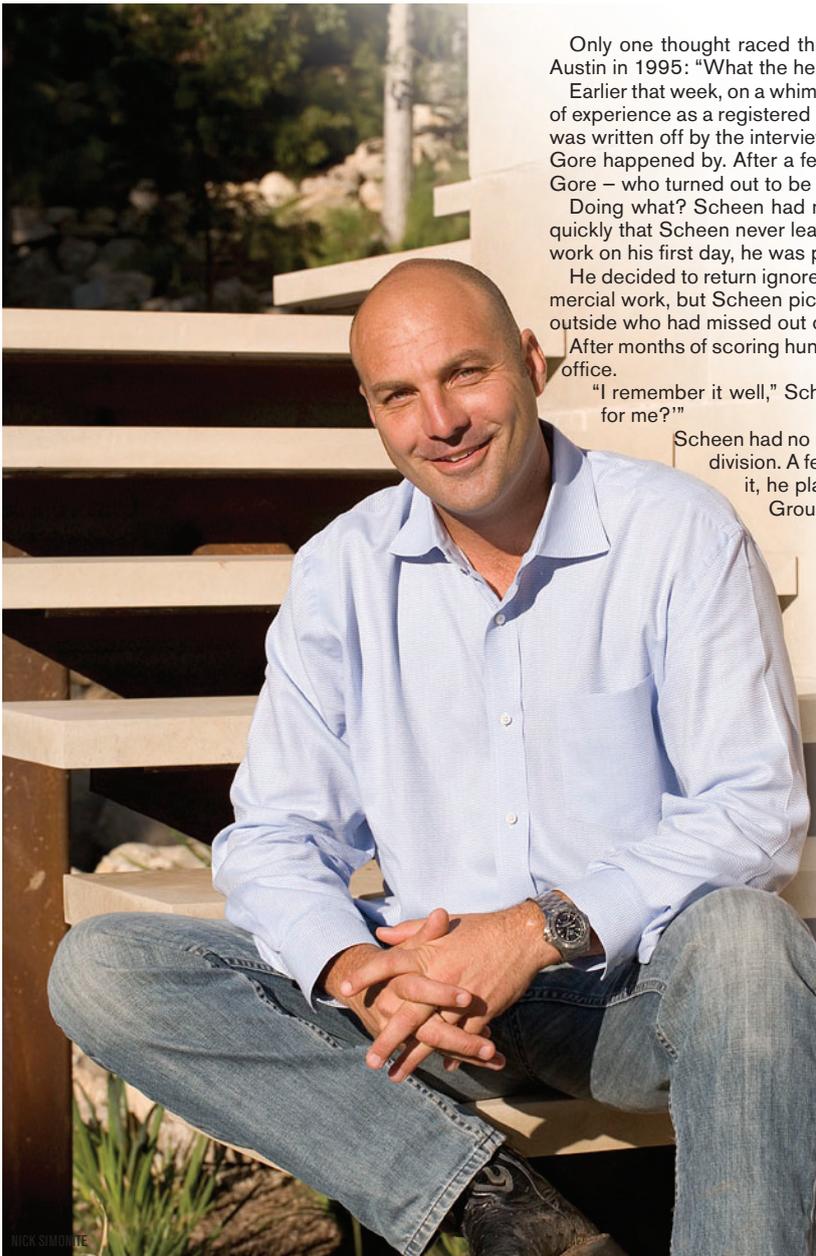


## Rick Scheen

Founder and president  
LandWest Design Group



Only one thought raced through Rick Scheen's mind as the U-Haul truck stuffed with his life's belongings entered Austin in 1995: "What the hell am I doing?"

Earlier that week, on a whim, he drove to Austin from his home in Louisiana to interview for a job that demanded 10 years of experience as a registered landscape architect. Scheen had a year and a half under his belt and was unregistered. He was written off by the interviewers after the first five minutes, but while they stepped away a quirky, thin man named Rex Gore happened by. After a few minutes of talking about hunting, fishing and just about everything except landscaping, Gore — who turned out to be the top boss there — offered Scheen a job.

Doing what? Scheen had no idea. And that was what troubled him as he drove here for the job. It all happened so quickly that Scheen never learned what he would be doing or even how much he'd be getting paid. When he arrived to work on his first day, he was placed in a corner and left to his own devices.

He decided to return ignored calls from homeowners who needed landscaping. His new employer specialized in commercial work, but Scheen picked up whatever business he could get from individuals. He quietly gathered day laborers outside who had missed out on the company's official projects so they could execute projects he'd picked up.

After months of scoring hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of residential business, Scheen was pulled into Gore's office.

"I remember it well," Scheen said. "He said, 'What are you doing? Do you know how much money you're making for me?'"

Scheen had no idea, but it must have been a lot because he walked out heading a newly created residential division. A few years later in 2000, when the company was bought and "went corporate," as Scheen puts it, he planted the seeds for a high-end residential landscaping company called LandWest Design Group Inc. It now employs about 70 people, and the average client spends about \$500,000.

### What's your worst habit?

I'm highly critical of my work and that of my employees. But I always realize that I'm nothing without those guys.

### What did you want to be when you grew up?

A professional bass fisherman. [Although he declined to speak about it, Scheen routinely places high in — or wins — prominent fishing tournaments.]

### What are you most afraid of?

Failure, either personally or professionally.

### What kind of a boss are you?

Very unorthodox.

### What was the toughest part of starting a business?

Facing the reality of how much work it is. There is a serious shock factor when you get into it. I thought I was jumping off of a 2-foot block, but I ended up jumping off a cliff.

### Do you consider yourself an advice giver or an advice seeker?

Definitely a seeker.

### What do you drive?

A big Ford truck.

### What's been your biggest accomplishment so far?

The kids.

### What's on your bucket list?

I just want to complete well the two most important things I've started: My family and this business.

### You prefer to go to parties or host?

Go to one. No, wait. My wife would

### IN DETAIL

**AGE:** 42

**FAMILY:** Wife, Megan; son, Jackson, 8; and daughter, Josie, 4

**EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree in landscape architecture, Louisiana State University, 1992

rather go. But deep down I'd like to host. She would hate that, though, because my desire to make everything perfect would drive her crazy.

### If you could time-travel, where would you go?

To the time of Jesus. It's such an interesting time, and there are so many questions around all that.

### Are you on Twitter or Facebook?

No. I don't do any of that.

### What did you listen to on the way to work today?

The Pixies [an alternative rock band from the late 1980s].

### How do you de-stress?

Spend time with the kids.

### Where's your favorite place to eat?

Eddie V's.

### What was your first job?

Cutting grass, and I did a horrible job at the time.

### What did the Army teach you?

I ended up learning that I needed the discipline, but I also learned how to use heavy equipment like a backhoe, and that's been useful in this business.

■ Interview by Colin Pope

### WHAT OTHERS SAY

#### What is Rick Scheen best at?

Undoubtedly, it's his ability to assess situations quickly and accurately. He just has a gut that's rarely wrong.

**Ken Havranked**  
Chief financial officer  
LandWest Design Group

