

S|F

Sutton Garden Studio

Positioning Direction

Illustrative example

A Note Before We Begin

A Positioning Direction is not a critique of your work. Your work is already strong — that is not the question. The question is whether the way it comes to market reflects the intelligence, restraint, and seasonal clarity already present in everything you make. Most of the time, it does not. Not because of any lack of effort, but because design excellence and positioning clarity are two different disciplines. This direction sits at the intersection of both.

What follows is an honest reading of where your business stands, what your ideal homeowner sees when she finds you, and where the gap lives between the quality of your work and the message that should lead her to it. It is specific to you, specific to this moment, and specific to the opportunity that exists right now in your market. Nothing here is generic. If it reads that way, we haven't done our job.

You will leave with one clear position, one coherent offer structure, and one consistent way of explaining the value of your work — before price ever enters the conversation. Not a long list of tasks. Not a content calendar. A practice-wide direction built around the work you already do and the clients you actually want. That is the only kind of strategy worth delivering — and the only kind worth paying for.

Your Business at a Glance

Sutton Garden Studio is an independent residential garden design practice with seven years of work that has earned its reputation the only way that matters: through quality. Known in the Portland design community for naturalistic planting, restrained hardscape, and materials chosen for how they behave across all four seasons, not just one, the studio has built a body of work that is both distinctive and deeply considered.

Your strongest clients are design-conscious homeowners in Portland's inner and near-east neighborhoods — people who care about how a garden feels in February as much as how it looks in June. They arrive through word of mouth, and they are your best clients because they already understand the value of what you make. Your marketing does not yet reflect the quality of those relationships.

Your current offer structure is project-based residential design. No named offers. No starting fees. Inquiries arrive when they arrive. Projects begin when they begin.

Your seasonal rhythm is clear: you do your strongest work in fall and winter — the seasons when structure is visible, and plant behavior is honest. Yet you go quiet precisely when your aesthetic is most legible and your competitive window is most open.

What we see is a designer with a distinctive point of view, a loyal client base, and a reputation built entirely by the quality of her work — and a business ready for a position that finally matches the intelligence already present in everything it creates.

Illustrative example

The Diagnosis

The Work Is There. The Right Client Is Not Finding It.

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Sutton Garden Studio has what most designers spend years trying to build: a body of genuinely distinctive work, a reputation earned entirely by quality, and a client base that comes by word of mouth, because the results speak for themselves.

The work is not the question. The question is whether the right homeowner — the one who would choose this work on sight, pay without hesitation, and feel pride in the decision for years — can find her way to it. Right now, she often cannot. Not because the work is invisible, but because the message that should make her feel, "This is for me," does not yet exist.

The reason is structural, not a failure of effort. The work is documented rather than positioned. The portfolio shows what was made — and it is genuinely worth showing. But it does not tell the right homeowner why this particular garden, in this particular season, was made for someone who thinks the way she does.

The language describes the process: site visits, planting plans, and installation oversight. These are accurate. They are also invisible to the client who is not buying a process. She is buying the certainty that the result will feel inevitable — calm, quietly considered, and entirely her own. Nothing in the current messaging gives her that certainty before she has to ask for it.

The work is excellent. The pathway to it is invisible.

That is what this direction resolves. Not more visibility. A position the right homeowner recognizes on sight: a garden that feels like it was always meant to be hers — structure designed to look intentional in February, not just June.

Illustrative example

Ideal Client Alignment

The clients who find Sutton Garden Studio through word of mouth are almost always the right fit. They arrive already knowing what they value. They have seen the work in context — in a neighbor's garden in November, in a photograph that stopped them mid-scroll, in a conversation with someone whose taste they trust. They do not need to be convinced. They simply need a clear pathway to yes.

These clients exist in greater numbers than your current marketing reaches. In their absence, a different kind of inquiry fills the space. These inquiries behave differently. They compare. They ask about price before they ask about intention. They are not wrong to do so — they have simply not yet been given a reason to understand the value of what they are considering. That is not a client problem. It is a positioning problem. The message that would have filtered them out — or educated them before they arrived — does not yet exist.

Your ideal client has the budget to choose well — and the taste to care deeply about what that choice says about her. She is not looking for options. She is looking for a designer whose judgment she can trust completely, whose aesthetic aligns with her own closely enough that the decision feels inevitable rather than effortful. She has thought carefully about her home. She expects the garden to reflect that same care.

She is drawn to gardens that feel calm, inevitable, and quietly expensive — not showy, not crowded, and not obviously designed. She wants a result that speaks softly but unmistakably to those who share her eye. She is not buying a service. She is making a decision that will reflect on her taste for years — and she will feel that in February, when the structure is bare, and every choice is honest.

She is already looking for Sutton Garden Studio.
She simply has not yet found a message that tells her she has arrived.

Illustrative example

Market Position

Most gardens are designed for summer.
Sutton gardens are designed for every season after it.

Residential gardens for Portland homeowners who judge a garden by how it holds in February.

Sutton Garden Studio is not a planting service and not a landscaping firm. It is a design practice with a point of view: structure first, restraint throughout, and plant choices made for how they behave across all four seasons, not for how they look in a June photograph.

That point of view is the position. It is what your best clients already recognize when they find you through a neighbor's garden in November. Stated plainly, it does three things at once: it tells the right homeowner she has found the designer who sees what she sees; it tells the wrong inquiry, politely, that this is not the studio for her; and it removes price as the first point of comparison, because nothing else in your market is offering the same thing.

The work does not need to change. The way it is named does.

Illustrative example

Offer Hierarchy

Three tiers do one job: they let the right client see where she begins. The top tier sets the standard; the entry tier lowers the first step without lowering the standard. Nothing in between needs explaining.

Entry — The Garden Reading · $450

A two-hour site walk and a written page of direction: what to keep, what to remove, and what the garden needs before anything is planted. For the homeowner who is not ready to commit to a full design but wants your judgment.

Move: new. It gives the careful buyer a first step that is still unmistakably yours.

Core — Residential Garden Design · from $3,800

The full design: site plan, planting plan and material palette, chosen for how each element behaves across all four seasons. The work you already do, for most of your clients.

Move: keep it, and rename it on the site from “project-based residential design” to one named offer with a starting fee.

Signature — The Composed Garden · $6,500

The complete four-season design with installation oversight, for the gardens where every month must hold. For the homeowner who wants the whole garden resolved and is ready to say yes.

Move: elevate it. Show it year-round as the top of the practice — not as a seasonal campaign.

Value Communication

This work is not for every garden — only the ones where restraint, structure, and seasonality matter. That is not a limitation. It is a standard. Stated clearly, it does something no amount of visibility can: it tells the right homeowner that this practice was built for someone with her eye.

She should understand the value before she asks the price. Right now she learns it the other way round — the process first (site visits, planting plans, installation oversight), the value last, if at all. Reverse the order. Lead with what the garden does in February, then what it is like to live with, then how the work gets done.

Anchor the practice in three commitments:

1. The garden is chosen for how it behaves in February, not just how it looks in June.
2. Every plant earns its place through structure and seasonal honesty.
3. This is not a garden designed to impress. It is a garden designed to last.

These are not taglines. They are the quiet declarations of a practice that understands its own discipline. When they appear before the price — on the website, in the inquiry reply, in the first conversation — the right homeowner arrives already knowing what she is paying for.

Messaging Direction

Language is not decoration. It is the first filter — on the homepage, the About page, every service description and every inquiry reply. It is what tells the right homeowner she has arrived before she reads a single line about what you offer. The shifts below are not cosmetic. Each one changes who responds — and who selects herself out.

Inhabit the season. Don't describe it.

"Fall planting" and "winter structure" are accurate. They are also inert. They tell the reader what category of work is being done without making her feel the season itself — the quality of light in October, the way a garden reveals its structure in November, the quiet satisfaction of a border that looks considered rather than abandoned in February. When she feels the season in your words before you have named it, she knows she is reading something made for someone like her.

Name the result. Not the process.

Every time your language describes what you do, it asks the reader to imagine the outcome for herself. Most will not do that work. The homeowner you want is not buying a process. She is buying a specific feeling: the certainty that the result will be right, that every choice will hold across the seasons, and that the garden will feel inevitable rather than installed. Let the process remain invisible.

Write for one client—not the market.

The instinct to write broadly produces copy that speaks to no one. Your ideal homeowner reads marketing all day and recognizes, instantly, language written for a general audience. Specificity is not exclusion. It is an invitation — only to the person the language was written to. Write for her. Let everyone else select themselves out. That is the difference between being considered and being chosen.



Visual Alignment

The portfolio is not the problem. The images are strong, the seasonal range is clear, and the restraint that defines this practice is visible in the work itself. What is missing is not better photography or more content. It is editorial context — the layer of meaning that tells the right homeowner not just what she is looking at, but when, and why it matters that it looks this way in that season.

Your current visual presentation documents completed projects. It does not position them. The images show what was made — and they show it beautifully. But they are organized as evidence of craft rather than as a mirror for a specific buyer. She arrives, sees beautiful work, and moves on — not because the work failed to impress her, but because nothing in its presentation told her this was made for someone who sees the way she sees.

The single highest-leverage visual shift available costs nothing and requires no new photography. It requires selecting differently from what you already have.

Find images of completed projects taken in late fall or early winter — after the growing season has ended, before spring has returned. The images where the structure carries all the weight. Caption them not with project names or plant lists, but with the observation only someone with your eye would make: why this plant was chosen for this position, and what it does in February that nothing else would.

That shift does more to position Sutton Garden Studio for the right homeowner than any amount of new copy. It shows her, before she has read a word about your offers, that this practice thinks the way she thinks — and sees what she sees.

One image. One honest season. One specific observation.
That is the proof of everything this position promises.

Illustrative example

The Inquiry Pathway

The right homeowner already reaches you through people who know your work. The pathway is how she reaches you when no one has introduced her — year-round, not by season.

First view — show the standard before the work.

Now: a portfolio of finished projects in summer light, organized by type.
Direction: open the homepage on one winter image, captioned with your own observation. Then show three gardens across the seasons — the same garden in June and in February. She sees the standard before she reads a word.

Choosing — let her see where she begins.

Now: "Contact us to discuss your project."
Direction: show the three named offers with their starting fees — The Garden Reading, Residential Garden Design and The Composed Garden — so she can see where she begins, and what the top of the practice looks like.

Inquiry — ask the questions that filter.

Now: a general contact form.
Direction: three questions — her home, her timing, and what she wants the garden to feel like in winter. The wrong inquiry selects itself out here. The right one arrives already knowing what she is choosing.

Illustrative example

Recommended Next Steps

A clear path for refining the work ahead.



The Path Forward

These recommendations are not tasks. They are the principles that will strengthen the clarity of your positioning and make your standard unmistakable to the homeowner who values what you build. Each one protects the integrity of your work without changing the work itself.

1. Refine the language that frames your aesthetic. Your best clients choose you for your eye, not your process. The language surrounding your work should reflect that discipline — quiet, precise, and rooted in seasonality and structure.

2. Reorganize your portfolio around winter structure. Select images that show the garden when abundance is gone and intention is visible. Caption them with the observations only you would make. This is the visual proof of your standard.

3. Anchor your website in identity, not description. Shift from explaining what you do to articulating who you do it for — the homeowner who recognizes the value of a garden built with restraint, longevity, and intention.

4. Name the three offers and show where she begins. An entry step, the core design, and The Composed Garden as the signature. A named structure with starting fees lets the right homeowner see her place in the practice — and lets the wrong one step away before the first email.

5. Maintain a consistent editorial voice across all touchpoints. Your tone should remain calm, confident, and exacting — the voice of a designer who knows precisely what she is building and why it matters.

These principles do not change your practice. They make its value unmistakable.

Illustrative example