

## In brief

**What** A private garden created around a newly built family house.

**Points of interest** Contemporary design with hard landscaping blending with exciting planting combinations. Ponds and gorgeously planted borders.

**Where** Hertfordshire.

**Size** Two acres.

**Soil** Alkaline clay over chalk.

**Climate** Temperate. Close to London but open to frost.

The house and stone terrace command views of the garden in all directions. The rendered walls provide an architectural link between the house and garden.



The perennial grass *Calamagrostis* × *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' together with drifts of coppery-red *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty' typify the expansive approach to planting.



**This image** Bright yellow *Helianthus* 'Miss Mellish' contrasts with vibrant orange *Crocosmia* to create impact. Deep borders allow for bold planting masses.

**Below** Rendered walls are used as a backdrop to planting and these also act as screens that reflect the changing shadow play of the tall plants.



## A modern masterpiece

Design duo Andrew Wilson and Gavin McWilliam created this award-winning garden using architectural elements tempered with bold swathes of planting

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A sunken patio looks across the lawn, with its row of multi-stemmed *Amelanchier lamarckii* (snowy mespilus), which are given extra dimension when uplit at night.



*Eryngium agavifolium* and plumes of *Cortaderia richardii* provide texture throughout the year.

I have always been curious about design partnerships: I imagined that there would be lots of fireworks, hissy fits, throwing of sharpened pencils and, finally, resentful compromise. Apparently, this is not the case if you use the award-winning dynamic duo Andrew Wilson and Gavin McWilliam as your example. They met at the University of Greenwich, when Andrew was teaching planting design and Gavin was an eager student, and partnered up in 2008 to create Wilson McWilliam Studio. “We don’t fight,” Andrew assures me, “although sometimes we might express reservations about certain ideas!” Usually the division of labour falls naturally into Andrew having responsibility for soft landscaping while Gavin commands the hard stuff.

This garden is one of their most lauded designs – winner of three of the Society of Garden Designers’ awards in 2013. It is in Hertfordshire, only a skip and a jump from the M25, although the surrounding trees soak up all the traffic noise. The house is new and stands in what used to be the orchard of the neighbouring Edwardian manor house.

“When we first saw it there was a scummy, malodorous pond in the middle of the garden, a clump of *Chamaecyparis* for ‘privacy’ and a frankly uninteresting approach,” explains Gavin. From such unpromising beginnings they have created a modern garden that manages to not only complement the architecture of the house but also settles easily into the



Seedheads of *Eryngium planum* ‘Blaukappe’ and *Eryngium alpinum* ‘Blue Star’ provide a spark of colour and structure in this border near the terrace.

surrounding green belt. Just outside the driveway gate is an expanse of common land freckled with mature trees, waving grassland and the odd pond. Andrew and Gavin have taken that as a starting point for the drive so that, with the help of loose planting (ferns and grasses) teamed with sharper hedges, you are gently ushered from nature into manicured garden. Andrew describes the garden as being “like a funnel: you enter at the narrowest point and from there it all widens out into a wide space where the habitat is preserved, but augmented”.

From here you reach the heart of the garden. The original pond has been repaired, tweaked and opened up to form a clearing of still water that carries the reflection of one of the finest mature oak trees I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. With this as the epicentre, the garden spins off using a series of cleanly rendered walls, which serve to lead the visitor round the garden and also to act as impromptu frames for the ebullience of the planting.

There is a path along the perimeter, past a copse of hazel, a double line of birch (both silver and river) and bold planting. There are stands of *Persicaria x fennica*, *Chamaenerion angustifolium* ‘Album’ and commas of *Deschampsia* and fern. As you move from the deep shade the planting changes to drifts of salvia, achillea and *Valeriana officinalis*. Next is a capacious lawn (“a place where you ▷



*Equisetum hyemale* is a perfect plant to bring a bit of extra texture to the edge of the wildlife pond.





Marginal planting around the water lily pond includes *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Alba' and *Rodgersia aesculifolia*.



In late summer, *Aruncus dioicus* 'Zweilweltenkind' and the rush *Schoenoplectus lacustris* subsp. *tabernaemontani* remain interesting, particularly when contrasted against the defined lines of the walls.



A profusion of *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm' and *Miscanthus* border the driveway, while an acer provides autumn colour.

▷ can kick a rugby ball without doing too much damage!") with what Gavin and Andrew call a "fuzzy ending", by which they mean a wide strip of longer grass with wild flowers, a big existing magnolia and a scattering of cornus.

From there, it is a straight run past a vegetable garden with raised beds constructed from rusted steel, a long formal lawn guarded by a row of amelanchiers, and then on to a crisp terraced area by the house, perfectly placed to take in the views. The perambulation finishes on a deck hovering just above the surface of the pond – a perfect place to dangle your toes, watch the planting rustle in the breeze and the damselflies flit across the surface of the water.

All good gardens should seduce: they should slowly beckon you onwards, promising you much but not revealing everything until the last possible moment. The use of hedges and walls as screens give you glimpses as you move through the garden, although the spaces and planting actually merge together. This is a seductive garden with many facets, each one crafted and well thought through. The planting impresses, but it is the skeleton that holds it all together. Maybe there is something to be said for partnerships after all? □

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

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