



SHOW TIME

Liz Ackerley

Following a somewhat last-minute entry into the Birmingham Grand Designs Live Garden Designer of the Year competition, Liz Ackerley reflects on her design inspiration, the challenge of show garden construction, and what made her design stand out from the crowd

Less than a week before the deadline for competition entries I looked at the link to the Birmingham Grand Designs Live Garden Designer of the Year competition, forwarded to me by a friend and property expert. "You have to apply for this" she said; five days later I submitted my proposal!

The brief was to create an urban kitchen garden, contemporary in style, inspirational, and reflecting an ethical and environmental sustainability ethos. I designed the Gourmet Retreat to enable a professional couple to combine growing foods including herbs, salads and fruit with enjoying their outside space as a contemporary sensory retreat; reflecting 'eco-urban chic' living. The idea of integrating these different uses is key in a small urban garden where space is at a premium and it is close to my heart having a courtyard garden and a boutique allotment of my own.

The contemporary style in the show garden was achieved through simple clean lines and materials such as the stone filled gabions, use of charcoal and grey decking to clad the wall and

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floors respectively, and clean, crisp metalwork for the pergola and water feature. Inspiration comes from integrating multiple uses into each element, e.g.

- The gabions form the walls of raised beds as well as providing interesting bug hotels and seats.
- The pergola not only provides an enclosure for sitting but also enables support of climbing fruit and vegetables.

The hard materials are either sourced locally, for example the gabions and stone, or recycled, for example the decking. Crop rotation and companion planting were included to enable organic management and bee and butterfly friendly planting including asters, fennel, sedum and herbs within a herb wall were incorporated.

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Once I was shortlisted, there were only five weeks until the build! This I knew was going to be a huge challenge, not only because I had to get suppliers on board but also because the brief meant sourcing vegetables, herbs and fruit. It turned into a 24/7 time-consuming occupation. Because my garden was dependent upon metal fabrication, this took some time but in the end I was lucky enough to be linked to IDM engineering who did a fantastic job of the bespoke elements. I had not worked with my contractors, Landstruction directed by David Binks before. Their attention to detail is fantastic



7



David contacted me via Twitter and for the final weeks we met weekly and discussed detailed design elements daily. Landstruction prefabricated several elements including the frames for the deck and the wall and took three transits and a 16ft trailer down to the NEC from Chester. The planting consisted of plants I had grown and dug up; grown in pots; purchased; borrowed, or in the case of the herb wall, 400 herbs donated to me by Rose Cottage Herbs in Yorkshire. The distance from Manchester to the NEC necessitated staying local during the build, on a B&B/farm near the site that had enough space to store the plants!



3D MODEL DRAWING

The three-day build time doesn't leave room for error and fortunately most of our work on site went more or less to plan. All the materials apart from the four tonnes of stone for the gabions were taken down with us. All of the preparation (including full testing of the water feature) and planning paid dividends. There is no time for contemplation on site: it needs to be delivered like a military operation with the exception of the last hours making sure everything is just right.

I was thrilled with the judges' response to my urban retreat and their keen interest

in the bug hotels built into the ends of the gabion beds. They also really liked the use of vegetables and fruit, especially the corn providing height and authenticity.

There was much interest in my garden throughout the show as people could see its reproducibility for an urban courtyard/roof terrace or other contemporary space. I also got to meet some great contacts from suppliers to developers and some potential residential clients too making it a great show to exhibit at in my first year of business.

REFERENCES

Designer

Liz Ackerley
Poppyhead Consultancy
Tel: 0161 745 7890
Email: liz@poppyheadconsultancy.com
Web: www.poppyheadconsultancy.com

Contractor

Landstruction Ltd
Tel: 01244 880 422
Email: create@landstruction.com
Web: www.landstruction.com

Trug, sieve, post and strings

Hill and Sons
Tel: 01663 732 607
Email: riddlesandsieves@gmail.com
Web: www.riddles-sieves.co.uk

Metal fabrication

IDM Engineering Ltd
Tel: 0151 355 4490
Email: sales@idmengineering.co.uk
Web: www.idmengineering.co.uk

Composite decking
and lighting

Saige Decking
Tel: 01789 721 576
Email: info@saigedecking.com
Web: www.saigedecking.com

Fire dish

Eco Smart Fire
Tel: 020 7384 1677
Email: thomas@smartfireuk.com
Web: www.ecosmartfire.com

Stone

Specialist Aggregates
Tel: 01785 661 018
Web: www.specialistaggregates.com

Metal rope
and pergola fittings

S3i
Tel: 01302 752 504
Email: info@s3i.co.uk
Web: www.s3i.co.uk

Waterproof cushions

Oily Rag Ltd
Tel: 01379 871 948
Email: info@oilyragfabrics.com
Web: www.oilyragfabrics.com

Herbs for herb wall

Rose Cottage Herbs
Tel: 01302 841 856
Email: enquiries@cormacwhyte.f9.co.uk
Web: www.rosecottageherbs.co.uk

Perennial plants

Bluebell Cottage Nursery
Tel: 01928 713 718
Email: sue@bluebellcottage.co.uk
Web: www.bluebellcottage.co.uk

Vines and apples

Victoriana Nursery
Tel: 0233 740 529
Web: www.victoriananursery.co.uk



- 1 The metal cables of the pergola.
- 2 The brushed steel water feature.
- 3 The slate and gabion seating area.
- 4 Liz Ackerley describing the garden to the judges.
- 5 The bioethanol fire dish.
- 6 The Gourmet Retreat show garden.
- 7 The build of the garden at the NEC.
- 8 Receiving the GDL Garden Designer of the Year award.