

A CLEAR VISION

Creating a garden for a house that had not yet been built proved a successful challenge for this designer

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY
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The garden's rectilinear design, softened by planting, works beautifully against the striking architecture of the distinctive Huf Haus.



The imposing feature wall, painted a stunning shade of deep pink with a central moon gate, is mirrored in the turquoise pool, doubling the visual impact.

Usually a landscape designer is engaged to create a garden around an existing house. But in this case, the brief was to design on a blank area of land. The clients – a professional working couple, their two children and the wife’s parents – were having an iconic three-storey Huf Haus built on an empty plot in Kent, and designer Nic Howard was chosen for his ability to combine contemporary solutions with soft, cottage-style planting. ‘Being engaged before the house was even built was certainly something different, especially as the owners had quite a wish list of requirements,’ recalls Nic.

The extended family were keen to create a sense of seclusion with an environment for entertaining and play areas for the children, as well as space for the older generation to indulge their passion for gardening. Not least, a range of other elements also had to be included, from a swimming pool and seating areas to a home office and a greenhouse. ‘It was quite a tough brief to get a lot of items into a small space and get it all to hang together

without being confusing,’ Nic says. ‘We worked on very detailed plans showing exactly where the house and so on would be constructed so we could landscape in the correct places.’

The first step was to put in retaining walls to create levels. ‘The hole for the house had been dug for the basement, which was like a concrete shell,’ Nic says. ‘We were able to shape the garden from there, creating a flat area that was then decked in sustainable hardwood and paved with limestone to be accessed directly from the older generation’s apartment, while an upper level was designed to be viewed from the first floor.’

Gravel expanses, steps and paths for access were incorporated into the garden’s plan, leaving space for the pool and other elements to eventually be added, while structural trees were planted down the central axis to break up the impact of such an imposing build.

The groundwork took around three months, then the Huf Haus went up within a week, followed by the pool, a gazebo, home office and greenhouse. Once the strong linear bones of the garden ▶



Clockwise from above Decking, pathways and a variety of levels have been incorporated into the overall design, not only to provide unique points of interest throughout the garden, but offer space and privacy to each generation of the family who share it.



THE ACCENT WALL IS A STRIKING FEATURE THAT DRAWS THE EYE THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE

Planting brings a sense of abundance, with traditional cottage-style varieties used to maximum effect.



Above The use of levels – with walls and steps rendered in a steel grey – proved an exciting challenge during the design process. Seating has been placed to take in the views, while the planting palette of lavender, pink and white softens the overall effect. **Below** The garden has been cleverly designed to create private spaces for the various family members to enjoy – such as this quiet little corner leading off from a terrace.

were complete, the soft landscaping of an almost country-style mix of plants could begin. Nic has a relaxed, easy signature style to his planting and the exuberant infill in the garden really shines out. 'I like using traditional plants in a contemporary way and wanted to include as many plants as I could that would work together,' he says. 'Often with Huf houses you see a huge expanse of white plants and a very limited palette and I didn't want that. With all the glass in the house, I wanted the owners to feel that they were really nestled in the garden. Trees come up to the glass with woodland underplanting, so it's a very soft look overall.'

Using a palette of purples, lime greens and pinks, the garden is awash with wafting textures of grasses and free-form perennials against a foil of muted grey surfaces. As a striking contrast, an accent wall of rich Moroccan Velvet pink, complete with a circular moon gate, is a stunning feature, cleverly drawing the eye through the landscape.

Summing up the creation of the garden, Nic says: 'The main design challenge was to provide a garden that fits with the house's very imposing architecture, offers privacy, and gives a sense of ownership to each generation of the family with an overall space that all hung together.' It's an aim that has undoubtedly been achieved. ■



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