

PRIVATE VIEW

PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS | WORDS VERONICA PEERLESS

This stunning garden on Guernsey comprises a series of beautiful intimate spaces hewn out of a steeply sloping, challenging site



The pretty Channel Island of Guernsey is known locally as 'The Rock'. This granite outpost on the edge of the Atlantic is buffeted by winds, and over the years has developed a network of sunken country lanes, lined with granite walls and lush vegetation, and low-lying houses. In this unique environment nestles a new garden that gives the impression it has always been there.

Surrounding a traditional granite farmhouse, it comprises a series of linked intimate spaces for dining and entertaining, relaxing and reading, swimming and sunbathing. It has a contemporary feel to reflect the interior of the extensively renovated farmhouse, but also a relaxed, comfortable air to reflect the agricultural landscape beyond. ▶

The garden was created from scratch over the course of two years by design duo Acres Wild, who were faced with two acres of steeply sloping farmland. 'The garden has a total fall of 3m from top to bottom,' explains designer Debbie Roberts. 'The only way we could make useable spaces was to create terraced areas - you couldn't use the garden otherwise.'

Debbie and her business partner Ian Smith created six level spaces: two lawns, a pool terrace, a dining terrace, a sitting terrace and a courtyard, linked by 42 steps and extensive planting. Some retaining walls were created, but these were not as high as they might have otherwise been, because Debbie incorporated lots of sloping borders into the design. 'They have the added advantage of showing off the plants,' she says.

As the derelict farmhouse was being renovated and extended

at the same time as the garden was being developed, Debbie was able to make use of the materials already on site. The granite retaining walls and steps were made using reclaimed stone from demolished outbuildings, beautifully integrating the house with the garden, and the garden into the landscape beyond - something Acres Wild always aims to do.

'People on Guernsey like English country gardens, so it has that aesthetic,' explains Debbie. However, the planting is given a twist by the use of tender plants such as echiums that thrive in the sheltered areas, thanks to the mild climate. The owners like to holiday in Brittany, so there's a French flavour too.

'The clients love the garden because it's so useable,' says Debbie. 'It looks like it has always been there, which was our intention. A garden should always look timeless.'

► **INTIMATE TERRACE**

Granite retaining walls unite the house and garden and provide shelter and intimacy. The planting is at the cooler end of the spectrum, and evokes an English country garden, with a nod to its coastal setting and a touch of French elegance. *Erigeron karvinskianus*, found throughout the island, is allowed to self-seed to give the garden an established air. The teak dining set is from Faraway Furniture.



▼ **PLAYING POOL**

Most of the hard landscaping is reclaimed York stone, but the swimming pool is surrounded by sawn York stone for a more contemporary look; it's also practical and comfortable. The planting around the pool includes tender plants such as echiums, which thrive in the frost-free climate. The poolside loungers are from Odd company. ►

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▼ **A SENSE OF ENCLOSURE**

The garden has two lawns, surrounded by lush planting. In the front garden, the lawn is bisected with a stone path leading to the front door. Box balls line the path, and give an element of formality in an otherwise informal setting. The garden is inward looking to provide shelter, but vistas have been created within it.



▼ **ART ON THE MOVE**

The kinetic sculpture is by Ivan Black, the owner's brother-in-law. The slightest breath of air sets it in motion. Ivan's work has been exhibited at galleries and sculpture parks including the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice and the Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden in Surrey.





▼ **PLANTING PALETTE**

The lush, abundant, naturalistic planting is comprised of perennials and ornamental grasses such as *Stipa gigantea*, *Stipa tenuissima*, pennisetum and miscanthus. It has a backbone of shrubs that include cistus, hebe, pittosporum, perovskia and lots of roses.



◀ **FABULOUS FRONTAGE**

Hydrangea is another shrub that is used throughout the garden; this is the white *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Madame Emile Mouillère'. It is lined by a low hedge of box. A split granite path leads to the original granite-built cottage, with its low-arched front door.

▶ **MEADOW MAGIC**

The perennial meadow area at the edge of the site links the garden to the landscape beyond. The soil was already poor in this area (perennial meadows should not be sown on fertile soil), but subsoil from excavations elsewhere on the site was also used. 'We spread the subsoil over this area of the garden to create a low-fertility seedbed into which we sowed wildflower seed.' The meadow was sown two years ago, and already looks well established.



The perennial meadow area at the edge of the site links the garden to the agricultural landscape beyond

▼ **HERBAL HIGHWAY**

A hedge of *Escallonia* 'Iveyi' separates the front and rear gardens. The border on the sunniest south side of the house and near the kitchen was designated for herbs. Here, the owners have planted chives, fennel, and marjoram, and the adjacent path is lined with lavender.



PLANT PROFILES



▼ **ESCALLONIA 'IVEYI'**

The evergreen hedge along the front of the house is *Escallonia* 'Iveyi', a 'lovely, dark, glossy evergreen that's salt and wind tolerant,' says Debbie. It bears panicles of white flowers in mid and late summer.



▲ **ACANTHUS SPINOSUS**

Acanthus is a good architectural plant. 'It adds verticality; we used it around the buildings as it looks great against the granite. *Acanthus mollis* is equally useful.' It grows to a height of up to 1.2m.



▲ **AGAPANTHUS AFRICANUS 'ALBUS'**

Tender, evergreen agapanthus grows happily in the borders of this garden, thanks to the mild winter climate. Protect over winter with a dry mulch, or grow tender varieties in pots and bring indoors.

DESIGNER PROFILE



ACRES WILD was set up by Debbie Roberts and Ian Smith in 1988, after they had trained as landscape architects. Their designs aim to integrate the house into the garden, and the garden into its surroundings. Their signature style is a bold structure, softened with abundant, naturalistic planting. Based in West Sussex, they have designed gardens throughout the UK. www.acreswild.co.uk