

Neatly clipped domes of *Hebe rakaiensis* and an edging of *Sesleria caerulea* backed by spires of violet *Salvia x sylvestris* 'Mainacht' mark the transition from the cedar pool deck to the stone path.

CONTEMPORARY STYLE

The lie of THE LAND

Designed to make the most of its glorious countryside views, this expansive garden perfectly combines geometric lines with generous planting to create a calm, organised space

WORDS JOBIE JONES PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS



ABOVE *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' is used to bold effect in one of the garden's seating areas. The dwarf white lavender, *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Nana Alba', and *Rosa* 'Wollerton Old Hall' make pretty planting companions.

LEFT The Victorian-style greenhouse from Alitex forms the focal point of the vegetable garden, where salads, herbs, tomatoes and beans are grown in oak-framed beds.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A fully equipped outdoor kitchen and sweeping stone steps give the pool garden an added note of glamour; once a problem area, the revitalised pool is now a natural gathering point for the family during the summer months; shallow steps and a sloping border filled with nepeta and *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' make a virtue out of a change in level in the lawn.

The first thing you notice when you step into Jon and Sue Olsen's garden is the view. Fields dotted with trees surround the house, with the Surrey Hills as a glorious backdrop. "That was our main focus when it came to designing the garden," says Jon. "We wanted to enjoy that fantastic view. We both grew up in South Africa so we have a love of wide open spaces, distant views and outdoor living."

It was all rather different when they bought the house in 2011. "The previous family had lived here for thirty-five years and it was very much of that time. Creating what Sue and I wanted was a real collaboration," says Jon. "Sue did an amazing job on the house, opening up spaces and knocking off half of the rear façade to add an orangery and create a link with the outside. I began to think about the garden. It had bags of potential, but it was filled with so many walls, hedges and garden buildings that you couldn't see the view."

Deciding to clear everything away was easy. Working out how to organise the space afterwards was quite another matter. "Friends introduced us to Debbie Roberts and Ian Smith, who run the garden design practice Acres Wild. They immediately understood what we were trying to achieve, and we have been working together ever since."

Debbie still has the brief that the Olsens handed to her. "Jon and Sue wanted to unite the house with the garden, and the garden with the view. Overall, they wanted the look to be contemporary but comfortable, structural but natural and, most of all, calm, green and organised."

The design she created with the Olsens ticked every box on their wish list. Rectilinear borders now contain the spaces nearest the house. Box balls, clipped *Hebe rakaiensis* and long runs of the ornamental grass *Hakonechloa macra* provide a green framework for an ornamental planting primarily in





shades of mauve and white. There are swathes of *Geranium* ‘Rozanne’ and *Perovskia* ‘Blue Spire’, a border of agapanthus by the pool, and *Nepeta racemosa* ‘Walker’s Low’ edging the paths. “With panoramic views like these, you need to be bold and, en masse, nepeta has real impact,” says Debbie.

The panoply is all immaculately maintained by gardener Jose Silva, and Jon is delighted by what they have all achieved together. “In the beginning, I was impatient to make it perfect from day one, but now I enjoy the process of tweaking our ideas and seeing it gradually get better and better.”

Perhaps the greatest transformation has been the old swimming pool, now the focal point of a stylish leisure area. “It had been built at a different angle to the house, so we designed a curved flight of steps to accommodate that,” says Debbie. Now, all you notice is a cedar hot tub, a sleek outdoor kitchen with breakfast bar and that generous sweep of steps, which also serves as additional seating to take in the view.

What was once a problem area has turned into a natural gathering point when the Olsens entertain. “We set up the Olsen Animal Trust, an animal welfare and conservation charity so, as well as all the usual family activities, we have been known to entertain several hundred guests for a fund-raising event here,” says Jon. “No matter how many people we have, the garden just seems to work brilliantly.”

GARDEN GUIDE

Garden orientation West facing.

Soil type Sandy loam.

Special features Full outdoor kitchen, pool, hot tub and a range of seating areas.

Garden design Debbie Roberts MSGD and Ian Smith MSGD, Acres Wild, 01403 891084, acreswild.co.uk.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW LEFT

The wildflower meadow has been a particular passion for Jon who is delighted with the way it has matured; gentle mounds of clipped greenery mark the edge of the garden; the vegetable garden, which features climbing roses over metal arches, was designed to be ornamental as well as productive; the vigorous, long-flowering *Geranium* ‘Rozanne’ sings out against the fresh green tufty grass *Hakonechloa macra*.

ABOVE One of the garden’s highlights is its sweeping views of the distant Surrey Hills.

RIGHT The fairytale look of the tree house is enhanced by fat domes of white *Rhododendron* ‘Madame Masson’; and pink *Rhododendron* ‘Susan’ (a variety chosen in part because that is Sue’s given name).

