



## IN BRIEF

What Private family garden.  
Where Surrey.  
Size Five acres, including woodland.  
Soil Sandy loam.  
Climate Temperate.  
Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Masses of late summer perennials, including a swathe of *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm', rich orange *Rosa* Lady Emma Hamilton (= 'Ausbrother'), lavender-coloured *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch' and pink and white anemones, create a colourful transition between the main lawn and the swimming pool garden. The corners are anchored by multi-stemmed Tibetan cherry trees (*Prunus serrula*) with beautifully peeling coppery-coloured bark.

# Balancing act

Design studio Acres Wild has created a garden around a former stable block that matches traditional and contemporary planting and design

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**B**uilding work is often the catalyst for a garden redesign and Debbie Roberts of design studio Acres Wild is used to visualising the potential within a sea of mud. The harder challenge is to create a coherent design when the garden already contains a number of established elements. The owners of this property had lived here for over 20 years and the garden was planted primarily for spring and early summer interest, with an orchard and woodland, a recently added swimming pool and a large, green-oak pool house. They had decided to reconfigure their house, a converted stable block, with a large modern extension and wanted a contemporary garden to complement their newly styled contemporary interiors. The challenge was to create a link with the wider setting and provide views over the North Downs.

“This meant creating a hierarchy of formality, from the most contemporary area adjacent to the house, softening out to the wooded boundaries over a series of gently rising levels and rationalising the position of the pool, which aligned with the boundary wall but nothing else,” says Debbie. Having trained as a landscape architect, Debbie is more sensitive than most to a lack of alignment, but she is also expert in baffling the eye. “Design is about working within constraints. Once you know what those constraints are the whole design falls into place.” Today you would need a tape measure and a set square to spot the clever way she has normalised the relationship of pool to main lawn with a deep ornamental border that expands at one end to absorb the change of angle.

Foxing the eye even further, this border is stuffed with billowing masses of colour. A broad ribbon of golden yellow *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* ‘Goldsturm’, masses of orange Lady Emma Hamilton roses and the lavender-petalled daisies of *Aster x frikartii* ‘Mönch’, all jostle cheerfully together. “I stick to species and cultivars that don’t need expert maintenance to perform well over a long season. It is the overall effect I am interested in. As for the palette, we wanted a real party vibe around the pool, so I went all in with lots of bright colour.”

This pop-tastic explosion of late summer perennials contrasts with the cooler, greener parts of the garden. “That was intentional,” says Debbie. “It goes back to the concept of a hierarchy of formality. We wanted to have fun around the swimming pool but the terrace by the extension required a more restrained and contemporary polish.” Using slabs, setts ▷

**Above** One side of a gravel path in the cooler part of the garden is awash with *Hakonechloa macra* and anemones, both pure-white *Anemone x hybrida* ‘Honorine Jobert’ and shell pink ‘September Charm’, while the facing bed is filled with *Miscanthus* plumes. At the end of the path, a stone figure is framed by masses of greenish white *Hydrangea arborescens* ‘Annabelle’.

**Right above** Overlooking the swimming pool flower beds is a Victorian glasshouse that the owners had dismantled, refurbished and rebuilt in a new location, where it is now filled with ferns and provides a sheltered place in which to enjoy the evening sun.

**Right below** On the lowest terrace, the view is animated by layers and layers of plants. Swathes of *Pennisetum* ‘Fairy Tails’, *Hakonechloa macra* alongside *Rosa Desdemona* (= ‘Auskindling’), *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Ferner Osten’ and a multi-stemmed *Prunus serrula*, all grow on different levels, but create a single picture of beguiling depth and interest.



We wanted to have fun around the swimming pool but the terrace required a more contemporary polish

▷ and gravel in a warm buff stone that tones with the sandy soil, Debbie has devised a quietly clever linking sequence of paths, steps and terraces that lend a sense of inevitability to the journey between these two physical and stylistic extremes.

Closest to the new extension, the modern minimalist terrace is filled with an expanse of precision-cut paving, swathes of fluffy *Pennisetum* 'Fairy Tails' and four single-stemmed amelanchiers growing up through squares of clipped box. "This was such fun to design, working within those strict dimensions to create a perfectly tailored finish," says Debbie.

From here, broad, shallow steps lead to a simple strip of grass bisected by stepping stones, then up again to an expansive L-shaped lawn, also bisected by stepping stones. Between the two is a low wall in more of the same sandy-coloured stone, this time cut in blocks to form a contemporary interpretation of a dry stone wall, topped by a bank of *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote' and frilled with an underskirt of *Geranium* Rozanne (= 'Gerwat'). The stepping stones form not just a path to the end of the garden, but a dividing line between old and new, traditional and contemporary. To their left, you are firmly in the 21st century. Grey Manutti Zendo sofa units and a Rivelin Valencia firebowl form a lounging corner with views out over the garden wall to the rolling hills of the North Downs. A swaying curtain of *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Ferner Osten' veils this relaxation zone from the swimming pool garden glimpsed beyond.

To the right of the main lawn, a beautiful oak pergola relocated from the garden's previous iteration, leads into the mature traditional part of the garden. Here routes have been refined, existing planting replenished and a classically sculpted figure placed as an eye catcher that encourages exploration of the shrubby green depths. A pair of iron gates, long ago inherited by the owner's family from Chelmsford Cathedral, opens into the old orchard where, among the apple trees, Debbie tucked raised vegetable beds and a white greenhouse. Hidden behind high hedges, it is pretty, and couldn't be in greater stylistic contrast to the sleek polish of the main terrace. But that is the genius of Debbie's design. Combining old and new, like the house it unfolds, this garden forms the perfect palimpsest of one family's life long lived here. □

**Above** The natural topography of the terrace posed practical difficulties but now has a sense of inevitable logic and calm organisation. The broad, shallow steps have a sculptural quality that turns them into a feature in their own right, and four *Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Robin Hill' skirted by clipped squares of box bridge the transition up to the next level.

**Right above** In the old orchard, Debbie created a traditional kitchen garden where oak-edged raised beds give the space a pleasing sense of order, and allow for intensive cultivation. The greenhouse is a new addition in period style that is filled with tomatoes throughout the summer.

**Right below** Hydrangeas grow well in this garden and Debbie has used different cultivars in various sections, including the compact mophead *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Ami Pasquier', which here marks a transition from the more contemporary and manicured part of the garden that runs across the back of the house, to a path that leads to more mature and woody reaches.

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Debbie's work at [acreswild.co.uk](http://acreswild.co.uk)