



WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON?

James Scott FSGLD talks to **Zia Allaway** about a project to develop a new planting design for the Long Garden at Cliveden, the historic Buckinghamshire estate once owned by the Astors and now a National Trust property

Multiple-award-winning garden designer and Fellow of the Society of Garden + Landscape Designers (SGLD) James Scott studied landscape construction and design at Merrist Wood College and worked in America and London before setting up his own business, The Garden Company, in 1991. Having built an enviable reputation over the past three decades, he and his team have won a string of awards for their work, including the 2024 National Landscape Award for Design Excellence and the *Pro Landscaper Business Award* for a Garden Design Company in 2024. James is also a member of the SGLD's Accreditation Panel and is on the judging panel for the SGLD Awards.

How did you win the commission?

We were approached by the property's management team which wanted to work with a designer who was new to the National Trust but who had experienced historic renovation work – we think our work at Temple Gardens in London probably helped to influence the decision to select us.

What is the history of the Long Garden?

In the mid-18th century, the area now occupied by the Long Garden formed the northern section of the 'Upper Gardens' that included formal areas planted with trees and shrubs. It was then used as a kitchen garden until 1896, when William Waldorf Astor had the area transformed into an Italianate garden and the setting for his sculpture collection. The garden is also significant because

of its association with the socialite garden designer Norah Lindsey, who redesigned the planting in the 1920s. More recently, the garden has been planted with annual bedding.

What brief were you given?

We were asked to reflect Norah's design but to introduce a more contemporary planting style that would address several environmental challenges. These included removing the central path of artificial grass, replacing the bedding with perennials to increase biodiversity, replacing the old blight-ridden box hedging with a more resilient species, and creating a scheme that will have plant interest throughout the year.

How have you responded?

My design team, Anna Dadswell and Molly Kumer, and I have been able

to review Norah's plans and draw on some of her original planting solutions. We have also considered how she might have been inspired by current trends, such as the use of grasses for a more naturalistic feel.

Our new planting scheme for the central flower beds has a main season of interest from spring to autumn but includes plants with several attributes that perform at different times of year, such as species roses with hips, and the stems and seedheads of *Pennisetum* and *Calamagrostis* that persist through the winter months. The existing box hedging will be replaced with *Taxus x media* 'Hillii', and into the borders we are introducing *Fagus* topiaried in the shape of beehives and domed *Taxus* to link with the surrounding topiary and provide year-round interest and structure.

A new central path will be lined with sawn Apperley Antique Yorkstone, with hand-dressed edges for a crafted, aged look, to replace the artificial grass and provide better access for visitors, while working seamlessly with the new softscape.

Who else has been involved?

A large team of experts, including a National Trust archaeologist



The new planting scheme will include beehive-shaped *Fagus sylvatica* (top left), *Rosa glauca* (above left), and *Teucrium lucidrys* (above right) for seasonal interest and structure. The artificial turf that currently lines the garden's central path will be replaced by sawn Apperley Antique Yorkstone.

and architect, Cliveden's own Conservation Department, as well as structural engineers and the landscaping contractors. But we have worked most closely with Cliveden's Head Gardener, Anthony Mason, to make sure our solution meets his expectations and that we create a visitor attraction that has impact.

How will biodiversity be increased?

Using flowers with a long season has been essential to support pollinators. Also, the new grasses and perennials will be allowed to die back naturally, leaving stems and leaves over winter to provide shelter for insects, while the hedging and seedheads will provide nesting sites and food for birds. In spring, the cutting back will be staggered to provide a continuous stream of resources for wildlife.

What have been the main challenges?

The greatest has been the need to devise a solution that balances the garden's history with modern needs such as accessibility, delivering

sustainable materials and plants, and fulfilling the requirement for year-round performance.

Have you any advice for designers embarking on a heritage project?

They are likely to involve a large team of stakeholders so any designer needs to ensure decisions are robust and that the rationale can be explained clearly. I also recommend designers research the historical context and site's heritage as it provides a platform for decision-making. It is also important to respect the original intent and to understand conservation guidelines. Selecting materials that were available in the era when the garden was originally designed, such as stone, wrought iron and local wood, will also help to preserve the authenticity. ●

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