

# BLENDING *new and old*

**THE GARDEN COMPANY**  
WEST HILL, BEDFORDSHIRE

## PROJECT DETAILS

### Project value

£100k+

### Build time

3 months in total,  
completed in  
separate phases

### Size of project

2500m<sup>2</sup>

### Awards

BALI National  
Landscape Awards  
2022 – Special Award  
for Best Design  
and Build

**O**n moving into a new modern property in a Bedfordshire village, adjacent to older properties with more character, the owners were looking for a haven in their outdoor space for the family and friends to spend time together.

The rear garden had a small patio and no planting except for an existing mature holly hedge, and the awkwardly shaped front garden had a low-quality drive, lawn, and paved pathway. Fortunately, the homeowners had inherited handsome boundaries – a Victorian brick wall running along the back of the site and a holly hedge running from the rear boundary to the front – and a largely ‘blank canvas’ within.

To turn this into a haven, the family’s wishlist included a generous dining area, a good-sized lawn, a place to grow vegetables and a hammock to relax in. Room to entertain lots of people was a must, as were spaces for quiet retreat and – as suggested by one

teenage daughter – a fire pit. Creating a space that would attract wildlife was also important.

### Following Fibonacci

Overall, the designer James Scott’s intention was to create a warm, naturalistic feel. The house already had a good connection to the rear garden thanks to bi-fold doors which open straight from the kitchen/family room into the outside space, and strengthening that connection was a vital element of the design concept. It was important to complement the original brick wall and to pay homage to the holly hedge. Unlike so many gardens that are long and thin, stretching away from the house, the rear garden spreads across the width of ►

**1** Sunken fire pit and bespoke laser-cut Corten steel panel ©Clive Nichols





the property – leading to attractive views of the outdoor space from the family room/kitchen.

The rear garden now reflects the modern building through strong geometry, with planting and materials chosen to soften the effect. The garden has distinct zones for different activities, with framing of views through and within the garden from these areas.

A pale grey sandstone terrace flows from the kitchen, while the planters, low walls, and laser-cut art of the fire pit are all weathering steel that rusts to warm tones. Clay pavers leading to the fire pit complement the original brick wall at the rear, while the fire pit seating and raised beds in the vegetable garden are green oak. The terrace is home to four large ‘floating’ planters while the lawn has four generous quadrant beds. Both look like mass planting as the year progresses.

A handcrafted greenhouse designed by Scott was added in the final stages of the project. Next to the greenhouse is a small meadow from wildflower turf, embellished with spring bulbs and home to the hammock. The back border has been deepened to accommodate a bespoke Corten steel water feature, in keeping with the weathering steel featured elsewhere. Also designed by Scott and following Fibonacci mathematical principles, this has added visual dynamics and tranquil sounds, as well as attracting more wildlife to the space. The semi-sunken trampoline pit has recently been re-designed into a



sunken seating area, reflecting the changing needs of the family.

**Mixed materials**

The front garden now offers a sense of calm. A fluid organic design has diffused the garden’s uneven geometry, and different uses of rock has added visual interest and illustrated the journey from boulder to slab. The use of natural materials along with the addition of a water feature creates a harmonious flow towards the house.

On a practical note, the driveway has been modified to accommodate more vehicles when needed. The existing porch was small and rather dingy; part of the design solution was to replace this with a larger, lighter porch that blends the home’s modern architecture with the older properties nearby. This was designed in-house and crafted by The Garden Company’s joiner.

It is possible to view directly through the house from the front garden to the rear garden’s back wall, lining up on the water feature. The landscapers paid huge attention to detail with finishing touches including a stone-carved dog bowl and a stone seat next to the front path.

**Edible additions**

Overall, the soft landscaping complements the garden with seasonal colour and textural interest. Specimen trees add height and focal points or frame views. The rear garden’s planting is intricately layered, featuring different species and combinations. Each terrace bed is home to a multi-stemmed *Amelanchier*, underplanted with spring bulbs. This mitigates the lack of depth in the garden by creating foreground interest. Four naturalistic lawn beds include alliums, nepetas,



salvias, asters, achilleas, and grasses. When the perennials reach their full height and bloom in summer, this looks like one large block of planting. The perimeter borders are more of a woodland mix. The wildflower area provides visual interest for many months, offering great plant diversity and a changing colour palette throughout the seasons.

In addition to incorporating raised beds for fruit and vegetable growing into the garden design, there is also a small herb garden area near the kitchen door, making it easy to pop outside and grab fresh produce while cooking. The new greenhouse also provides fruit and vegetable plants with a safe haven protected from extreme weather and insects.

**Creating habitats**

There is a good balance between hard and soft landscaping throughout the front and rear gardens. In addition to a large lawn area in the rear garden, the plant borders are deep and abundant, and the terrace is enhanced with generous planters.

Pollinator-friendly plants were chosen to attract bees, butterflies and other beneficial creatures to the garden. A small wildflower meadow was also added to the rear garden and the long holly hedge – a great habitat for birds and other wildlife – has been carefully nurtured. The existing Victorian brick wall was partially covered in ivy which is great for nesting birds and insects, and this was preserved in the new design. ▶

- 2 Garden stretching width of house ©Clive Nichols
- 3 Sunken garden area and planting ©James Scott
- 4 Geums, Salvia and Irises ©Clive Nichols
- 5 Bespoke water feature ©James Scott





The garden is reasonably self-sufficient with no need for 'extreme' garden maintenance techniques. It was designed with vernacular materials in mind, to cut back on the transport required to get materials to site and reduce the project's carbon footprint. Materials with a high carbon footprint were avoided; hard landscaping relies largely on natural stone and weathering steel. Gravel was also used where possible, cutting down on hard, impermeable surfaces.

Three large compost containers are in use, providing a great habitat at different times of the year for many wildlife species and helping to cut down on landfill too. New water features in both the front and rear gardens not only add visual interest but are beneficial for birds and other wildlife.



### Nationwide recognition

The location of the site in Bedfordshire meant that the ground conditions comprised of sandy soil, which tends to leach nutrients and dry out quickly. The Garden Company overcame this by plant choice, and the addition of organic matter during the soil preparation. The garden is also top dressed annually with compost produced from the garden and supplemented with composted bark or green waste compost if required.

Once digging began in the front garden it became apparent that the area had once been a Victorian/Edwardian 'dumping ground' for glassware and pots, leading to some slight delays while these were dug up and inspected.

Owing to the existing mature trees surrounding the front garden, there was a 'no dig' landscaping solution for the new driveway. The property is also accessed by a narrow lane, and so deliveries to the site needed to be via small vehicles.

Overcoming these challenges, the gardens are now enjoyed by the family on a daily basis. A full lighting scheme serves a practical function, as well as extends the time the family can spend outdoors.

The success of the scheme was reinforced at the end of 2022 when the British Association of Landscape Industries presented The Garden Company with a prestigious Special Award for the Best Design and Build project. Judges said: "The transformation from bland, uninspiring, 'new build' landscaping to a landscape designed and constructed to fill the heart and the senses is a joy to behold."

6 Wildflower mini-meadow & hammock ©James Scott

7 Cut stone boulder & planting ©James Scott

### REFERENCES

Ebony Cloud sawn sandstone paving  
**CED Stone Group**  
cedstone.co.uk

Drive stabilisation grid  
**Core Landscape Products**  
corelp.co.uk

Plants  
**Nederhoff Plants**  
nederhoffplants.nl/en

Sawn Yorkshire paving, rocks and feature stones  
**Rand and Asquith**  
randandasquith.co.uk

Metalwork  
**T Brown and Sons Ltd**  
tbrownandsons.co.uk

### ABOUT

Led by James Scott FSGD MBALI, The Garden Company Ltd creates places of enduring value through expert design and landscaping. Its award-winning work is rich in detail and drawn from over 30 years' experience of bringing clients' dreams to life. The Hertfordshire-based company operates throughout South-East England and North London.  
**thegardenco.co.uk**