

IN THE PINK

A fashion forecaster has used her love of colour and texture as a template for her East Sussex garden, with spectacular results ▶

PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS **WORDS** PATTIE BARRON

Garden Profile

PLACE Hove, East Sussex
DESIGN Developed by the present owner, Barbara Kennington, since 2007
SIZE 110ft by 50ft
STYLE Wildlife-friendly town garden that includes a shady woodland walk, an exotic pool garden, a vegetable plot and patio with pebble mosaic floor.
OPEN Open two days a year for the NGS. See *The Yellow Book* or see www.ngs.org.uk

When shaping a new garden from old, it takes a cool eye to determine what might be salvaged, and what needs to go; razing a garden to the ground in a bid for a clean sweep can mean missing out on not just plant treasures, but the bones of a new garden. For Barbara Kennington, what helped shape part of her new plot was a large, ugly swimming pool at the back of the garden, which she inherited when she bought her home in Hove five years ago. 'It was rectangular and deep, so it would have been a nightmare to fill in,' says Barbara. 'The obvious route was to turn it into a dark reflective pool. Now, with its oak walkways and a shocking pink wall that makes you draw breath as you turn the corner, it's the highlight of the garden.'

Mature banks of shrubs on either side of the garden were a godsend, she says, and meant that after the ground was cleared, she could concentrate on redesigning the area within. One thing was clear: the sloping plot, about 12ft higher at the back than at the front, would need four separate levels, an excuse to give each level its own stamp. Now, the ground level is a roomy sandstone patio with trickling tiered pool; several steps up and the second tier is predominantly lawn, to give the eye pause (and to keep mini dachshund Bertie happy); on the third level, the shade on the left side dictated a woodland garden, with white birches and an understorey of spring-flowering bulbs and perennials, separated by a purple beech hedge from the pool garden on its right; the fourth level, the revamped vegetable plot and vintage greenhouse, another retained gem, are concealed by a screen of pleached Chanticleer pear trees and backed by living bamboo.

A novice to garden design and in fact gardening itself, though with a practised eye for colour, form and texture through her career as a fashion and textile trend specialist, she called in experienced garden designer Annie Guilfoyle



1. Vegetable Garden
2. Pleached Pear Trees
3. Waterfall
4. Oak Deck & Pathway
5. Living Willow Circle
6. Railway Sleeper Steps
7. Pebble Mosaic
8. Inset Oak Circle Seat
9. Three-tier Waterpool

to help make her plans reality. 'I knew what I wanted, but I work best in collaboration, and Annie's input, both technically and creatively, was invaluable. But I was keen to tackle the planting myself, as I had the luxury of doing it over time. I hate the idea of a planting plan.'

Barbara revelled in the task, soaking up information and ideas, visiting gardens, reading books, going to lectures by planting pros such as grasses expert Noel Kingsbury and perennials queen Marina Christopher. 'I especially like tall, airy plants that create a rhythm through the garden, linking the

levels. At Marina's talk I saw pictures of sanguisorbas and fell for them. Now I have three different kinds; their small, sparkling flowers bob far above the other plants.'

What makes this garden special, however, is not just the planting and the landscaping, but the unique craftworks, either created by Barbara or by local artisans, such as a living willow circle that leads into the woodland walk, the pebble-patterned rug to define a seating area and a rusted gate with attendant bird, all seamlessly integrated into this diverse and dynamic space.

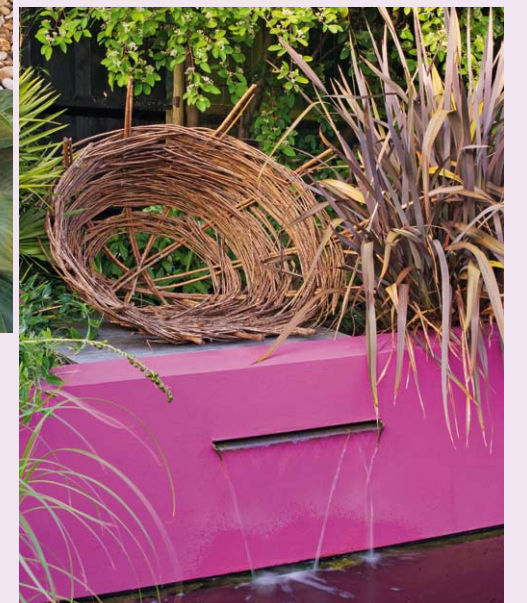
ILLUSTRATION/NEIL GOWER



WATCH THE BIRDIE Rusted iron and flowing lines make this gate and garden railings all but disappear into the planting (above). The watchful bird echoes the birdbath visitors (left).

BRONZED BEAUTY The bronze birdbath (left) inspired Barbara to use the dark tones, clean curves and weathered oak as a design template for the garden.

WOVEN WILLOW Barbara's first efforts in willow weaving did not, she admits, go according to plan, but the resultant woven bowl (below) softens the large solid slab beneath.



Artistic elements

Hand-crafted, beautifully designed features scattered throughout the garden reflect the owner's passion for interesting colours, shapes and textures.



MAKING MOSAIC Why have pre-cut paving when you can have a pebble mosaic?' asks Barbara, who has been making mosaics for some years, and loves the whole process. The biggest project in the garden was the 8ft circular pebble mosaic on the middle patio (far left), comprising 13 jigsaw-like paving slabs that took 10 days to make inside, and a further four weeks to dry outside. The mosaic sphere (centre), set on a stone plinth, has a Turkish tulip motif and is made from three polystyrene shapes first bolted together. Mosaic insets on the main patio table (left) replace the marble used to hold hot plates. ▶

On the boardwalk

A neglected swimming pool at the back of the garden has been transformed into an exotic pool garden, with oak walkways and a hot pink wall enclosing tropical-style planting.

Evergreen planting focuses on exciting foliage choices such as plum *Persicaria microcephala* 'Red Dragon'.

Inspired by the work of Mexican architect Luis Barragan, Barbara looked for the hottest shade of pink in exterior paint, to sharply contrast this exotic space with the calmer English garden beneath.

A set of steps lead up to the pool garden, which is set back so it is not visible until the corner is turned, making it a surprise.

'It was tricky to make the pool watertight,' says Barbara. 'The solution was to line it with fibreglass, which has worked perfectly.' She wanted a quiet, reflective pool, so black was the colour choice. It also offsets the colourful planting.

A weathered oak boardwalk intersects the pool and has allowed Barbara to create smaller pools within the larger one, so that one holds waterlilies, while another holds steadily increasing families of koi carp.

'I wanted a hedge that not only enclosed the pool garden, but was interesting in itself,' says Barbara. 'Purple beech looks wonderful in both summer and winter, when it weathers down to a great rust colour, which suits the garden well.'

Equisetum, contained in an underwater planter to restrict its growth, makes a vertical accent that visually breaks up the flat expanse. For this same reason, much of the pool planting consists of tall, ornamental grasses.

Barbara chose sandstone slabs to surround three sides of the pool because, she explains, they have softened edges and a mellow shade that suits the informality of both the pool garden and the weathered oak boardwalk. ▶



STEP LIVELY A line-up of blue and green pots (above) defines the steps and makes a miniature border, leading the eye on into the vibrant colours of the pool garden.

HOUSING BENEFITS Glazed lead cloches protect young lettuces in the veg plot, which is interplanted with flowers and herbs to make it decorative as well as functional (left).

SOOTHING SOUNDS On the lower patio, within rendered block walls of warm ivory, water trickles continuously down a mosaic chute into a reservoir beneath (below).



Beds and containers

Raised beds that double as water features, an overflowing kitchen garden and containers at every opportunity make this a garden that uses every inch of space.

POTS ON THE PATIO The outside dining table is usefully within a few steps of the house, so there are always cut flowers from the garden to admire, as well as resident houseleeks (below).



OWNER PROFILE

Barbara Kennington is a fashion and textile trend specialist who believes that similar design principles apply whether working with fabrics or the garden. 'In the fashion industry, it's all about how the fabric drapes, how the colours and textures play off each other. All my thinking on the garden's planting has been about considering colour and texture, and how I can use plants to soften the hard lines of the raised beds and walls, just like a fluid dress flowing over underpinnings.' She uses plants in rich, dark shades and diverse shapes to soften the hardscape and create a flow.



PORTRAIT ©BARBARA KENNINGTON