

At the end of the long Plantsman's Walk, the entrance to Scampston Walled Garden is fully revealed



Photo: GAP Photos/Rob Whitworth

GO WITH THE FLOW

Annie Guilfoyle explores how journeys can be created within the garden

Observing the way people move is fascinating. However, working out how you want to move people through a garden can be challenging. To create an interesting and successful garden design, it has to contain a sense of journey and mystery; it can be deflating to enter a garden and see everything in one glance. A designer has the ability to manipulate not only the way people move around a space and how it is viewed, but also to ensure it is done in the correct sequence.

Last autumn, I made my first visit to the wonderful walled garden at Scampston Hall in Yorkshire, and when buying my ticket I was directed to enter the garden by following the 'Plantsman's Walk'. This path follows the high brick wall that encloses the garden and is the principal way to enter. As I walked along, tall hedges masked the internal views, while the wall prevented me from seeing out. A beautiful border flanks the wall, richly planted with early flowering shrubs and perennials, punctuated by groups of cloud-pruned *Buxus*.

Along the route there are one or two tantalising views into the walled garden via carefully positioned gaps in the hedge. At the halfway point, there is a path that allows you into the main garden, but I was advised to keep walking until I reached the far side. This is a clever design device, because intrigue and excitement built as I made my way around, fully aware of the large and complex garden within. Finally, I reached the entrance, with undulating waves of *Molinia* flowing across the large and open garden from side to side, enticing me in. This carefully orchestrated journey is exactly what designer Piet Oudolf intended for the visitor; carefully controlling how they enter and view the garden.

A good way

Efficient flow through a garden requires thorough planning at the early stages of the design. This is when the functional layout plan really comes into its own; it is an essential stage



in the design process, bridging the gap between the survey and the masterplan. It is important to mark up the functional layout (or zonal) plan with all potential movement lines or 'traffic flow', indicating where people will need to move through the garden.

At this point, it is also practical to divide the paths into primary or secondary routes. For example, a primary route could be the walk to and from the greenhouse, compost bins or parking area. This is a path that may be used several times a day, possibly pushing a wheelbarrow, whereas a secondary route could be a meandering path through an area of planting, potentially leading to a seat. On a secondary route there is less urgency and you are encouraging people to stroll and take their time.

When organising pedestrian traffic flow you need to consider the direction in which you want people to move, as well as the speed and efficiency of the path itself. It is a good idea to try several versions of a functional layout plan before deciding upon the one you will refine for the masterplan.

It is human nature to want to cut corners when moving from one place to another, so if people see a shortcut, they will take it. This is basic landscape design, and yet you only have to go to any public park to find areas of worn grass or trampled planting, indicating a desire line.

So how do we direct people effectively and persuade them not to take the shortest possible route, or encourage them to slow down spending more time in the garden? Structural planting can be an extremely useful tool when directing movement and flow. An avenue of trees is often used to delineate a drive or an approach to a house. High hedges restrict views and will urge the visitor to walk more briskly, while low hedges allow views out but prevent the visitor from deviating off the prescribed path. Randomly placing planting into a gravel path or across a terrace will encourage people to slow down and meander.

Pave the way

Paving choice, the method of laying and the shape of a path can also influence the speed and direction that people will take. On a straight path, linear materials such as brick pavers, decking or cut stone laid lengthwise will visually encourage more rapid movement through a garden. Positioning a focal point, such as an open gate or an arch in the hedge, at the end of a path will naturally draw people along.

On the other hand, if you want to slow people down, you can lay paving across the path running from side to side;



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Slate set on edge creates a directional flow; an elegant, staggered pathway with gaps slows the pace in this Chelsea garden by Sarah Price and Patrick Clarke; a narrow brick path weaves through the orchard at Great Dixter; a curved cedar path in Adam Frost's 2015 Chelsea garden

All photos: Annie Guilfoyle



Photo: Iwan Baan/Friends of the High Line

curving or staggering the shape of the pathway; or allow plants to intrude. All will produce a more relaxed feeling and encourage people to take a steadier pace.

A loose material, such as gravel will inevitably slow down movement, especially if there are stepping stones laid into the gravel – then the visitor literally has to watch their step as they walk. A 90-degree corner in a path will bring you to a halt and is a useful device for emphasising a selected view, before changing direction. Where paths cross or intersect, you can visibly mark the junction using a design detail, such as a circle or square formed using the paving. This will slow people down to consider the change in direction.

The High Line in New York is a great example of managing human-traffic flow and while the paving is mainly laid in a linear directional style, there are various ways in which the overall design encourages people to slow down and enjoy the elevated walkway. The High Line pathway varies in width; some places are wide-open and tempt the visitor to deviate off the track towards a seating area or promontory viewpoint; some sections are narrow with tall planting and restricted views, and the tendency here is to walk faster. Sculpture and seating is strategically positioned and not always obvious, and the element of surprise slows the visitor down as they become more inquisitive. It all comes down to mystery, surprise and a sense of journey. ○

ABOVE New York's High Line shows how to manage pedestrian traffic flow **BELOW** Basalt paving slabs set into gravel will slow down people's movement, enabling them to appreciate the planting



Photo: Annie Guilfoyle

FURTHER READING:

- *From Concept to Form in Landscape Design* (Van Nostrand Reinhold) by Grant W. Reid
- *John Brookes Garden Masterclass* (Dorling Kindersley) by John Brookes