



WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON?

Pre-registered SGD member **Lucy Conochie** speaks to Zia Allaway about a multi-layered garden in Oxfordshire which she is creating in close collaboration with the architect of the owner's home

AFTER GRADUATING with an MA from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2007, pre-registered SGD member Lucy Conochie set up a garden maintenance company alongside her artistic practice. She then went on to gain her RHS Level 2 Principles of Horticulture and a Diploma in Garden Design from Capel Manor College, and upon graduating, was awarded the Gardener's Company Prize by The Worshipful Company of Gardeners. She established her design company in 2015 and focuses on making sustainable landscapes that help to increase biodiversity and wildlife habitats.

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How did you win the project?

I was recommended to the garden owner by a friend of mine who lived nearby. The owner and I clicked as soon as we met and she loved my vision for a sustainable, wildlife-friendly garden.

What was the brief?

The owner is refurbishing a sprawling, sandstone farm cottage and it will eventually be connected via an unheated, glazed link to a modern barn. The property as a whole is about four acres in size and the owner asked me to design three-quarters of an acre of garden around the house and new barn, and some planting within the glass walkway, with social areas for visitors and more private spaces that she and her partner can enjoy. She wanted an informal, higgledy-piggledy garden with hidden spaces and an orchard.

How did the masterplan evolve?

Architect Jon Du Croz and I worked →



A Japanese-inspired private terrace (3D visual, pictured) is part of the design by Lucy Conochie (above).



closely to create a design that unifies the house, barn and garden. Although I have worked with architects before, it has usually been at the end of the process but for this project, Jon brought me in at the very beginning of the planning stage. We collaborated on a whole range of design decisions including thresholds to create smooth transitions from the house to the garden, and the views through the space. We engineered a beautiful vista, for example, that runs from the entrance gate in the east wall, through the glass link, into the garden and on to the valley and treelines beyond. We have also saved and reused materials and retained old buildings that had been marked for demolition.

Who or what was your inspiration?

I asked the owner what areas of the original site she was drawn to, and which she disliked, and her instinctive responses informed my final design. I was also inspired by the work of 'New Wave Dutch' planting exponent Henk Gerritsen at Waltham Place in Berkshire, where grasses and flowers are left to self-seed and flop over the Yorkstone paving.

How have you fulfilled the brief?

The garden is divided into a series of interlinked areas. A Japanese-style garden beside the house is mainly intended for guests and it leads onwards, to a gravel garden that acts as a transition to a tiered lawn and vegetable garden. We kept an old concrete path to edge the productive beds, and the renovated outbuildings will be used to store a mower and gardening tools. To the west lies an informally planted terrace for use by the owner, and on the higher ground, an existing circle of grass edged with reclaimed saddle stones and with beautiful views over the countryside, will be used for meditation or yoga. I have also included an orchard and a natural swimming pond on the west side.

Tell us about the planting

In the decorative areas, I am focusing on self-seeders such as *Sisyrinchium striatum*, *Lychnis coronaria*, *Calamintha nepeta* and *Phlomis tuberosa* 'Amazona', which will support wildlife, either with their long flowering season or good winter structure. The gravel garden will include medicinal and culinary herbs, together with other aromatic plants, and beyond that, most of the garden will be cultivated with wild grasses and flowers and site-appropriate trees, together with a range of fruit trees in the orchard.



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What about the garden's carbon footprint?

The beauty of working closely with the architect is that we have been able to salvage sandstone from demolished outbuildings. Small pieces have been crushed for sub-base while the best stones will be used to build the retaining walls. I have chosen reclaimed York stone for the stepping-stone paths and for the terrace. Where we use it for the paths, cement will not be needed at all and for the terrace, the heavy weight of the stone means it can be loose laid on grit and sand, with just the edges shored up with a mortar base to keep the stones in the middle in place. The gravel driveway is also permeable, but we decided a retaining plastic mesh was a necessary compromise, to protect the roots of the mature trees. ○

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Lucy's site plan and 3D visuals of the gravel garden, which opens out onto the tiered lawn.