



## CASE STUDY PRIZE DRAW

Photography Carolyn Grohmann Words Caitlin Clements

**S**ome people claim that if you want something, you should say it aloud to the universe and your wish might just be granted. The owners of this sublime garden jokingly asked its designer all the way through its creation if it was going to win a prize – and it did: at the prestigious BALI National Landscape Awards. The universe can't take credit for this outdoor masterpiece, however – that goes to Carolyn Grohmann of Secret Gardens Design.

Outdoor space matters so much to the clients that they enlisted the designer's help as soon as they bought their house, a beautiful Georgian villa in Edinburgh's Merchiston area. They'd worked with her previously and had complete faith in her skills, and she in turn knew they loved beautiful design and ▶

high-quality workmanship. They told her they were going to add a contemporary kitchen extension to the side and rear of their new home, and that the garden had to complement both this and the original parts of the villa. So she worked with architects Somner Macdonald from the outset to create a garden that would flow seamlessly between old and new.

“I wanted to use some of the symmetry and features of the house in my layout but with a more contemporary feel to it,” says the designer. “Proportions were a key element – the house is a typically tall, two-storey, solid villa with large windows and a grand front door, and the garden needed to reflect these proportions in the space available. In the back garden this involved designing on the diagonal to create the necessary length.”

To make an impact right from the start, she specified a mosaic on the front path. “I wanted to create a sense of arrival,” explains Grohmann. She turned to Joel Baker of Stone Man Mosaics, who drew inspiration from the front door, picking out details of its surrounding stone carvings in his design, tying the front garden to the house from the outset. This area has other standout features too, such as mature beech hedging and weeping ornamental pear trees, and is framed by grey railings by P. Johnson & Company.

Its constantly evolving beauty has won many admirers: “In spring, miniature daffodils are followed by a display of velvety pink tulips and from then until early winter wave after wave of colour and interest have passers-by stopping in their tracks to take it all in,” smiles the designer.

She likes to check in on it herself from time to time, admitting that she often makes a detour when in the neighbourhood to see how it’s doing and what’s in flower. A seating area in the front garden

**[Previous page]** The garden is full of eye-catching elements; Carolyn Grohmann’s plan showing how the front and back gardens are connected, and how the latter is laid out on the diagonal so there is space to get the proportions right. **[Opposite, clockwise from top left]** A scorched-oak boardwalk crosses the sunken garden; complementing the honey-coloured stone and symmetrical façade was a key design consideration; seating areas are positioned in order to catch the sun at different times of the day; the rill that runs through the sunken garden

flanked by maples (*Acer platanoides* ‘Crimson King’ and ‘Princeton Gold’) means the owners can enjoy it too, and are able to soak up the morning sun.

Down a black basalt path, past a bronze water tub complete with water lilies, is the rear garden. “The challenge here was to create something thought-provoking and intriguing in a relatively confined space but without it becoming contrived or overly busy,” says Grohmann.

It’s full of richness, but has been carefully planned so it doesn’t overwhelm, with each area standing out clearly in its own right. The first focal point is the stone garden building at the end of the scorched-oak boardwalk across the sunken garden. Other features that pack a punch include a Gabriel Ash greenhouse, a sundial by Macmillan Hunter and a circular rill with flowing water nestling amid tulips, clipped box and seasonal plantings.

There is also patio space in which to sit and revel in the sights and scents, with plants selected to ensure the garden is impressive all year round. Vibrant begonias in pots add a pop of colour to counteract grey skies, for example, and in winter, says Grohmann, frost catches in the seedheads and grasses, to stunning effect.

Blues, pinks and whites dominate the colour palette at the front of the house, with yellows, oranges and reds more prominent at the back, particularly in the late-summer borders. “I find the garden peaceful, colourful and interesting at ▶





[Above] The landscaping here, as elsewhere, was done by Water Gems of Edinburgh. [Left] The front path, bordered by pink tulips, has an elegant design courtesy of Joel Baker of Stone Man Mosaics. The railings are by P. Johnson & Company

any time of the year, which is what I was aiming for,” says Grohmann. She is quick to acknowledge the contributions of others in the creation of this garden. It was built by landscapers Water Gems, the plants were supplied by Binny Plants and it is maintained by Janet Thomas at New Leaf Gardens and David Scott at the Green Garden Company. “It was a fantastic opportunity to pull together the very best people in the industry and create something truly special,” says Grohmann.

The BALI judges agreed: “The quality of the hard landscaping around this Edinburgh house, including difficult radial cuts and detailed motifs, is superb. The planting in the front garden is exquisite and the colour palette spot on. To the rear the large lawn area contains a beautiful sunken garden with a rill. Overall, the scheme is totally in keeping with the period of the house and is faultless as a piece of landscape construction.” ■