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THE KING FISHER



Simon McDermott meets Andrew Fisher Tomlin, the talent behind landscape and garden design service, Fisher Tomlin

Gardening. You either love it or you hate it. There are some of us who will happily spend the whole of Sundays pruning shrubs or re-potting plants, and then there are those of us who want to get away with doing the least work as possible. Either way, if you're thinking of bringing your garden into the 21st century, your safest bet is to make sure the garden works for you.

Fisher Tomlin offer an extensive landscape and garden design service and are known for their simple structured designs using natural materials. Their projects range from small stylish city gardens to large country houses with formal or natural planting schemes. Andrew Fisher Tomlin is also consultant Chairman of the Society of Garden Designers and consultant to the British Psychological Society on the benefits of gardens and open space.

When it comes to designing gardens it is important to have some basic understanding of the architectural structures of the garden as well as the plants in it. "Some people don't understand how to use the plants and space together in their gardens. You can actually save people lots of money if you advise them properly about how to use their garden," says Andrew. "It is easy to spend lot of money on your garden, but you have to make sure that it will be able to work within the confines of the space you have available," he adds. "What looks good in a brochure or show-garden will not necessarily look good back home."

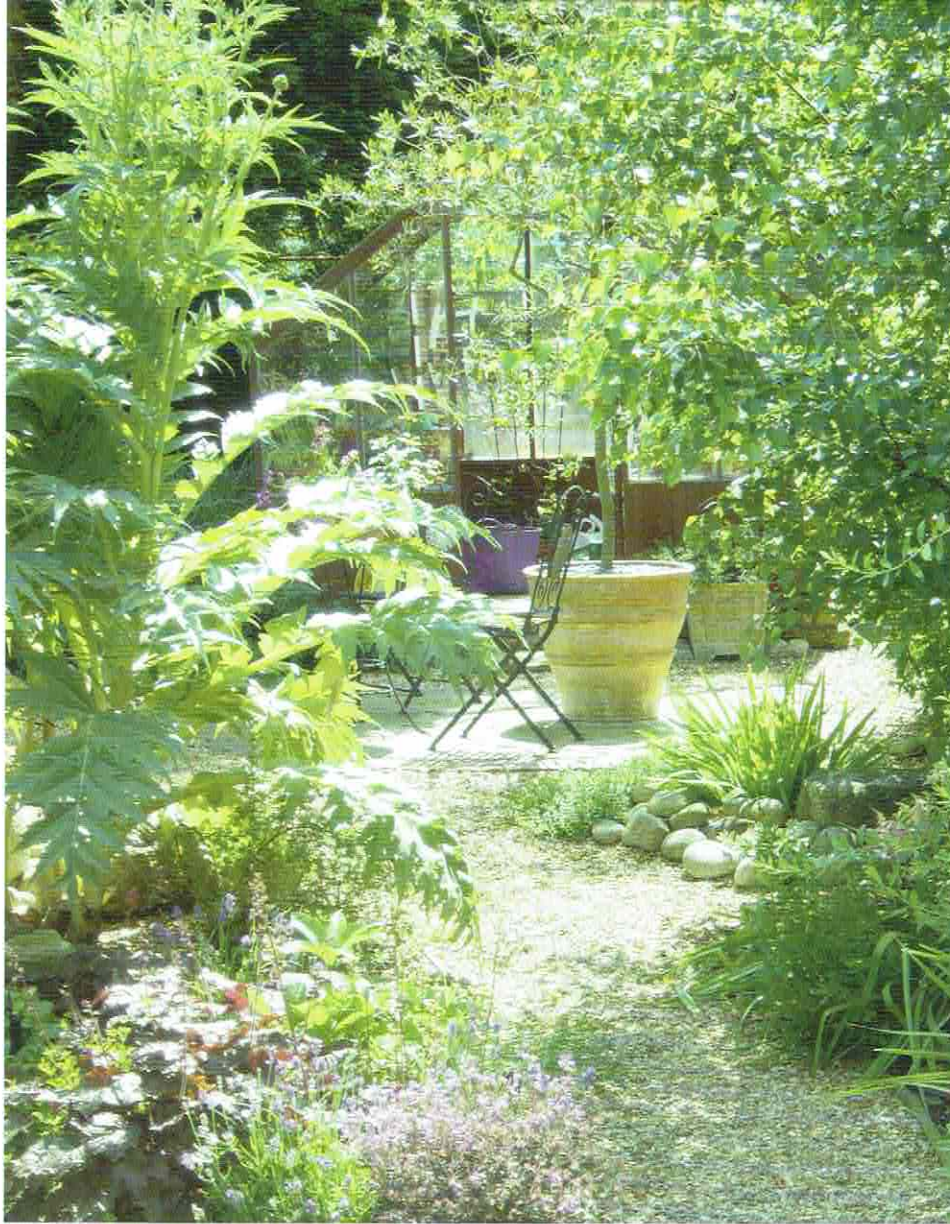
According to Andrew, a good garden has four main characteristics. Firstly, a good structure to the garden is essential, in the sense that people should be aware of its prime uses. The second characteristic is simplicity. "Don't use too many different materials within the garden design," he says. Andrew feels that too many different materials create confusion and clutter. "Stick with a couple of good natural materials – Old Yorkstone is great for use within traditional gardens, whilst natural hardwood is perfect for some contemporary designs."

Andrew believes that you need to be able to strike the right balance between both the hard elements of the garden – such as paving and architectural features, and soft elements – i.e. plants and trees. "Many inner-city gardens over-emphasise on the hard

elements," says Andrew. "This disrupts the balance and can leave some spaces looking cold and lifeless." Finally, Andrew feels strongly that a good garden should be just that – a garden, and he shies away from the trend to see the garden as 'an extra room'. "I agree that with changes in climates and new garden products more and more people are making greater use of their garden," he says, "But it shouldn't end up being like an extra kitchen to the house. A garden should be more of a 'retreat' – somewhere you can escape to."

Recent demographic and lifestyle changes, including the

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introduction of new technology has seen fresh developments within garden design. "It is also the challenge of the designer to ensure that the garden reflects the people who will be using it," says Andrew. "As life becomes faster and there is less time for people to garden, low maintenance gardens have seen an increase in popularity, especially with young professionals," he adds. "Its important for them to be able to carry out their gardening as quick and easy as possible, as well as having a space to relax and entertain guests." Fisher Tomlin recently carried out a commission for a single professional man that included a sun deck and entertainment area complete with fire-pit, which has seen an increase in popularity in the UK during recent years.

Office gardens are also a growing trend, and workplaces that have included an outside space area have seen increases in productivity of over 25%. Outside spaces can help people take time out from the busy office to relax and calm down. Additionally, due to more and more people telecommuting, Andrew has noticed a distinct growth in the number of people who ask for some kind of workspace area within their garden. Andrew's own office is actually situated at the end of his garden. "Any small outside building within the garden can be great places to work because they allow people to differentiate their working life from their home life," he adds.

Additionally there has been increased demand for greater environmental awareness within garden designs. "No longer are our customers willing to accept any type of soil or planting," he says. "This is most probably due to the influence of the children

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within the family. As they have learnt about environmental issues at school and are sometimes involved in wildlife projects in school gardens, they are increasingly pestering parents for a 'wildlife' space within their own garden." This has also lead to an increase in the popularity of grasses in recent years.

However, despite this, Andrew still feels that there are some traditional plants, such as roses, that will never go out of fashion. The one aspect of horticulture that Andrew is concerned about is the introduction of GM plant varieties within the UK. "Many of the plants and trees that we see in the UK have been introduced from overseas. However, I do find it difficult to accept new potential concepts such as blue roses," he says. "Roses are not supposed to be blue!"