

A sense OF PLACE

Leigh Clapp meets garden designer Mike Harvey, whose ethos is to create gardens that are fun to be in while suited to the conditions



Left: Garden designer Mike Harvey creates relaxing outdoor spaces

Inset: The striking over-sized chairs were made from 20 old pallets

Right: Alliums feature in Mike's designs

January is a great time to plan new ideas or areas in the garden. Calling in a garden designer, with their honed eye for the total look of a coherent scheme and their knowledge of plants for your conditions, can clarify your thoughts or lead you in an unexpected way. Garden designer Mike Harvey of Arun Landscapes came to my attention with his eye-catching show garden at the 2012 RHS Hampton Court Flower Show. His wonderful use of bright colour with easy-care planting and all on a tight budget was inspirational.

As part of the category 'Low Cost High Impact Gardens' it met the criteria well with the use of recycled materials and clever choices of hard landscaping materials. Rather than expensive large slabs of York stone, smaller pieces were used as crazy paving, a fireplace appearing to be stone was actually concrete, the two imposing chairs were created from old pallets, the walls were rendered with a colourful textured design, complete with a living picture of sempervivums, and plants were selected for good-value profusion.

There was quite a laid-back lifestyle feeling to the space so it came as no surprise to learn that Mike grew up in Cornwall. "My parents probably most influenced me becoming a garden designer. Dad was a landscape contractor and mum is an artist. They have a fantastic garden in Cornwall. As a child I was forced to mow the lawn at weekends, weed and dig holes. Many a good surf I missed due to gardening! I grew up hating gardens, but when I went to university I realised I missed it. When I visit them now I am always out in the garden, however I still struggle to get them to change anything, apparently they know better," smiles Mike.

Mike trained first in landscape architecture, then changed to studying garden design as he found it more personal with clients passionate about their gardens. Strong linear structure pervades his designs, softened by a relaxed Mediterranean vibe. "I love Mediterranean gardens, Nicole de Vesian's garden in Provence is beautiful as she uses natural materials such as stone and wood and combines with beautifully



clipped planting," he comments.

With last year starting hot and dry, then wetter than wet, we certainly need to choose plants that can cope with periods of both extremes. "I think people are even more aware of gardening with low water and maintenance requirements, to select the right plant for the right place, have no lawn in a small space and to mulch flowerbeds. Rainwater harvesting is becoming increasingly common, either with a simple waterbutt or a large buried storage tank, as is re-using materials in construction," explains Mike.

A lot of Mike's work is on the South Downs, the well-drained soil and sunny conditions allowing him to use plants with a Mediterranean influence, such as lavender, either sculpturally clipped or free-flowing with its scent and flower in summer. "I also love alliums for their fantastic round flower heads. The movement of grasses such as *Stipa tenuissima* or *gigantea* adds another dimension to a garden. They also catch the light in the evening if planted in the right place," adds Mike.

A common thread with Mike's designs is that the plants must suit the location. "Plants should thrive, not struggle and choosing the right plants will cut down on your maintenance. Gardens in my opinion should be fun, interesting and relaxing. Hidden seating areas surrounded by plants and colour, year round interest and scent are all things I like to include," he concludes. ■

Get in touch Mike Harvey
Arun Landscapes Ltd, 267 Dairy Cottage, Northstoke, Arundel, West Sussex BN18 9LS
www.arunlandscapes.co.uk
01798 831045