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# Baywatch



"Once I allowed myself to think 'water', there was no turning back, and I quickly decided that I would try to flood the space with as much water as I thought I could get away with. Basically my idea was to invite the seascape into the garden and thereby to link the property as closely as possible to its surroundings",

It goes without saying that there are many factors that one needs to take into account when engaged in the design process and somewhere close to the top of the list might be, the client's brief. Now in this case, Anne and Liam (the client) were happy to draw up a detailed and very informative document outlining their observations along with their hopes and wishes which they presented to their landscape architect and designer, Hugh Ryan. The following are extracts from this document that deal with the front garden.

" How it will look from the house? (The kitchen mainly but also the sitting room and main bedroom upstairs), particularly in relation

to the view beyond (of the sea), considering that it can look blue and Mediterranean but mostly looks grey and murky and sometimes you can hardly see anything because of the mist.

- In this regard would you bear in mind that we'll take almost all our meals in the glass bit of the kitchen and might even, during a heat wave, venture outside to eat.
- How it will look from the street, although the garden is raised above the street level and there is a wall.
- We have no need for a water feature as we have a huge one on our doorstep.
- We have neither children nor pets. »

**PROJECT DETAILS**

**SITE/TYPE** Baywatch  
**LOCATION** 17km South of Dublin, Ireland  
**CLIENT** Anne and Liam  
**LANDSCAPE DESIGNER** Hugh Ryan  
**PRINCIPAL DESIGNER** Hugh Ryan

**PROJECT FACTS**

**SITE AREA** 153 sq. metres  
**BUDGET** n/a  
**STATUS** Complete

In spring 2003, Anne and Liam, a professional middle aged couple, had just recently bought the property and were in the process of radically refurbishing and extending the house. The landscape architect was brought on board to design and construct a garden that would fall in line with their vision for their new home. This house, originally built in the 1940s, is located in a choice seaside setting 17 kilometres south of Dublin city in an area that is steeped in history and very close to where the landscape architect himself grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. Close by and to the east stands Geragh (1938), home to the iconic Irish architect Michael Scott (1905-1989), a house that he designed for himself next door to the James Joyce Museum. This museum, which Scott established along with John Huston, the film director, is housed in the same Martello Tower that features in the opening pages of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Turning westward, one looks towards the historic port of Dun Laoghaire with its massive harbour walls built with granite from the nearby quarries at Dalkey Hill. Then across the bay and to the north one can see the sleek landform that is Howth Head with its bejewelled tip, the Baily lighthouse.

The whole property runs to some 580 sq. metres with a building footprint of 166 sq. metres, a front garden of 153 sq. metres, a side passage of 16 sq. metres and a back garden of 245 sq. metres. Now although the design covers the front, side, back and interior gardens with a common thread throughout, the focus of this article is the front garden alone. With a northerly aspect, the garden receives its share of sunshine and although only about seven metres from the sea it is situated on a relatively sheltered coastline though winter storms are not unknown. The property is bound by the public road to the north and to the west and as the front garden is raised 1.5 metres above external ground level and behind a two metre high wall it is not easily overlooked, even by the most curious passers-by.

After having assembled the data, the designer was in search of the hook on which to hinge the design. From the outset, he had decided that granite along with white walls would both feature in the design; the former because of its significance in the local environment, both the built and the natural, and the latter because of their maritime/Art Deco feel. Another obstacle was the "We have no need for a water feature..." by the owners, but the designer's thinking was dominated by the overwhelming presence of the sea, and that like the 'elephant in the corner' the possible inclusion of water could not be ignored.

"Once I allowed myself to think 'water', there was no turning back, and I quickly decided that I would try to flood the space with as much water as I thought I could get away with. Basically my idea was to invite the seascape into the garden and thereby to link the property as closely as possible to its surroundings",

he explains. To achieve this objective, a split-level water feature was constructed, with water in the upper level rising and falling in a tide like motion. By making water the dominant feature of this garden the intent was to engage the qualities of open space, movement and reflection, qualities that the designer believed were fundamental to the seascape. For both the client and the designer, the enduring appeal of the seascape is its simplicity born from its complexity. Tides that ebb and flow, with colours and textures that are constantly changing. Very often one only need to glance at the bay to learn the time of day, the season and perhaps more importantly, what the weather is up to at any given time.

Of the 153 sq. metres that make up this space, 44 sq. metres is decking, 24 sq. metres is planting and the rest, 85 sq. metres is water (almost half). Given the narrow access to the front garden and allowing for the fact that large amounts of mainly soil material had to be both removed and later replaced with concrete - this was a protracted and at times frustrating build. The water feature is lined with sand and loose pebbles on both levels. Water is pumped slowly from the lower to the upper pond and then as if to mimic the tide, the water slowly returns to the lower pond only for the cycle to start once again. The sand in the lower pond is never exposed, but as the water ebbs away from the upper pond it slowly emerges and on dry days the colour changes between wet and dry adding to the effect. Three slabs of black granite are positioned in the upper pond that resemble sailing boats or even "sea creatures", but they are also intended to mirror the shape of Howth Head as it too seems to float in the water. Moreover, when it rains the slabs take on a new dimension and become jet-black mirrors. It seems too obvious to say that reflection is one of the great qualities of water, but it can't be ignored, and here it seems to work well.

Decking, to provide access to the garden from the kitchen and as a place to sit or even eat out (weather permitting) was an obvious choice and was immediately approved by the client, and although the designer wanted to finish this deck with a coloured stain (cape cod grey was the first choice), the client settled on a deck oil with its varnish like finish.

The planting plays a small but significant part in this scheme. "I am happy that the use of grass in one of the beds has struck the right note and that the warmer planting near to the house is just that, warmer, but time and the ravages of winter will tell their own story. All in all I am very pleased with the outcome and I am looking forward to keeping an eye on my very own Baywatch!" concludes the designer. **Text: Hugh Ryan, images: Ewa Cieslikowska (p.91, p.99 top left, top right, bottom right), Hugh Ryan (p.99 bottom left). Edited: Architecture+**

