

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2005 €4.95 / £3.45

GARDEN

Heaven



HYACINTH

Fill your garden with scent next spring

GREAT DIXTER

Helen Dillon visits Christopher Lloyd

FARMLEIGH

We take you behind the scenes



NORMANDIE

BY HUGH RYAN MSGD MGLDA



This garden proved to be a dream project for me, with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable client, a sympathetic and gifted architect, and a house to die for. Art Deco as a style has always fascinated me and as a child in the 1950's I was fortunate enough to live quite close to some of Ireland's best examples of Art Deco architecture. So when I was asked to design a garden for this house in Dublin I didn't have to be asked twice.

The relationship between the nature of a building along with the space that it occupies, and in turn with the space that surrounds it,

is fundamental to my approach to garden design. In this case, a large house of obvious character seemed to dominate the site, and my first impression was that it evoked the image of an ocean going liner. It was this image that subsequently fueled the inspiration for my design. Later I was to give this project the nickname 'Normandie' after the great French Art Deco ocean liner of the 1930's.

When I first saw the house it was undergoing a radical renovation and extension, and the garden itself was, to all intents and purposes, a blank canvas, that is to say with the exception of a very fine Siberian spruce *Picea omarika* in the back garden and a fabulous

Cedrus atlantica 'Glaucua' in the front. I noted that all the rooms in the house had views to the garden, and many on the first floor had balconies. The kitchen occupied an especially important central location in the house and provided the principal link between the house and back garden.

The client wanted a garden that was neither too traditional nor too modern, play space for a trampoline and basketball, room to entertain in the back, a lawn and a water feature but not a pond. She also wanted a utility yard to the side and, in the front, lots of space for cars. She was also keen for me to include some of her favourite plants.





HUGH RYAN

Kilballyowen, Annacurra, Tinahely,
Co. Wicklow.

Tel: (0402) 36 386 / 087 256 1139

Web: www.hughryan.ie

After studying architecture at Bolton St, Hugh Ryan turned his attention to landscape gardening in 1977. Choosing the modern and contemporary approach to design, Hugh is always seeking to explore new ideas, new materials and new plants, and to develop new ways of combining form and shape along with colour and movement. He describes himself as a landscape modernist.



So where to begin? Well, I like to start by really getting to know the site and the client's needs and wishes. One of the undoubted advantages of being asked to design someone else's garden is that you bring fresh eyes and fresh thinking to the project. If, however, it's your own garden and fresh eyes have long since turned sour, and your thinking has become blinkered, well then try looking at your garden in a mirror and see if that helps. Indeed that 'mirror' may be someone else. Gather as much information as you can, make lots of notes and sketches and remain flexible at all times. It is essential to conduct an accurate, albeit simple, survey of the garden and always work to a scale.

I have been designing gardens for almost thirty years and over that period I hope that I have learned a thing or two about the process, but primary amongst these things I believe is flexibility. Most of the time patience is important, and rushing your fences may only lead to problems later on, but for me once the die is cast on a design, and this can happen very quickly, there is often little chance of turning back. However, I do find it critical to remain flexible. With flexibility comes refinement, and often I find that it is what I leave out that is at least as important as what I choose to leave in. Avoid preconceived ideas and rely instead on inspiration. Try not to make the mistake of simply copying other ideas and trying to make them 'fit'; instead why not borrow the ones you like, analyse and dismantle them, and then, if appropriate,

modify them to suit the requirements of your project.

With this project one of the planning challenges that I faced was the fact that the route between the door from utility room to the place where I wanted to create a utility yard crossed over the line of sight from the gym to the garden. Now in most cases I like to keep the utility yard as close as possible to the utility room door but to have it separated and screened from the main part of the garden. In this case it was essential that this screening would in no way interfere with the view from the gym into the main garden. I resolved this situation by installing a long curving and sweeping white wall that provides separation along with screening, while at the same time maintaining a clear view from gym to garden.

As I said before it is the kitchen, with its high ceiling, large curved glass wall, and generous doors that opens directly into the back garden. Picking up on the curve of the kitchen I developed an arc of paving, (the 'ship's deck', or is it the 'quay side?'), and this area with its radiating pattern of limestone and granite acts as a bridge between house and garden. Here we find a warm, sunny place ideal for sitting out and sipping coffee or a cold drink. From here we can see that the planting is set in ribbons that, like waves, swirl and flow throughout the garden. The large round painted deck, which is linked to this paving via a boardwalk, appears to float in a sea of vegetation.

Between the lawn and the deck is the water feature, and this, with its massed white granite boulders punctuated by three sparkling and dancing fountains that provide sound as well as spectacle, is intended to emulate the shoreline of the ocean.

A large circular lawn opens up the garden and this is linked to the paving via two concrete paths. These paths are made with white sand and cement and are edged with pieces of angular limestone, also intended to evoke images of a shoreline.

Across the broad sweep of the lawn to the south is a small copse of birch and crab apple, underplanted with spring bulbs and shade-loving plants. Here we find a long curving path that begins by piercing through the bamboo, which screens and protects the trampoline, and then sweeps its way through the copse, behind the statuesque Siberian spruce and eventually reemerges onto the deck through another silky grove of bamboo.

By contrast the front garden contains only foliage plants, many of which are evergreen. Again the plants are aligned in ribbons, but this time they curve and undulate in intersecting streams of silver, green and winter bronze. I have always felt that there is hint of seafront amusements to this scheme. With plenty of space for parking the front garden is simple and easy to maintain and the two Italian cypress would, I hope, have appealed to the likes of Robert Mallet-Stevens (1886-1945) a French architect and recently celebrated exponent of Art Deco. ■