



ANN-MARIE POWELL – AUTHOR & GARDEN DESIGNER

By [MOLLIE BROWN](#) / Updated **June 6th, 2023**

Contributions From [ANN-MARIE POWELL](#)

Award-winning Garden Designer [Ann-Marie Powell](https://www.ann-mariepowell.com/) has been designing private and commercial gardens since 1998 and has since become a prominent figure in UK Horticulture.

In 2021, Ann-Marie released [My Real Garden](https://www.myrealgarden.co.uk/), a book based on the advice of the online community she fostered during the lockdowns of 2020, with proceeds going to the charity [Greenfingers](https://www.greenfingerscharity.org.uk/), of which she is a patron.

RHS Gold Medalist Ann-Marie is also set to appear on an episode of [Art of the Garden](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vicwOjGW_cs) in June of this year.

We spoke with her to learn more about how she found gardening, her career to date and some exciting plans for the future.

Imagery featured in this article is provided courtesy of [Charlie Hopkinson](https://www.charliehopkinson.com/) and Ann-Marie Powell.

Can You Tell Us A Little About How You Got Into Gardening?

“Unusually for a Garden Designer, I grew up without a garden, because my father was in the army,” says Ann-Marie.

“My grandfather was a miner and lived in Leeds. He had a very small lawn that he was very proud of; I remember he used to cut it with kitchen scissors! He also had an allotment, which supplemented his family table but also gave him a deep connection with

light and sunshine after spending all his days in the dark.

“He was so inspiring and I think of him often.”



Photo credit – Charlie Hopkinson

“When I was in my early twenties, I went travelling and visited India, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand and Central America. That’s when I saw the magic that my grandfather was experiencing when he was not down a coal shaft.

“I’d been doing textile design at college but dropped out as at that time of my life, I found the nightlife of Nottingham more fun than studying! But whilst abroad, the beautiful textures, fabrics and colours that nature puts together in a living landscape astounded me.

“When I came back from travelling, I enrolled straight into a Garden Design Course at Capel Manor College in Enfield back in the mid-90s. I trained in Garden Design and Hard Landscape.”

What Do You Love About Gardening?

"I've been designing gardens for longer than I haven't and I still get a kick from it," Ann-Marie shares. "My grandfather once said 'find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life', and even though I do work very hard, I definitely feel that I took up his advice.

"I'm also amazed at how horticulture is at the centre of almost everything we do. There's a horticultural element in everything that shapes our day-to-day, and after so many years, I'm still learning.

"I think it's true to say that without plants, we're screwed!"

Do You Have A Process For Garden Design? What Are You Inspired By?

"Inspired by all those years ago whilst travelling, for me, it's all about amplifying what nature does so brilliantly," she says. "We have 2 mottos in our studio: 'nature amplified' and 'plants, people, place'.

"Every garden is different, so we want to make sure that we're designing each space for each individual client and their unique outdoor space — I don't think any of our gardens are the same.

"I think one thing we do really well and are not afraid of is colour. Back in the mid-90s, when I first started my practice, it felt like Garden Designers were being very safe when designing their planting schemes and there was a prevalence of green, whites and pastel colours.

"I was very much influenced by Sarah Raven and Nori Pope, who were boldly putting together some exciting and very different colour schemes together.

"So, my team and I are inspired by what nature does and what wildlife and ecology our work with plants brings into any garden we design, be it in a town or city. We like to embrace the wildness and the uncontrollability of nature to create exciting spaces for our clients and wildlife to live in harmony together."

You Mention You Garden In Your Spare Time —

"Full-time," she laughs. "Garden design is my vocation, but I don't feel good about my life unless I go out into my garden every single morning before I go to work, and if I can, when I get home too!



Photo credit — Ann-Marie Powell

“I garden in almost any spare time that I’ve got — it just makes me feel better.”

Do You Have Any Secret Tips Or Hacks That You’ve Developed Over The Years For The Garden?

“I think you have to be true to yourself.

“When people first start gardening, they’re very self-conscious about what they do in their own garden. It’s understandable, and when I first grabbed a trowel and a plant, I know I certainly was. You’re constantly thinking ‘am I doing this right?’, so I think that the best tip I can give to any starter gardener is don’t be afraid of plants because plants want to grow.

“They don’t want you to plant them and then to curl up and die. Having a bit of confidence around plants actually enables them to grow better. Think about them as small beings, give them light, and water and feed them regularly. That’s all plants want really —

a good start.

"I also think one of the biggest things people have issues with is that they are really scared to edit their gardens. They're worried that if they prune something, deadhead it or dig something up to divide it and make something smaller, they are going to kill the plant.

"Editing is something that, as a gardener, you're doing every single day when you step outside into the garden. You need to do what works for you and get rid of what doesn't. Don't let fear hold you back."

You Published A Book That Seems To Have A Real Focus On The Gardening Community. What Does This Community Mean To You?

"At the start of lockdown, a lot of our projects got put on hold," Ann-Marie explains. "Our studio designs a lot of high-end commercial and private gardens, and as lockdowns ensued, many of our clients were cautious about the future of their own businesses and obviously didn't prioritise the services we usually offer.

"It was a really frightening time for me, so I ended up doing what I love best and gardening my way, frenetically, through it quite honestly.

"I found having my hands in the earth grounding and comforting, and it gave me some focus to my day in between doing whatever I could to keep the business afloat. I started doing Instagram lives on a different account called [@myrealgarden](https://www.instagram.com/myrealgarden/) (<https://www.instagram.com/myrealgarden/>) where I shared what I was doing in my garden because I thought it might help people.

"The community grew really fast. Every day at 12.30pm for 100 consecutive days I went live and showed people what I was doing in my garden on any particular day, it was such a positive experience for me and, suddenly, a large joyful, generous community was built.

"I wanted to do something positive with this joyful community we had built.



"It was the community's idea that we crowdfund to do a book called 'My Real Garden', with a lot of the profits going to my favourite gardening charity Greenfingers, which I am a patron of. Greenfingers fundraise to build gardens in children's hospices throughout the UK; it's such important work.

"I set out to create a book that represented our community and what our gardens meant to us through this difficult time. The book had to be a quality product and something to be proud of, especially as I aimed to include anyone in the community who wanted to be a part of it.

"We managed to crowd raise £35,000, (books are expensive to produce!) which I was blown away by.

"Everybody from the My Real Garden community sent through pictures of their own garden, their gardening tips, tricks and hacks, and words about how gardening made them feel. My friend Tamsin Westhorpe spent countless hours editing and designing it all, and then had it printed and sent out.

"It's an amazing book. My favourite quote about the book is that 'it's a compendium of gardening joy' – and it really is. It's colourful, bright and unlike any gardening book that I've ever seen, so I'm very proud of it."

Do You Have Any Standout Career Highlights You'd Like To Share?

"I was recently proud to be made a fellow of the Society of Garden Designers (https://www.sgd.org.uk/find_a_designer/search_for_a_designer/designers/a0e55e7a-78da-452f-b09d-d40a54e853fe/), recently. To be picked out by your peers for your contribution to horticulture and garden design is really quite something.

"It's a huge honour because these people are those that I admire and have inspired me for the whole of my career, so for them to make me a fellow is quite extraordinary.

"I was also thrilled last year when my team and I won the American Horticultural Society's Environmental award (<https://www.ann-mariepowell.com/philadelphia-flower-show-awards-for-ampg/>), for our show garden that we did at the Philadelphia Flower Show; that was super hard work for me and my time and came at a particularly difficult time for me personally.

"I'm also proud to be a patron of Green Fingers, so I can try to enhance the every day of children with short lives, their families and the staff in the hospices that support them.

"And, I love the My Real Garden community and what we've created together, inspiring people to garden because, whether professionally or personally, if I can give people a tiny bit of the pleasure that I get from my day-to-day gardening life, then I've done my job well.

"I think my grandad would be dead proud of me."

Do You Have Anything Exciting Coming Up That You'd Like To Share?

"There's a documentary about me coming up on the Sky Arts show 'The Art of the Garden,'" says Ann-Marie. "It highlights selected Garden Designers throughout the series and talks about their work and their approach to design.

"I'm really proud of that because it's a really great series. I'm so nervous about my episode, but the show itself is so good!"



Photo credit — Ann-Marie Powell

You can watch Ann-Marie on *Art of The Garden* on SkyArts on Tuesday 6 June at 7.00pm.

Do You Have Any Advice For Those Who Are Thinking Of Giving Garden Design A Go?

“Just do it because life is really short — don’t waste a moment.

“If you’re wanting to get involved in Garden Design, you’ll never regret it. You might have less money than you’re used to if you’re changing your career, but my god, you’ll be happy.”

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