

DESIGN TRENDS

2021

Like many of us, garden designers are having to respond to the fast-paced world we are living in, while also considering the environment and our wellbeing.

And key to that is a move to a more sustainable, thought-through and cohesive approach to our relationship with our gardens and green spaces.

Here, following a year of extra challenges for us all, nine notable designers from the UK and beyond explain a little about how they are approaching the world of garden design in 2021 and its responsibilities to the planet and our lives.

Ann-Marie Powell

Garden designer

I think an appreciation and desire to have a strong relationship with the natural world is becoming more and more prevalent. Naturalistic schemes filled with pollinators, in rural settings, are more popular than ever before, alongside minimalist, contemporary architecture as juxtaposition. People want to share their spaces with garden wildlife. Almost all of our gardens now contain water in some way to provide habitat for wildlife.

We are enthusiastically trying to be more site-sustainable – re-using or re-purposing materials – and clients are behind us every step of the way, limiting the environmental impacts of contributing to landfill.

Plants, people and places celebrating the wild and energetic colour of nature have long been drivers at our studio, and I have revelled in including as much of their ethos as possible. Social media has been a key influence for me this year, following a host of other folk for whom environment, autonomy and conservation are key, or who are growing it for themselves and sharing their wins and losses. It has prompted me to return to the tribe of the gardener again – I can't tell you how good it has felt to get my hands dirty again, and now I cannot pass a day without spending time in my own garden, no matter the weather. As a result, I believe I am a much better garden designer for it.

Key projects for our practice this year include completing two and a half acres at RHS Garden Wisley for the World Food Garden and Wildlife Garden. After nearly four years in the planning I cannot wait to share their paths with visitors.

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Cleve West

Landscape designer

Perhaps the silver lining to 2020's *annus horribilis* is that the negative aspects of the Anthropocene have finally been brought into sharp focus. Climate change, species extinction, biodiversity loss and now zoonotic disease can't be ignored and some of the solutions in terms of mitigating these problems (such as rewilding and other plant-based solutions) may well influence the way we make and enjoy our gardens.

A more sensitive approach to our interventions and the resources we use is inevitable. This means recalibrating our aesthetic barometers and acknowledging the role other lifeforms play in keeping things ticking over. Methods used in forest gardening, permaculture, no-dig and veganic horticulture will gain more traction. The demand for peat will drop (an outright

ban would be better) and, while some gardeners prefer the comfort zone of a more controlled, traditional approach, others are now more tolerant of the notion that gardens are not just for people.

The nine months of introspection has also made many of us question not only who we garden for, but also who has been excluded. Horticulture is a great leveller, but there are still inequalities and hurdles to overcome in terms of race, gender, class and wealth, and for many of us, the privilege of a garden or indeed an allotment has never been felt more keenly.

Education is key, so I see more emphasis on community gardens and gardens for schools, helping children understand just how closely we are entwined with nature. It may also help them relate to others in terms of co-operation, responsibility and equality and, in turn, foster a more tolerant and inclusive society.

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Humaira Ikram

Garden designer and KLC School of Design course leader

As landscape professionals who work with the future in mind, we must think beyond short-term trends and make decisions that are sustainable both for our clients and for the planet.

Unfortunately, it is not always obvious which options are the best. The majority of designers are already trying to keep waste on site where possible and favour natural materials, but we should appreciate that in some cases, it may be better to reuse the vast amount of plastic that has already been created than to stop using plastic altogether.

Some may instinctively avoid using artificial grass or wood and so on, in consideration of local wildlife and ecosystems, but sometimes these products are still the best ones for the job, provided that they are made from 100 per cent recycled waste material and are themselves 100 per cent recyclable. Making use of the circular economy model, we should collaborate with responsible manufacturers to innovate and create materials using existing waste products, therefore reducing their burden on future generations.

So my trend for this year, and I hope for many years to come, is for us to educate ourselves on more long-term solutions; we should improve our choices and integrate sustainability into our design processes. And if the products we need don't currently exist, then we must keep asking for them until they do.

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CHARLIE HOPKINSON

ANN-MARIE POWELL
Award-winning garden designer, presenter and writer, working to enthuse people about gardening.



CHAZ OLDHAM

CLEVE WEST
Restful and engaging spaces, with a focus on craftsmanship, are key to the work of award-winning designer Cleve.



ANDREW MONTGOMERY

HUMAIRA IKRAM
Working as a designer for more than ten years, Humaira can also be heard on BBC Gardeners' Question Time.