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YOUR PERSONAL HAVEN

Grow your own little slice of paradise by discovering your garden's full potential with the help of the team at Earth Designs

WORDS BY **LAURA HICKIE**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANNA OMIOTEK-TOTT GARDEN PHOTOGRAPHY**



Gardens have always been a refuge from the trials and bluster of the everyday. A place to savour fresh air and sunshine, and spend quality time alone, or with family and friends. Never have these small pieces of wilderness that we make our own been more important than the past year. Weeks spent in lockdown have given us a new appreciation for the luxury of having our own outdoor space.

People have been rediscovering their gardens and their uses. Demand for garden rooms has been enormous, as people build garden offices to work from home. Many

tried growing fruit and vegetables for the first time, or used gardening as a way to relax and escape the news. If you're a parent, outside spaces have been a godsend. Providing children with room to let off steam, instead of bouncing off the walls (not to mention a place for us to retreat to, gin and tonic in hand, after a week of homeschooling).

There's no doubt that the pandemic has given us more reason to treasure our gardens than ever before.

A garden should be an extension of your home. It should be a place to relax and enjoy on your own or with company. It should complement your life and personal style, but also transport you away from the norm.



Which is exactly what the owners of this bold and playful garden wanted, and needed. But when they called in Katrina Kieffer-Wells and the Earth Designs team, they had no idea just how much they'd come to appreciate it.

John and Ant are dedicated to their professions in education and healthcare. They work long hours and like to unwind with good food and evenings out with friends. But they also wanted a garden to relax in. One that reflected their taste and style, and went well with a cocktail or two on a summers' evening. Having used Leigh-on-Sea based Earth Designs before, they felt confident in calling them in again. "We knew Kat and her team would do a good job. But her design far exceeded our expectations," John says with a smile. On paper John and Ant's old back garden was typical of your average ➡

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mid-terraced family garden. A west-facing rectangular plot, fairly ordinary, apart from a large koi pond. It was neat and functional, but not very “them”.

Post garden redesign, it couldn't be further from ordinary. Step out the back door and you're not in a back garden in Leigh-on-Sea anymore. Rather, transported into a world reminiscent of boutique hotels and sophisticated poolside bars.

An unmistakable holiday feeling washes over you. Like that wave of relaxation when you open the doors at your holiday villa for the first time. Or get that first glimpse of the beach. Kat has cleverly placed the garden design on an angle, so the space appears much wider than it is. The sunny, angled deck provides plenty of room to entertain friends (when allowed). Sitting with a prime view of the garden beyond.

A wooden pathway leads off the deck, inviting you to take a stroll to the bottom of the garden. But first, let's take a moment to appreciate the view.

This is a garden bursting with personality and confidence. Flashes of pink stand stand-out against dark fences. Lush greenery fills the borders and cascades out of giant planters. A steel water-blade fountain delivers a wide, continuous wave into the pond below. While sun-kissed copper tiles glisten at the water's edge.

Beyond the foliage and giant planters, there's a glimpse of a building. Follow the path, and tucked beside the pond you'll find a modern garden room that the owners refer to as “Riffraffs”.

Painted in the same dark shade as the fence, with doors and windows that open out onto the deck and its own neon sign.

On the deck, hot-pink seats wait for you (and a margarita) to join them in the best spot for catching every last sunray. Move inside to the bar at Riffraffs for cocktails after dark and to escape the evening chill.



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It's a different kind of “poolside” to the holiday kind. But if the gentle gurgle of the water feature creates its own kind of tranquility. The pond itself re-rendered and painted green, to sink into the background. While the pergola overhead provides height and defends against passing herons.

Neither John or Ant are keen gardeners, so Kat kept the planting simple, with low maintenance green foliage and a few, mainly

pink, blooms. Borders are an interesting mixture of soft ferns and spiky grasses. Banana palms, echinacea, achilia and agapanthus sit side-by-side. Their vibrant greens popping against the contrasting, dark fences behind.

When John and Ant first contacted Earth Designs, they'd imagined tidying the space up a bit and making it their own. But Kat encouraged them to go one step further - and they're very glad they did.

“Kat has delivered us with a space that we are so proud of. We have completely changed the way we feel about our house and we spend as much time as possible in the garden, both relaxing and entertaining,” says Ant.

Now, it's a garden that works perfectly for them, reflecting their personal style and supporting their busy lifestyle. A small oasis of calm from stressful jobs and long days, that's really come into its own this past year. Providing them with a much-needed space to switch-off and recuperate.

But, when allowed, it's also a garden that begs to be enjoyed with family and friends. A wonderful celebration of cheerful optimism, good times and holiday spirit. A happy place just waiting for the chance to fill with the sound of late nights and laughter. Fingers crossed it won't have to wait too long. In the meantime, it provides sweet sanctuary and respite to all who enter.

Earth Designs is an award-winning garden design and build company working in London and Essex. They are members of the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) and the Association of Professional Landscapers (APL), and are registered with the Society of Garden Designers.

earthdesigns.co.uk

