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INSIDE EARTH DESIGNS

FOUNDER **KATRINA KIEFFER-WELLS** SHARES HOW **EARTH DESIGNS** HAS GROWN ORGANICALLY, FROM ONE SELF-TAUGHT GARDENER TO A DESIGN AND BUILD TEAM RECEIVING NATIONWIDE RECOGNITION

It's arguably a dream come true to have your work appear on TV. It's certainly something worth shouting about. But Katrina Kieffer-Wells, head of garden design at Earth Designs in Essex, is remarkably humble when talking about how a private garden her company designed and built featured on one of the BBC's latest hit shows. With the opportunity to be seen by millions of viewers, Earth Designs' project was chosen for an episode of *Your Garden Made Perfect* as an



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exemplar of introducing pops of colour into a space without creating a gaudy garden.

To be fair, it's not the first time the company's work has been the focus of media attention, with its projects having appeared in a number of both consumer and trade magazines. *Your Garden Made Perfect*, though, made what was already a bumper year for Earth Designs even better.

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“Because of lockdown, when people were spending more time at home and entertaining in their gardens, the idea of outdoor living and using your garden as an extra room became really important to people. So, when you're on a programme like that, in a pandemic, it's very aspirational and, of course, it helped to boost business,” shares Katrina.

It helped that the garden was well-represented on the show, praised for its “colour-popping backdrop” and how it linked the colours in the garden with those used indoors. “One of

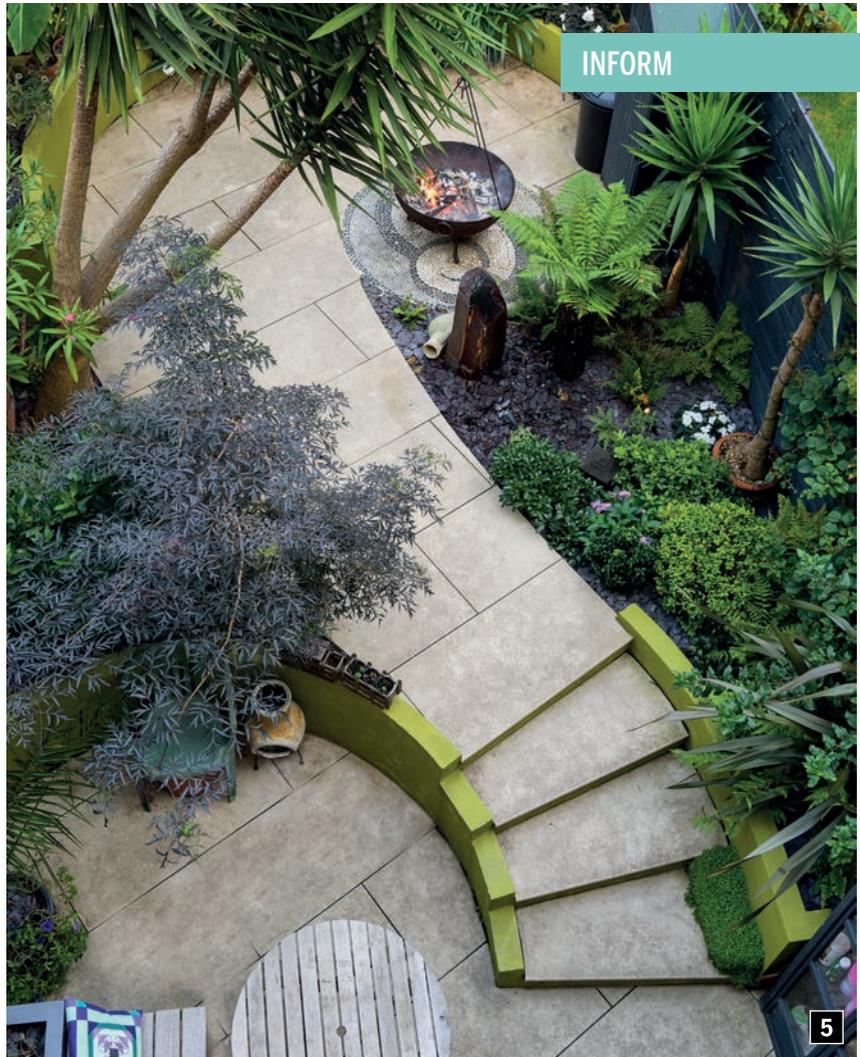


KATRINA KIEFFER-WELLS

the lovely things about colour is that it can tie in the interior,” says Katrina. “If a certain colour is being used inside, it can be added outside. It adds a dose of personality to a space too, even if the colour is quite subtle, like a muted pink. Most importantly, it gives your garden colour in the winter. When clients ask for year-round colour in a small garden, it's not impossible, but it's hard to create a garden that delivers seasonal theme; but if you let hard landscaping do some of the work in terms of the colour, then



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you can go for a lot more variety in the evergreens that you choose.”

Smaller spaces are Earth Design’s speciality. The family-run design and build company first started in East London, where many of its projects were for terraced properties. Katrina founded Earth Designs after being made redundant from an event management company. She set herself up as a gardener, but with experience in floristry and a degree in art, this quickly turned into a garden design offering. Earth Designs now provides both design and build, with Katrina’s husband Matt now running the two landscaping teams.

“You probably couldn’t do what I did then, now,” admits Katrina. “Garden design was quite an unknown, underused service – my mum and dad would never have dreamed of using a garden designer. It was more for the upper classes. Now, it’s more for the masses – more people are using garden designers than they were 20 years ago. So, I was able to offer something that a lot of people weren’t offering at the time; it was quite unique.” ▶



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- 1 Modern Japanese garden
- 2 Oak effect porcelain paving planks
- 3 xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
- 4 Raised bed with herbs
- 5 xxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxx
- 6 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

That was nearly 20 years ago. Katrina and Matt have since moved to Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, though they continue to take on projects in East London. Being based in Essex, though, broadens the type of projects they can undertake. "We're now dealing with slightly larger, slightly different gardens. Every garden we've completed has been unique, though, with different challenges and complexities and assets, whether it's on a hill or somewhere with really bad access, for instance."

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Most of the gardens Earth Designs builds are ones which Katrina has designed, though the company does offer design and build as two separate services. On top of this, Katrina provides inspirational courses for other garden designers, where they will visit an art gallery or museum – typically the V&A, which Katrina describes as a “rich” museum, in terms of content – to discover how artefacts and other objects can influence garden design. “We’ll draw sketches based on vases, for instance, or a snuff box or wrought iron railings; looking at



This is just one of the benefits of being an association member, though. “It offers peace of mind for the client. Whilst they may not have heard of the association, it demonstrates that you have achieved a certain standard. It’s also useful having a resource of members to tap into. This is where social media is useful too – if I’m sitting at my desk unsure of how to do

the way it’s composed, where it sits culturally, you can pull out some elements of that and put it into a garden.”

It’s this artistic influence which makes Katrina’s designs, and therefore the gardens Earth Designs creates, so unique. “We try to deliver a garden space for people that reflects their lifestyle and personality but is also stylish and innovative and accessible. It needs to look great but also be usable, which all good designs should be.”

These attractive but practical gardens are pulling in clients when featuring on Earth Design’s Instagram feed, which is a significantly different form of advertisement than when the company was first founded. “It used to be postcards in Post Office windows and adverts in the back of newspapers or in the Yellow Pages. Now, it’s social media, but equally they then go onto our website; the two work hand in hand. It’s really important to have a social media presence. You have to appeal to all age groups.”

Earth Design also gets work through its membership of trade associations, particularly the Society of Garden Designers, which Katrina says becoming a member of was a “high-fiving exercise” for herself. “It was a real career achievement, to go from not training as a garden designer to being accredited as a member of the SGD. And now I get work through them.”

something, it’s really accessible to reach out on a Facebook forum and ask if anyone else knows how to do it or where to get a certain material from.”

Lockdown has made associations more accessible too. “We’ve all become so much more comfortable with Zoom. I would never have got on a virtual meeting pre-pandemic. Now, it’s not a big deal and it helps bring more people together and share ideas. It makes things like SGD training days easier to attend.”

Continually searching for new inspiration has surely been key to the success of Earth Designs. Katrina isn’t afraid to try new ideas and different influences to achieve a garden which is aesthetically pleasing and functional, and Your Garden Made Perfect is unlikely to be the last time the company’s projects fall under the spotlight.

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