

Broadwoodside

EAST LOTHIAN

The old high road from Edinburgh down across the border into England has been rerouted, resurfaced and largely replaced, but it still exists in the form of a soft-surfaced avenue skirting around and through the village of Gifford in East Lothian, 40 minutes' drive east of the centre of Edinburgh. In 1997, Robert and Anna Dalrymple, who lived nearby, bought 200 acres of farmland from the Yester estate. But they had no intention of farming them and they have been tenanted out from the outset. There was also no attached farmhouse. But what attracted them was a set of low buildings making a derelict steading based around two mud- and muck-filled yards.

By the turn of the century, they had converted these into a home. Then, having transformed it into an incredibly handsome range of buildings, morphed from cowsheds and stables into interlocking rooms and domestic spaces based around two courtyards, giving it a distinctly collegiate feel, they set about creating a garden.

Robert Dalrymple showed us around with the enthusiasm and energy of one desperately wanting to show off his pride and joy, with the well-oiled turn-of-phrase of one who has done this many times before. He is a graphic designer, specialising in illustrated books, and the garden has the harmony of a very carefully thought-out design meticulously executed. It is essentially formal and symmetrical. Nothing there is random or threatening to spill into anarchy. The result is a garden with an unusual sense of accuracy and attention to detail, whilst at the same time having the vital element of knowing what to leave out.

Robert loves gardens and it is his eye and his creation – aided and edited by Anna, I suspect more than her modesty will admit to – but what is unusual for a British garden is that he has not physically made it. Guy Donaldson is the full-time gardener and has been so since its inception. He told me that he had planted every single thing in the garden and he clearly loves it as much as the Dalrymples do. I asked him if Robert gardens at all and Guy smiled diplomatically. 'He might move a few pots around on a weekend,' he replied and I got the feeling that the relationship works as well as it clearly does because of rather than despite Robert's lack of day-to-day involvement. This is not a judgement or a criticism – as far as I am concerned there are no rules in these matters and if there were they would be made to be broken – but it is rare for a garden that is in many ways so personal.

You enter through a wicket gate set within large double doors leading to an arch under a gatehouse into the first courtyard that is laid out in a series of chequerboard squares. Immediately, there is a sense of enclosure, a *hortus conclusus* protected from the buffeting winds and the eyes of the outside world. The 25 squares are made up of mown grass, cobbles and maples, each tree underplanted with a different, perfectly clipped evergreen, from box bobbles, pachysandra, yew and rosemary. An ornate wooden aviary fills one square in which William the African grey parrot resides. Apparently, the tree that occupied the spot died, so Robert took the form of a fruit cage from a Rothschild garden and sized it to fit the vacated square to provide William with bespoke deluxe accommodation. William is chatty but, I was told, inclined to be cantankerous. But a parrot that talks, bad tempered or not, always improves the quality of life.

On one side is an open loggia made from a barn, walls painted Barragán pink and orange, with a large table, a fireplace and water running from a brass tap into a galvanised trough at one end. At the other end, the wall features the inscription 'the Writing is on the Wall' in large letters. It is a stage set, perfectly ready for the actors – or diners – to play their parts.

In fact, on reflection, the whole garden is a stage set on which family and friends are the cast. All gardens perform like this to a certain extent, not least because no garden exists without a gardener, but I have rarely visited a garden in which it is so true as Broadwoodside.

A low wall divides this first courtyard from the second. You pass between large stone gate posts into a simpler space of four lawned quadrants with a large verdigrised copper planted with osteospermums and lilies. The walls of the enclosing, low-slung, converted farm buildings are covered in roses, wisteria and clematis on the sunny side and hydrangeas in the shade.

In one corner is a new double cube pavilion with a weathervane topping its mansard roof. The ground floor of this is the potting shed – everything in its allotted place and yet if this too looks like a stage set then it is also a very busy one. This is Guy Donaldson's domain and he produces about 1,500 plants every year from here, working to handwritten instructions from Robert, who knows exactly what he wants the garden to look like and then leaves Guy to make it so. Which he expertly does.





You pass through a corridor from the courtyards into a lower garden based around a rectangular lily pond fed by rainwater from the roofs and bounded by willow hedges that are coppiced to the ground each winter. Delphiniums, macleayas, salvias and nigella flower in a blue-and-white border down one side. On the other, a brick path leads behind the buildings to a grassy avenue flanked by fastigiate hornbeams – a housewarming present from Robert’s grandmother. The avenue ends, down by the road, with a single yew cone. The only colour is green, cast starkly into shadow by the trees. It is perfectly simple and very dramatic. But even here, the attention to detail is inch precise. Apparently, the avenue was planted whilst Robert was away and the trees were equally spaced down its length. However, perspective meant that the far

end looked unnaturally compressed and bunched, so Robert had them lifted and replanted with the spacing gradually becoming wider as they receded from the house to give their present appearance of being equidistant.

Most British gardens express their horticultural skill through the choice and distribution of plants – this has almost become axiomatic as a description of a ‘good’ or even ‘great’ garden. But Broadwoodside never succumbs to this. So the side entrance underneath a short avenue of pleached limes, which is flanked by a pale yellow and blue combination of large drifts of phlomis, aquilegia, hardy geraniums and perovskia, with as yet unopened ligularias and echinops behind, is profoundly satisfying and complete. More varied planting would be an unnecessary complication.



Likewise, on the outside of the buildings enclosing the second courtyard, where the garden borders the agricultural fields, is a long, south-facing strip of border against the buildings. The cotinus, with its deep purple foliage, the electric yellowy green of *Euphorbia wallichii*, the magenta flowers of *Geranium psilostemon* and an underplanting of golden marjoram repeated down the border’s length, backed by ivy-covered walls and scarlet paintwork on windows and doors, works really well because it is so simple and repetitious.

Where Broadwoodside is exceptional is, through a combination of Robert’s skill as a graphic designer and Guy’s skill as a gardener, when it dares to be simple. Once a colour scheme, texture and ambience has been decided upon, it is then planted to that effect without resorting to any kind of sidetracking or indulgence in plants

for plants’ sake. They are there to serve the design, rather than the other way round. There is a whiff of heresy about this – for many if not most British gardeners, a garden is there primarily to serve plants – but it is stunningly effective.

Robert cheerfully admits that almost everything in the garden has been copied, borrowed or stolen from somewhere else. Broadwoodside is a compendium of ideas, taste and style that he admires and which he has assembled with his highly informed and particular eye, the whole thing softened and to some extent rescued from a kind of frozen perfection by the fact that it is a family home where people live and love and leave stuff lying around.

