



A Beating HEART

East Lothian's Broadwoodside is a bucolic dream of a garden and a beloved family home, developed from dilapidation over 20 years by Robert and Anna Dalrymple, the warm colours of both buildings and planting reflecting the love that has been poured into it

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This page Purple cotinus flanks one of the walls, which is clothed in neatly trained and clipped ivy.
Opposite The pond was half-planned as a swimming pool.

The aviary sits in the chequerboard-effect upper courtyard and is wittily referenced by the copper bird sculptures.



A half-hour's drive from Edinburgh, just outside the pretty village of Gifford, lies a remarkable garden, built around a historic farm steading. It occupies a particularly bucolic spot, located at the end of a long track and bordered to the east by beech woods, which in autumn turn glorious shades of yellow, orange and russet.

These rich colours are echoed in the buildings themselves – a courtyard of old converted outbuildings built from weathered stone and mellow pantiles, with windows and gates painted in traditional hues of red iron oxide and deep forest green, and render enlivened by cheerful ochre limewash. Even on the chilliest of autumn days, the place seems to exude warmth, which comes both from the abundant planting and the many signs that it's a well-loved family home. An uninformed visitor would be forgiven for thinking that Broadwoodside has been cultivated for generations: a long-established garden that's evolved with the passing of time. Yet it was started from scratch just over 20 years ago by the current owners, Robert and Anna Dalrymple.

“When we first saw it, it was derelict with the roofs all tumbling in and weeds growing up through the floors,” recalls Anna, who was familiar with the property long before it came up for sale as she used to take her children to play in the grounds of the tumbledown farmyard. “It was love at first sight, really.”

Part of the attraction was the opportunity to create a garden from scratch, which Robert and Anna embarked on immediately, with the help of their gardener, Guy Donaldson, who lives on site and has been with them right from the start. Drawing inspiration largely from books – aptly so, since Robert is a book designer – they laid out the structure of the garden. At the heart of it lie two courtyards: the upper courtyard features an aviary and is laid out as a chequerboard of beds, while the lower one is mostly lawn, divided into quadrants with reclaimed flagstones.

Behind the courtyards, to the north-west of the property, is the orchard, which positively brims

with apples each autumn, and a long avenue of old lime trees. At the other end, as you approach the property, there's a hornbeam avenue, a vegetable and cutting garden and a dark rectangular pond that looks as if it might be a swimming pool, but isn't. “The idea was that if global warming ever came to Scotland it could be turned into a swimming pool – but it's currently only about three foot deep!” notes Anna, with a laugh.

While much has been written about the design and creation of the garden, the evolution of the space over the past two decades to suit the changing needs of the Dalrymples is every bit as fascinating. When they first arrived, their four children were aged between six and 16, and a major reason for the move was to have somewhere with enough land for their ponies. For the first 15 years, Broadwoodside was a busy family home with ponies jumping over garden walls, industrial quantities of potatoes growing in the vegetable patch and plenty of noise and bustle. During that time the garden gradually took shape and matured, while the couple added plenty of original touches. These range from a monumental early Victorian portico that was reinstalled in a field a short distance from the house, to a number of home-made sculptures that reveal the Dalrymples' sense of fun – a mound of stone and glass spheres entitled *A Load of Balls* being a prime example.

Below Bowed by the weight of its cargo of fruit, a golden crab apple epitomises the bountiful autumn atmosphere.

“In a sense it's rather horrifying to think that it's been over 20 years since we bought it, but in another sense it's also rather quick,” says Robert.

“Twenty years takes a lot of your life, but it shows that it doesn't take forever to achieve a mature garden. Recently, we've done a bit of tweaking and replanting of things that haven't worked. There are some plants that just won't grow here – I'm always very envious of gardens down south that have masses of bearded irises, for instance.”

Interestingly, the courtyard garden has a slightly milder climate than the surrounding area, about two degrees warmer, and this has enabled the Dalrymples to grow a wider range of plants than would otherwise be possible, although their ethos is





Book designer Róbert has an eye for symmetry and perspective, which is much in evidence in this neat hornbeam avenue.



very much to focus on varieties that will flourish without too much effort. In autumn, some of their favourites are *Helianthus* ‘Lemon Queen’, blue globe thistles and Michaelmas daisies, as well as rudbeckia and autumn-flowering cyclamen.

“In the past few years, as the garden has become more mature, I’ve noticed that it’s the trees that have come to the fore during the autumn months,” says Anna. “I love looking out of the window at the maples in the courtyard: they turn the most beautiful shades of gold and red.” Robert has his own favourite. “My desert island plant would be the royal ferns,” he enthuses. “They look wonderful in the autumn, they’re fabulous when they unfurl in the spring and they look great all summer. And they never keel over in the wind!”

The gardens have also turned out to be the perfect wedding venue – two of their daughters have had autumn weddings at Broadwoodside. “Our elder daughter got married about seven years ago and we had two marquees in the courtyard,” says Anna. “It was at the end of October – just on the equinox night when the clocks changed. It was very atmospheric.”

Then, last year, another daughter got married in late September – this time the occasion was very different, since due to government restrictions they were limited to just 20 guests. However, the gardens

Top The cooler climate means the Dalrymples can’t grow everything, so a greenhouse and coldframe are essentials. **Above** A pastel cosmos; ‘Sonata Pink’ is similar. **Right** Fun touches abound throughout, including this gate made from garden forks.



proved to be as magical a setting for a small wedding as for a large one. “We had tremendous flower displays on a huge scale – great limbs of prunus and crab apple,” Robert recalls. “They got married at the monument and walked down the lime avenue afterwards to the house, where we had the reception in and around the courtyard.”

In fact, Broadwoodside has recently been more lively than ever, since the Dalrymples’ grown-up children returned at the start of the pandemic with their own families in tow. “There was a point, about six or seven years ago, when we wondered if perhaps we were mad to be living in such a huge place because no one was going to be around, but actually now we’re back where we started, with small children running about again,” says Anna. “Everyone’s been back for the past year with all the lockdowns, and the gardens have really come into their own during this time.” A previously unused room was converted into a home office and the many different areas of the garden were pressed into use, since the entire family was suddenly living and working under one roof.

It’s had the happy side-effect of even more people around to help in the garden, and the recent programme of replanting means that Broadwoodside continues to evolve. Above all, it remains a place that is a home to this visionary couple, who have loved it since it was a romantic wilderness and, over the past two decades, have enhanced and developed its beauty, turning it into a place that will be cherished by many generations to come. ■

Broadwoodside, Gifford, East Lothian EH41 4JQ. Opens for Scotland’s Gardens Scheme and by appointment, Monday to Friday, all year. See scotlandsgardens.org and broadwoodside.co.uk



Top left A cheerfully painted gate, at the head of one of many vistas.

Top right The warm ochre and red tones used on the buildings are echoed by the planting.

Above Ducks and chickens forage freely, offering a natural source of pest control.

Right Smart glass cloches sit snugly in a bed of brassicas in the vegetable garden.

