

IN SMALL AND PERFECT FORM

At Broadwoodside in East Lothian,
TIM LONGVILLE delights in
exploring the new courtyards of
a small country house

BOOK-DESIGNER Rob Dalrymple's wife, Anna, says with mock-exasperation that her husband is 'obsessed with symmetry'. The evidence abounds in their 1½ acres of visually striking and already remarkably mature formal garden, which has been created from scratch over the past few years at Broadwoodside near Gifford in East Lothian. Indeed, his eldest daughter Effie's tease is that 'absolutely everything in it is in straight lines and pairs'.

When the Dalrymples and their four children acquired the property, it was merely a venerable farm-steading. There was no proper farmhouse, just a modest cottage with a correspondingly modest garden, a quantity of tumbledown outbuildings around the yard, as well as 200 acres of farmland beyond. The Dalrymples' plan was for the buildings to completely surround two courtyards. In their shelter, it would be possible to make the sort of almost Italianate formal garden Mr Dalrymple had in mind. 'Not the sort of thing you expect in East Lothian,' comments his wife. One outbuilding was even turned into a loggia, 'for the one day in five years here when it's too hot to be inside!' Two gap-filling additions, designed by architect Nicholas Groves-Raines, were necessary for the plan's fulfilment. They also, at a stroke, transformed a farm-steading into something much more grand. One was an ogee-roofed corner tower, similar to one at Traquair House and reminiscent of many in the gardens of Clough Williams-Ellis. The other was a grand stone archway, surmounted by a fake dovecote. ➤

Looking back from the lower to the upper courtyard. In the centre, what Anna Dalrymple describes as her 'instant garden,' a central arrangement of pots. Beyond it, one of the two major additions, the arched gatehouse doubling as a false dovecote (the 'blind' pigeon-holes are on the other side), with its sundial by Michael Harvey. It was moved from the Dalrymples' previous home, 'and so,' says Mr Dalrymple, 'can be excused its inaccurate time-keeping'







The bold, simple chequerboard design of the upper courtyard and the iroko-wood aviary where William (below), a grey African parrot, resides, but who often flies free in the garden, surprising visitors with his cry of 'Birds don't talk'

That, with its imposing wooden door, now closes what was originally only a gap, through which tractors and trailers entered the yard.

Broadwoodside's full-time gardener Guy Donaldson explains: 'I followed the builders. As they moved out of a courtyard, I moved in.' His first concern was a lengthy period of soil restoration and improvement. 'We're on heavy clay, so I incorporated tons of mushroom compost to improve it.' At that early stage, he also took a multitude of box-cuttings, for the garden's many hedges and 'shapes'.

There is a clear and light-heartedly acknowledged division here between designer-draughtsman and gardener-planter. 'Guy is entirely responsible for the actual planting,' says Mrs Dalrymple firmly, adding with a laugh, 'Rob doesn't like getting his hands dirty.' On the other hand, Mr Donaldson says equally firmly: 'Rob loves to experiment. He is always suggesting new plants for us to try—some of which succeed and some of which don't. But we're learning together what will and what won't work in these conditions.'

The success of the partnership is proved the moment you enter the upper courtyard. It is filled

with a boldly simple chequerboard design, alternate 'squares' being occupied by standard mop-topped trees, each given a dense but different evergreen underplanting. The trees were originally flowering cherries, *Prunus fruticosa* Globosa, but, as it turned out, they did not do well and are gradually being replaced by maples. The underplanting includes such eye-catchers as a solid, clipped block of *Hebe rakaiensis*, a sea of green-leaved ophiopogon with *Leucojum vernum* flowering through it in spring, and Queen of the Night tulips finding their way through a dense mat of *Pachysandra terminalis*. The only major interruption to this symmetry is the imposing centrepiece of a silvery iroko-wood aviary. Modelled on fruit cages Arabella Lennox-Boyd designed for Ascott House, it is the occasional home of William, a grey African parrot, who more often flies free, astonishing visitors with a flash of his red tail-feathers and his favourite mocking cry: 'Birds don't talk.'

A border on either side of the gateway in the bottom wall, >



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(Top left) A moment of well-earned rest: Guy Donaldson in the vegetable garden. **(Above)** 'A slightly wilder approach to life.' Exuberant planting in one of the borders edging the lower courtyard. The rose is Mme Grégoire Staechelin. **(Left)** The idea for this gate was taken from George Carter's design for Carla Carlisle's garden. **(Below)** Richard Bowden's cast-iron cat bench at the end of the path on the cottage terrace





The Hall Garden, with catmint and *Geranium x magnificentum* under a miniature avenue of standard limes, and a hedge of rugosa roses. (Right) The planted squares in the upper courtyard: in the foreground, box; beyond, fountain grass, *Pennisetum alopecuroides*, with the buds of *Allium sphaerocephalon* rising through it to take over from *A. aflatunense*

however, already hints that through it things may be different. It is based on strong foliage and white flowers, including white foxgloves, Solomon's Seal, astrantias, lily of the valley, and ferns. 'The border is Rob's design,' sighs Mrs Dalrymple. 'He's more organised than I am, so he tends to get the plant orders in before I've made up my mind. But,' she adds firmly, 'the lower courtyard [to which the gateway leads] is my courtyard.' Here, the formality of four small, plain rectangular lawns is set off by richly planted borders full of scented pink and white roses. The wall at the back of the border on the left, for example, is occupied by the rambler Madame Alfred Carrière, with bold repeated clumps of *Macleaya cordata*, cardoon and bronze fennel at her feet, plus occasional front-edge infiltrations of Mrs Dalrymple's favourite violas. 'I wanted a slightly wilder approach to life here—and it's beginning to happen now the roses are growing up—although Rob and Guy will weed out my self-seeders.'

Nowadays, however, the two courtyards are far from being the whole garden. From the lower courtyard, a smaller arch leads to what has, in effect, become a third. Its centrepiece is a formal rectangular pool, surrounded by an unusual hedge, made from 12 different willow varieties. 'We wanted yew, but it was just too damp for it here,' explains Mr Donaldson. On one side is a vegetable border, on

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the other, a cutting border, and at the bottom is an eye-catching door incorporating garden forks. 'It's an idea pinched from George Carter's design for Carla Carlisle's garden; the forks were bought from B&Q.' It leads out to a hornbeam avenue, the trees a gift from Mr Dalrymple's grandmother on her 90th birthday.

However, on the far side of the house, particularly wet conditions plus the meandering line of a boundary wall have forced Rob Dalrymple to abandon symmetry for once. A topiary walk at the top is perfectly formal, except where a ball-shaped *Elaeagnus ebbingei* has been battered by William, as he perches there while waiting to be fed. But against the field wall is what Effie Dalrymple describes as 'the garden's only wiggle'—a border where only serious damp-lovers thrive and whose front edge is seriously curvaceous to accommodate particularly wet patches. It is tempting to think of this as Mr Dalrymple's equivalent of the deliberate fault Islamic weavers leave, to prove that they are not aiming to equal divine perfection. However, I suspect that it is merely a 'technical hitch', and will soon be 'symmetrified' to fit in with the rest of this stylishly successful garden. 
Broadwoodside, Gifford, East Lothian, will be open to the public on June 17 as part of Scotland's Gardens Scheme (0131-226 3714; www.gardensofscotland.org)
Photographs: Val Corbett.

