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## WIT AND WISDOM

EAST LOTHIAN'S  
BROADWOODSIDE

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PHOTOS: [Andrea Jones](#)

# BROAD STROKES

East Lothian's Broadwoodside Steading is a perfect marriage of symmetry and wit, writes [Agnes Stevenson](#)

**T**ucked into a fold in the landscape near Gifford in East Lothian sits a collection of traditional farm buildings that 15 years ago were imaginatively restored to form an elegant family home. Broadwoodside Steading is an exercise in polished vernacular, from the yellow limewash of its low, ogee-roofed tower to the oxblood paintwork around its many windows.

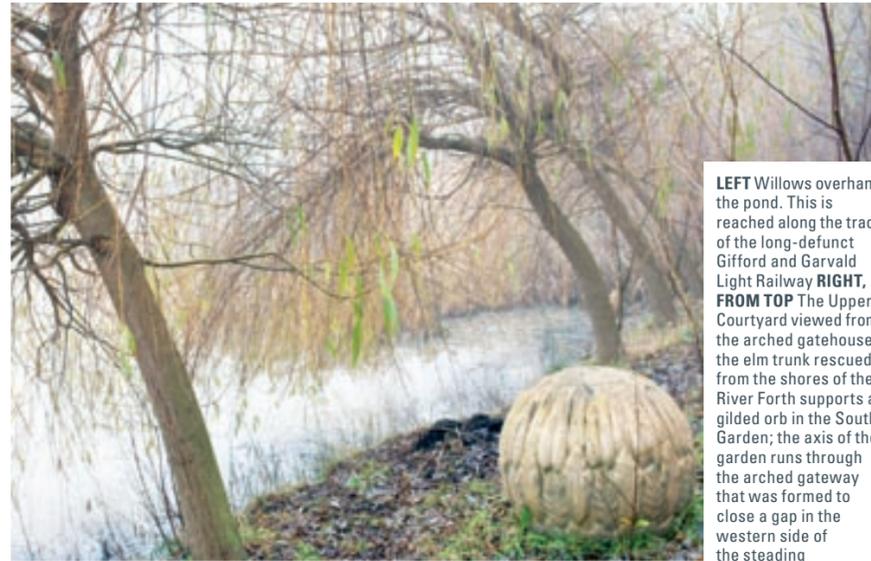
This is a house that seems to grow out of its environment, the hue of its stone walls and pantiled roof echoed in the colours of the fertile soil of the surrounding farmland, and around the steading has grown up what has been described as one of the finest contemporary gardens in Scotland.

Robert and Anna Dalrymple, who rescued Broadwoodside from dereliction, began plotting the garden on paper while the roof was being stripped and dilapidated outhouses were coming down.

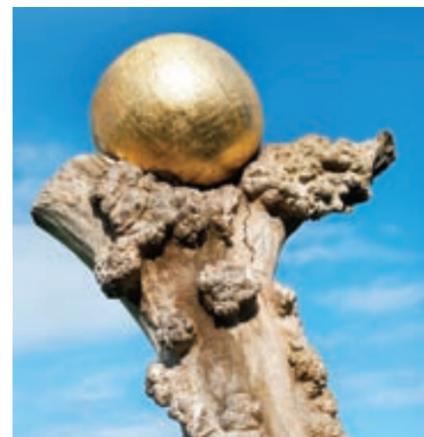
Here, amidst a sea of mud and rubble, they sketched out allees and avenues, working with architect Nicholas Groves-Raines to establish the sight lines that would radiate out from the many doorways and windows that look out over the garden from all sides.

The result is a garden that employs all the classical devices of symmetry, perspective and precise alignment but does so in such a witty fashion →

**PICTURED** The Upper Courtyard, with its squares of planting beneath *Acer platanoides globosum* and iroko pavilion, contrasts with the simple treatment of the Lower Courtyard  
**TOP RIGHT** The cast iron finial on the Dog's Tomb in the House Field came from the Holyrood Brewery when it was demolished to make way for the Scottish Parliament



**LEFT** Willows overhang the pond. This is reached along the track of the long-defunct Gifford and Garvald Light Railway **RIGHT, FROM TOP** The Upper Courtyard viewed from the arched gatehouse; the elm trunk rescued from the shores of the River Forth supports a gilded orb in the South Garden; the axis of the garden runs through the arched gateway that was formed to close a gap in the western side of the steading



that here, in this agricultural setting, the familiar becomes fresh and exciting. Focal points have been created by sculptures made from an eclectic mixture of architectural salvage and DIY store buys and notably from an elm trunk found washed up on the Forth estuary at Tynninghame. Set with a gilded wooden ball, it has the appearance of a primitive totem. It sits in the South Garden, one of the few areas of Broadwoodside where curved edges to the borders have been permitted.

Robert Dalrymple is a designer of catalogues for museums and art exhibitions and his love of a straight line is evident in the hornbeam avenue that marches straight to the tower and is then continued in the beech walk that continues through the House Field on the far side. In the orchard, apple trees assume regimental formation, to the south of the house there is a Topiary Walk with domes of Portugal laurel while on the opposite side a row of pleached limes lines the path in the Hall Garden, rising above a mass of muscari and 'West Point' tulips in spring then phlomis, perennial sunflowers and eryngium as the season moves on.

**Chequerboard courtyard**

A decade and a half after gardener Guy Donaldson, who has been involved since the very beginning, began the planting at Broadwoodside Steading, the garden is starting to mature. Anna Dalrymple says, "Suddenly the beech hedge around the orchard seems to have grown and the swags of wisteria that have been stretching out towards one another above the front of the loggia in the upper courtyard have finally joined up."

And it is that courtyard, divided into upper and lower sections, that has put Broadwoodside Steading on the map. While the lower courtyard is a restful lawn bisected by paths into four segments, the upper terrace is a chequerboard of alternating grass squares, granite setts and maple trees underplanted with evergreens. At the very centre stands an ornate iroko pavilion, which

forms the summer quarters of William, the Dalrymples' African grey parrot.

Broadwoodside is an edited garden, where even the most extravagant features have been skilfully assembled from a handful of carefully selected elements. Fifteen years after they were first laid out, those elements remain sharp and now the ongoing work of the garden is focused on refining the planting schemes.

Some plants, like the willow that forms a woven hedge around the pond in the kitchen garden, grows so well that it has to be restrained yet the yellow flags in the Iris Allee have been reluctant to flourish, despite the seemingly ideal conditions. "The soil in the South Garden is permanently damp but even though I've tried all sorts of primulas in there it is only the yellow ones that have taken to it – but the eryngiums do so well that they seed themselves into the wet grass."

This is not a garden of exotics, but of reliable plants used effectively. *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*, *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple', *Alchemilla mollis* and geraniums – these form the backbone of a planting scheme that is sufficiently robust to carry the garden confidently through the winter months.

To this framework Anna has added a romantic understory of Oriental poppies, hellebores and countless shrub roses. A large border in the kitchen garden, recently replanted with *Hydrangea paniculata*, *Rosa* 'Margaret Merrill' and white valerian now that the Dalrymples' four children have grown and the demand for vegetables has fallen, is spangled in summer with *Calendula officinalis* 'Indian Prince' and in the courtyard huge pots of agapanthus and scented-leaf pelargoniums continue a seasonal display that begins in April with hyacinths and tulips.

Restraint balanced with exuberance is the creative tension that makes Broadwoodside Steading exciting as it continues to develop and looks set to keep it on the radar for years to come. ○



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** A Victorian portico removed during restoration of the 18th century Strathleven House near Dumbarton forms a temple to the west of the steading; "Not everything is set in stone. Robert occasionally moves this around the garden," says Anna; raised beds in the Kitchen and Cutting Garden; the Hall Garden in summer

