

International Design

WORDS JULIET ROBERTS



KIM WILKIE ASSOCIATES

BASED: London, UK

SPECIALISES IN: Landscape and urban design

PROFILE: Kim read modern history at Oxford University, before studying a masters in landscape architecture at Berkley, California. "I set up on my own in 1989, never intending for it to be a major practice. I wanted the freedom to explore corners that weren't necessarily mainstream," says Kim. As the diversity and load of work increased so did the number of staff. Today's team includes John Dawkins, Jeremy Rye and Grania Loughnan. Kim says: "Being a small team means we can brainstorm every project together." Kim wrote the 100-year plan for the Thames Landscape Strategy between Hampton and Kew.

TRADEMARKS: Kim's team works on a range of projects from private country gardens to vast urban sites. They are the masters of elegant, timeless design that acknowledge the past while looking to the future. The practice is particularly interested in carbon-neutral developments and how water, energy and sewage can be considered together on one site.

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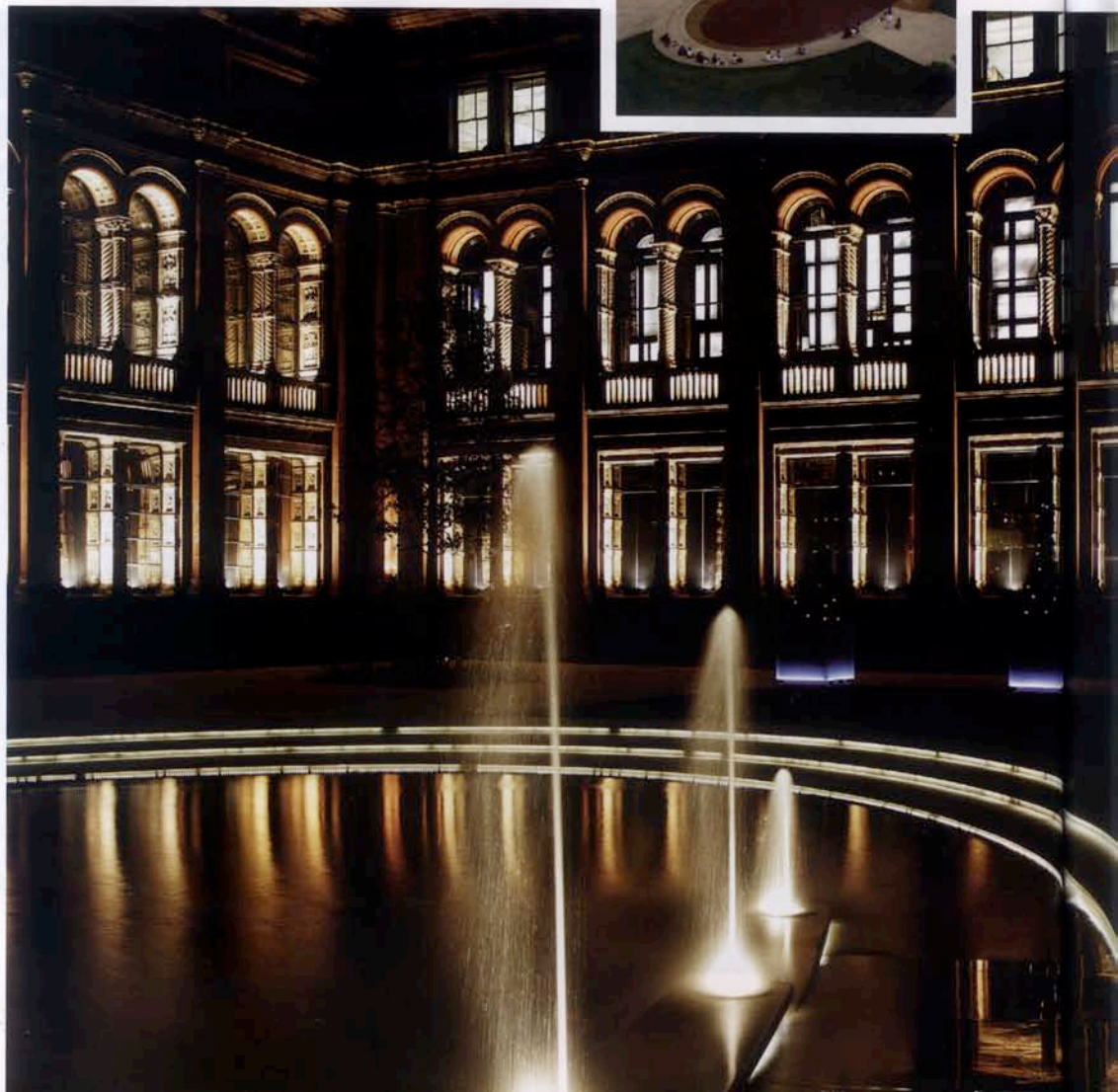
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PHILOSOPHY

Kim Wilkie sets out his company's philosophy on his website, listing 30 or so illuminating quotes (from Alexander Pope – 'All must be adapted to the Genius and Use of the Place, and the Beauties not forced into it, but resulting from it' – to Mark Twain). Kim believes that it is vital to understand each place's unique story and allow memory and imagination to inspire fresh design. His sensitivity to historical context and intelligent, understated design make for a potent combination. His projects range from a botanic garden in Russia to city centre planning in London. Kim cites garden historian and writer Mavis Batey and Berkley Professor Michael Lurie as key influences. "Michael was fantastically practical and was opposed to the idea of gardens as art. He believes they should be a service to man and nature," he says. Kim's work focuses on the relationship between land and culture and community and place. He has a particular fascination with the simplicity of earth forms and much of his work incorporates flowing forms: his designs for Heveningham Hall, Suffolk and for the John Madejski V&A garden have a similar solution – one rendered in grass, the other in stone.

▼ DESIGN 1: JOHN MADEJSKI GARDEN, VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

The commission for remodelling the three-quarter acre Italianate courtyard at the heart of the V&A was for a peaceful, intimate retreat for a handful of visitors, which on occasion could accommodate a crowd of 3,000 people. Kim's pared-back design features open lawns around an elegant stone-paved ellipse (incorporating steps and water jets), which when flooded becomes a shallow reflecting pool. Ingeniously, the pool can be drained off in less than an hour, transforming into a dramatic performance space.



PICTURES KIM WILKIE, EXCEPT WHERE OTHERWISE INDICATED



NICOLA BROWNE

▲ **DESIGN 2: FRIARS' STILE ROAD, RICHMOND UPON THAMES, SURREY**

After taking over the building floor by floor, Kim designed the 20 x 7-metre walled garden behind his offices in Richmond starting with a contemporary roof terrace, with an ingenious glass table that doubles as a light-well to the rooms below. At ground level, he divided the space into a lawn and an area for parking, which he covered with a dramatic layer of crushed blue glass. The lawn was sculpted to incorporate a series of waves, the crests of which are seeded with Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) "As I have an obsession with landforms, I had to have some of my own," explains Kim. A blue glass bench, by artist Ben Barrell, is positioned against a south-facing brick wall, making the perfect spot for the four team members to sit out at lunchtime beneath the sycamore tree whose seed pods were part of the inspiration for the bench's shape.

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▼ **DESIGN 3: HEVENINGHAM HALL, SUFFOLK**

One of 'Capability' Brown's final projects, this 2,000-acre parkland sits in the middle of five parish churches and was once the centrepiece of the landscape. In 1995 when the new owners of the Grade I-listed, 18th-century hall began restoring the estate, they commissioned Kim to create a masterplan and detailed design for the landscape. Brown had died before completing the garden, so as Kim explains: "It was rather like an unfinished symphony." Kim implemented the original plans for the parkland and since 1998 has planted 50 hectares of woodland per year. He also took the bold decision to remove the Victorian garden at the rear of the hall and replace it with an elegant landform, which fans out and rises in a series of curvaceous steps, taking in the existing cedars and oaks.



◀ **DESIGN 4: HYDE PARK CORNER, LONDON**

Situated in the southeast of the park, Hyde Park Corner is, in effect, the busiest traffic island in central London. The Wellington Arch sits in the centre of the 1.5-hectare plot, with the Australian War Memorial to the southwest and New Zealand's to the northeast. Kim's design has streamlined the main royal procession route while optimising the flow of traffic, pedestrians and cyclists. In addition, this formerly impenetrable space is now a calm, protected fulcrum in the middle of the Royal Parks. Future developments include a glass cafe that links into the Underground station. "It's now a place to be in in its own right; a link rather than a division," says Kim.