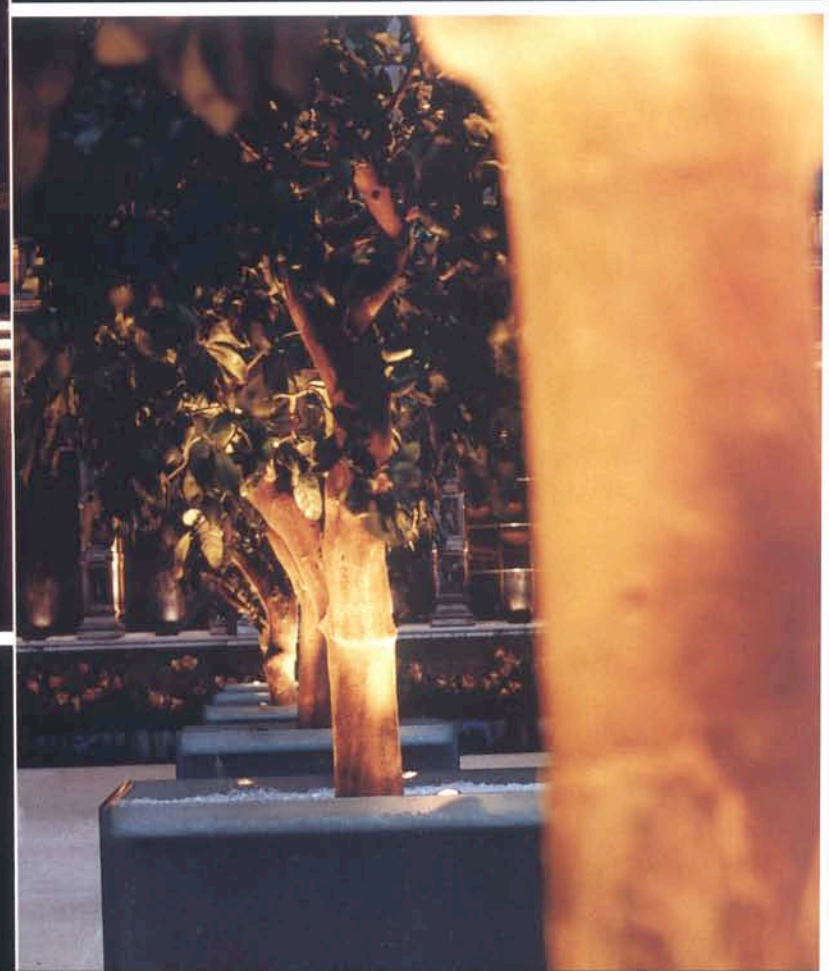
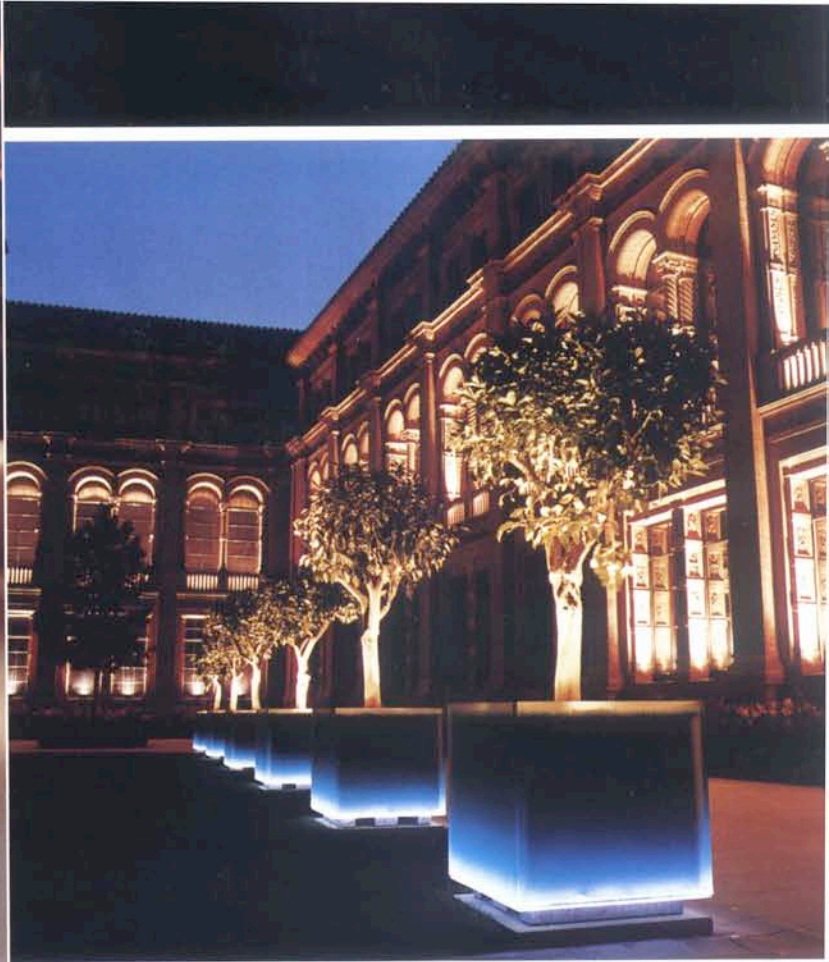


VICTORIAN VALUE

CLARE FOSTER MEETS LANDSCAPE DESIGNER KIM WILKIE, WHOSE RECENT COMMISSIONS INCLUDE THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE V&A'S MURKY COURTYARD



ALL PICTURES The three-quarter-acre courtyard garden at the V&A, recently redesigned by Kim Wilkie, is lit dramatically at night. Lemon trees in huge glass cubes are illuminated from beneath, while lights shine through the jets of water at the edge of the pool. The façade of the building glows ethereally in the dark, the windows illuminated by an ingenious lighting system sourced in Italy by Patrick Woodroffe



Kim Wilkie would not describe himself as a high-profile landscape designer, yet he has recently completed a project that a good proportion of the British public, as well as many more tourists, will visit and enjoy. Under Kim's exacting and sensitive eye, the three-quarter-acre courtyard garden at the V&A in London has been transformed from a dark, unprepossessing area into a light-filled, modern space, with open lawns, an elliptical stone pool and 22 huge glass cubes holding lemon trees. 'The effect is simple and bold,' says Kim. 'It has to be calm, to counteract the architecture; but at the same time powerful.' It is a garden designed first and foremost for people – both for the general public and for those invited to functions at the museum. 'Gardens are as much about the people as the space,' says Kim, 'and the challenge here was to design something that would feel comfortable for just a handful of people but could still accommodate a crowd of 3,000.' With these things in mind, the shallow pool can be drained for evening parties, and the whole space is dramatically lit at night, giving the garden a new and wonderful guise.

'Giving the land a reason' is how Kim describes his work, and he is clearly passionate about what he does. Born in Malaysia, he moved to Baghdad at the age of eight, and from early childhood was very aware of the landscapes around him. He read history at Oxford, and discovered landscape design while working as an environmental correspondent in Iran. After an injury to his leg in Mexico and a life-changing spell in hospital, he decided to enrol on a landscape-design course in the States, at UC Berkeley, and returned to Britain in the mid-Eighties to set up his own practice. 'In Britain, people have a deep-seated understanding and con-

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nection with the land,' Kim says. 'How we live with the land is very important, and there is a rich history to be aware of.'

It is this history, and the social and cultural aspects of landscape, that motivate and excite this designer, and although he works on both public and private spaces, it is the community projects that he finds the most intriguing, including urban-regeneration schemes and environmental planning. He is based in Richmond in Surrey, but his projects are by no means restricted to this country, ranging from the redesign of a city-centre plaza in Beirut to a scheme for a Russian community in the Arctic Circle.

In Britain, one of Kim's most absorbing projects is his involvement in the Thames Landscape Strategy, a 100-year plan co-ordinating different efforts to conserve natural habitats, restore historic landscapes and make the most of the river for people who live near it. Kim will be opening up historic views from Richmond Hill, as well as working on plans to reintroduce the water meadows along this stretch. Other current projects include a redesign of Hyde Park Corner, where he is reconfiguring the pedestrian and cycle routes, as well as creating landform and water features. What underpins all Kim Wilkie's projects is his careful consideration of the relationships between man, culture and nature. His schemes use the land in imaginative and dynamic ways which acknowledge both its setting in the wider environment, and the manner in which people use it. With Hyde Park Corner and the V&A under his belt, his work will be seen by millions. But although the projects themselves are high-profile, Kim prefers to stay out of the limelight: 'The personality of the designer should be recessive so that the landscapes can be left to speak for themselves' □

Kim Wilkie (website: www.kimwilkie.com)



THIS PAGE By day, the garden takes on a new character (all pictures). In the centre, an elliptical reflecting pool, which can be drained to provide an area for large, outdoor parties, provides a calming, contemplative focal point, with three simple water jets on either side. The 22 Sicilian lemon trees will be replaced in winter with clipped holly obelisks. Round the edge of the garden, long borders are filled with boldly coloured seasonal planting, including African lilies, hydrangeas, echiums and bright orange *Dahlia* 'David Howard'. OPPOSITE Designer Kim Wilkie sits on the shallow steps of the pool

