



# MAKING WAVES

Kim Wilkie is more familiar with designing the gardens of historic houses and national monuments, so his own tiny city plot demanded an entirely different approach.

The result, says **Mary Keen**, is a homage to one of his favourite places, the sea

PHOTOGRAPHS **NICOLA BROWNE**





**K**im Wilkie is a landscape architect, and he's the talk of many towns in many countries, from Britain to North America and Chile to the Arctic Circle. He's made his mark on historic landscapes such as Heveningham Hall in Suffolk (where Capability Brown also worked in the 18th century) and urban spaces, including the courtyard of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. How, then, does a man like this deal with a tiny domestic plot? Kim Wilkie's own garden, behind a Victorian terraced house in Richmond, south-west London, incorporates many of his trademark dramatic yet natural-looking designs in a space that measures just 7m x 20m (23ft x 65ft).

'I don't fully understand the design process,' he says modestly. 'It's to do with looking at a place to see what it wants.' With large gardens, he thinks you have to connect with the space and the landscapes beyond. Small gardens with defined boundaries are sometimes easier. 'Walls free you to think of the space separately.' Enclosed ►



The question to ask yourself is where do you take your first gin and tonic in the evening

Kim (left, with Ranunculus) has made a priority of relaxation – the glass-block table on the roof terrace (above) and the 'surfboard' bench (opposite) are perfect for eating and drinking





Kim mixes bulbs, annuals and vegetables in huge copper planters on the terrace – a small space is all the more reason to be bold RIGHT Ceanothus and crimson glory vine scramble up the walls of the house

## Have fun with containers

You can work wonders with a few pots in a small space. Sculptor Simon Thomas (01179 710711/email: sileethom@yahoo.co.uk) worked with Kim to create the copper planters on the terrace.

● Kim mixes red-flowered broad beans, English marigolds (*Calendula officinalis* 'Indian Prince') and highly scented sweet peas (*Lathyrus odoratus* 'Matucana') in summer. In winter, he grows sprouting broccoli.

● To grow vegetables in troughs or window boxes, refresh the soil constantly. Try 'Misticanza' (a mixture of salads such as chicory, rocket and watercress) with a few herbs. In summer, parsley, sorrel, tarragon, borage, or nasturtium flowers all add colour.

● In winter, *Cavolo nero* makes a great addition to soup. Rocket and lamb's lettuce also do well in the cold months. In London's warm microclimate it would be hard to resist adding a few bulbs of paper-white narcissi.

Salad and herb seeds are easy to find these days, but if you're stuck, try:

- Chiltern Seeds (01229 581137/[www.chilternseeds.co.uk](http://www.chilternseeds.co.uk) ✉)
- Seeds of Italy (020 8930 2516/[www.seedsofitaly.co.uk](http://www.seedsofitaly.co.uk) ✉)

## Boundaries are clothed with evergreens for a year-round backdrop

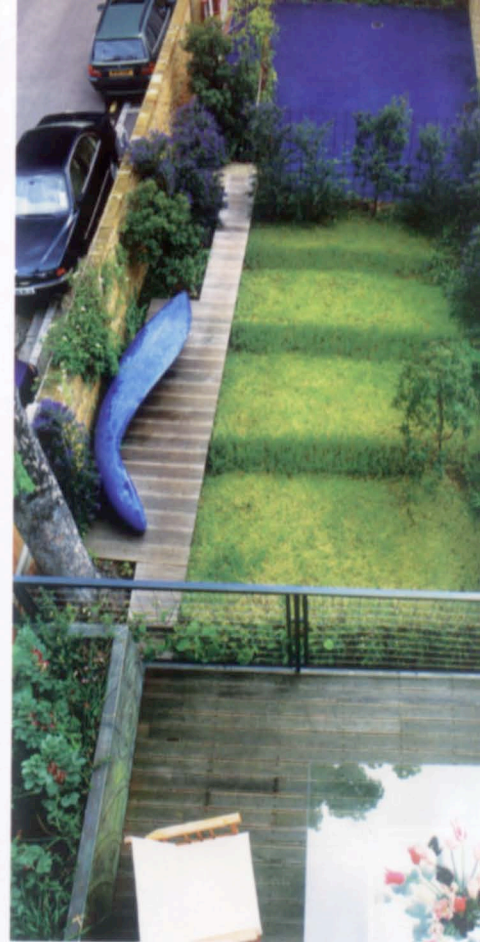
domestic gardens, he suggests, are personal places, where the owner's life is what matters most, in contrast to public spaces, which are more about many different people coming together. When pressed to tell the rest of us how to get going, he becomes less abstract. 'The question to ask yourself,' he says, 'is where do you take your first cup of tea or coffee in the morning. And your first gin and tonic in the evening.'

In Kim Wilkie's case, almost all drinks and meals are taken on the roof terrace, designed to overlook the garden, the tree-lined street and the view to Richmond Park beyond. Town gardens, he thinks, are often places that you look down on from the best rooms in the house. At the centre of the terrace is a glass tabletop, supported by aquamarine glass blocks over the skylight of the office downstairs. Mesh panels surround the balcony, covered in crimson glory vine (*Vitis coignetiae*), which makes the terrace feel private in summer.

On either side of the table are two huge oblong copper planters, now North-Sea green







A city view doesn't get much better: the waves of lawn culminate in the deep blue sea of the car park

with age. They're filled with crimson-flowered broad beans, pot marigolds (*Calendula officinalis* 'Indian Prince') and the most scented of all sweet peas, *Lathyrus odoratus* 'Matucana'. There are ripples on the pots, and on closer inspection these appear to be Kim's trademark thumbprints, which, he says, represent his respect for the relationship of man to earth.

Looking down from the roof terrace, the rectangular garden ripples with echoes of this idea, and of the perpetual movement found in nature. At the far end is a dramatic blue square – by day it's a car park for the five employees of Kim Wilkie Associates (based at the house), but by night the small sea glitters. This is not your average parking lot, but a layer of cobalt resin-bound glass over tarmac with 80 fibre-optic lights. 'I wanted it to feel like phosphorescence or stars,' Kim says, and it does. If you have to let cars into the garden, this is the way to do it.

From the azure car park, a boardwalk leads down the side of the garden. Not a *Ground Force* decking frill, but a wooden jetty – a reminder of boats and water, where Kim loves to spend his spare time. A curved bench of blue resin-bound glass, which looks a bit like a surfboard, is set back from the line of the walkway, creating seating for the workers to take an outdoor break.

Crests of grassy waves appear on the lawn, similar to those at Heveningham Hall. A flat lawn can be boring, Kim says, and this one has been ►





This is not your average parking lot, but a layer of cobalt resin-bound glass



The deep purple and blue-green of cerinthe growing through a rusted screen is a great colour contrast in summer. BELOW LEFT Kim lets the lawn grow in long crests that ripple in the breeze

transformed into a series of ridges, tiny dips and slopes, which rise to peaks of grass-clad earth, no more than a foot high. The grass is Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and while the rest of the lawn is mown, the tops of the waves are left to flower, so that the wind ripples the plumes and the place comes alive. At night, concealed lights under the boardwalk turn the flowerheads to foam.

Flowers and colour are less important to Kim Wilkie than shape and movement, but his approach to them is as rigorous as it is to the rest of the design. Kim knows the importance of linking the house with the garden, and he's used colour to do this – blue-green and terracotta-orange indoors as well as out.

The garden's boundaries are clothed with evergreens: ceanothus, punctuated with the hybrid strawberry tree, *Arbutus x andrachnoides*, provide a good backdrop all year round, as well as piercing blue flowers in early summer. Agapanthus, irises, crocosmias and Chinese lanterns (*Physalis alkekengi*) come and go throughout the year, while figs are trained around the car park.

If there's just one lesson to be learnt from this small but highly original garden, it's that consistency of vision is what makes a great design – and great designs are what Kim Wilkie turns out time after time.

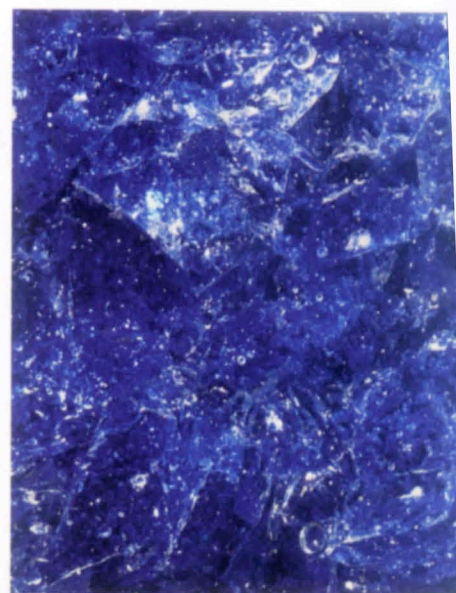
National Trust garden panellist and garden designer Mary Keen opens her Gloucestershire plot regularly for charity.







A wooden jetty leads from the car park to the house – you can almost taste the salt in the air



## If you want to try this in your garden

### ● Resin-bound glass

Kim used resin-bound glass (above) for the blue car park and the 'surfboard' bench. It's available in a variety of colours from SureSet and comes in sacks ready for mixing and is poured out like porridge. If you want to cover an area up to 15 square metres, it's best to use a DIY kit, which costs from £70 per square metre. For larger areas, SureSet can supply and fit the resin-bound paving from around £45-55 per square metre – the bigger the area, the cheaper the rate. (01985 841180/[www.sureset.co.uk](http://www.sureset.co.uk))

### ● Fibre optics

The 50-watt fibre-optic lights, in a mix of large and small sizes, were supplied and installed (under supervision by the designer) by Absolute Action. A 'sparkle wheel' was also installed, which causes the lights to change colour, creating a magical effect. (01622 351000/[www.absolute-action.com](http://www.absolute-action.com))

### ● Roof-terrace table

Skylights in roof terraces can be a problem, but Kim was determined to turn the situation to his advantage. In collaboration with Watchrod, he used the skylight as his starting point to design a 2.5 metre square table for the terrace. The specially thickened glass top is supported on aquamarine glass blocks (also from Watchrod). The void in the centre is open to the office below, which casts a soft light on Kim's desk.

(01344 872499/[www.watchrod.com](http://www.watchrod.com))