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ON THE CREST OF A WAVE

Continuing the occasional series on designed spaces, Chris Young visits an Irish, Art Deco-inspired urban garden that is as stylish and interesting as its architectural foil

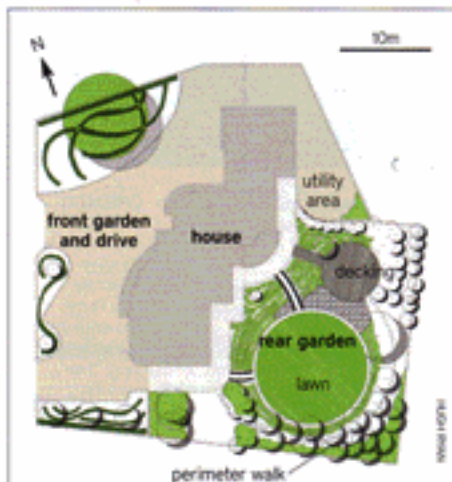
THE IDEA OF A GARDEN having been designed according to a theme – think ‘Japanese-inspired garden’ or ‘a bit of the Mediterranean in suburban Surrey’ – is something I usually find difficult to like. More often than not, such spaces are soulless, too contrived to be enjoyable, too premeditated to be realistic. I also dislike undue dominance of architecture, when the garden has to play second fiddle to built form, leaving the garden designer or plantsperson little scope.

But there is something special about where this designed garden, affectionately known by its creator Hugh Ryan as ‘Normandie’, started and its theme germinated: it was the style of the house.

Understanding the brief

Like much of Dublin, the Leopardstown area to the southwest of the city has been enjoying a surge in demand for property. Along a small, tree-lined avenue sits a group of Art Deco and Bauhaus-inspired houses, built in the 1940s that, buoyed by Dublin’s relatively recent wealth explosion, are now much desired.

When the owners, Teresa and Maurice Healy bought the house in 1999, it was in need of complete renovation. ‘We had done up one house before, but had ▶



LEOPARDSTOWN, DUBLIN, IRELAND

Owners Teresa and Maurice Healy, and their two late-teenage children

Occupations Maurice is a financier; Teresa is a full-time housewife (she also enjoys collecting Art Deco furniture and items)

Property Art Deco-style house in Dublin

Interest in gardening Teresa is a keen gardener and has a strong eye for detail; she also enjoys helping to maintain the garden



Brief for garden designer Small area of turf seating and entertaining area to be near to the kitchen (the main point of access into the garden); design to sympathise with the house; a little bit of ‘countryside’ somewhere in the garden; not-too-fussy planting; space for the children to enjoy and use; a water feature; and, later, the addition of lighting
Garden designer Hugh Ryan



PHOTO: TIGHEB



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Total garden area (front and back) 1,540sq m

Soil Near neutral, loam-based

Aspect East to west

Timescale Property was bought in 1999; clients moved in April 2001. Hugh was approached at the end of 2000; garden design and installation was complete by November 2001

Total cost €35,000 including design, plants, hard materials and contractors' fees



PHOTO: TIGHEB

ALL IN THE DETAIL The subtle maritime theme for this Dublin garden, designed by Hugh Ryan, includes a mix of hard (paving) and soft (planting) details. Hugh's planting (above) features 'waves' of plants – such as orange-red-flowered *Hemerocallis* 'Rocket City' and pink-hued *Sedum* spectabile.

The house (left) was substantially renovated by its owners; Hugh continued the detailing in the garden, with a radial design (top left) of white reconstituted granite slabs with darker grey Indian slate paving, leading from the kitchen. Irish limestone is set on edge (above left), with Wicklow granite boulders beyond housing the four water features

Perimeter walk

At the rear of the back garden, denser planting gives seclusion and interest

Hidden paving

Simple concrete slabs have been used to create a curved path running along the perimeter of the space – views back into the garden and of the house are, as a result, constantly changing

In the round

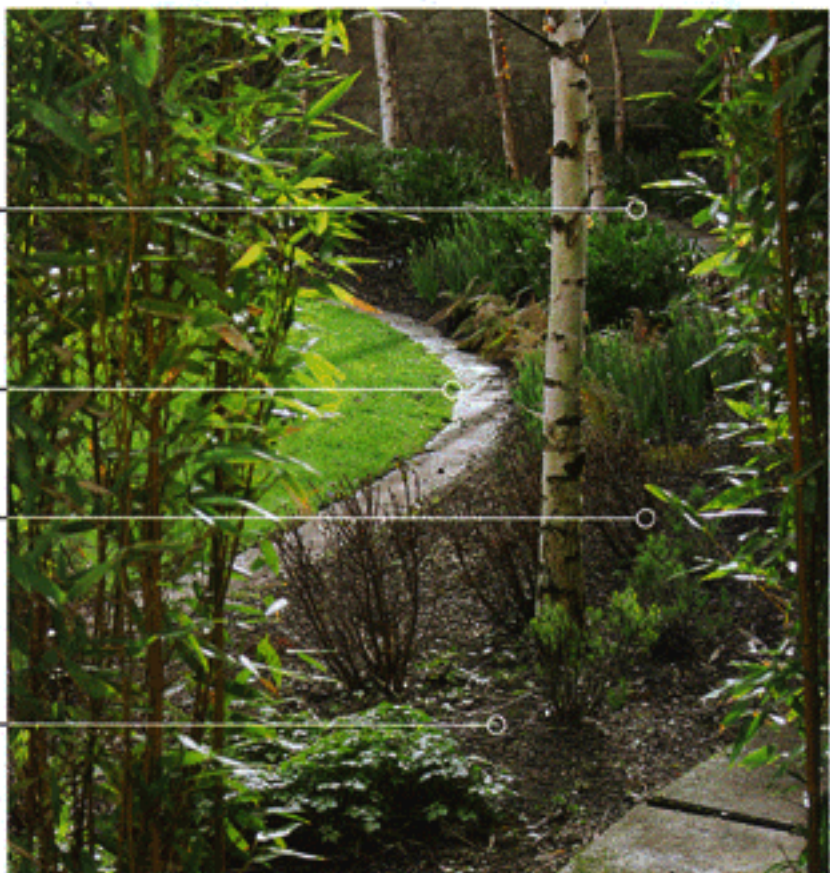
The circular lawn acts as a focal point for the garden, and is edged with Indian slate, giving it a contemporary feel

Dense planting

To screen the path, and act as a backdrop to the central lawn, designer Hugh Ryan has used reliable evergreens (such as bamboo, Escallonia and *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Otto Luyken') among birch trees

Keeping it in check

Even though the owners have some help in the garden, maintenance is reduced by an application of bark chipping mulch throughout the garden



MOVEMENT AND INTEREST Linking with the nautical theme, Irish limestone has been set on edge to flank the sides of the path; boulders and the lawn-edged Indian sandstone paving add textural contrast

no idea this was going to be such a big job,' says Teresa. With her husband a busy financier, she took charge of renovating the house and garden. 'I had thought about the garden when we first bought the property, but I put my ideas on hold while we were sorting out the house,' she says. 'Once the renovations were under way I turned my attention to the garden. Hugh was recommended to me by a gardener I had used previously.'

When Hugh was appointed in winter 2000, like so many people he was fascinated by the house. 'Even though I tried not to design an Art Deco garden, I took my lead from the house,' he says. 'The maritime theme came from the view from the first-floor balcony overlooking the garden, plus the fact that we are only a couple of miles from the sea. With that, the sobriquet 'Normandie' was coined.

The *SS Normandie* was a colossal French

ocean liner, built in the early 1930s and of exacting materials – not only was she famed for being among the fastest liners of her time, but was also the most exquisitely detailed, with lavish interiors in the then-contemporary Art Deco style.

As Hugh's understanding grew of what his client wanted ('the brief was aspirational, as Teresa knew exactly what she did and didn't like') so too did his final design. The garden was to respond to the Healy's needs for entertaining, space for the children and a service area at the back of the plot, using sympathetic design in keeping with the house and elements of a maritime theme (stones represent the seashore, a circular seating area the deck of a ship, and the sinuous planting swells in the waves). There was to also be a link to Teresa's childhood of growing up in the country, so Hugh included a 'secret' walk skirting the perimeter of the plot,

Main borders

Looking out from the house, these borders grow up to about 1m in height; planting is in sinuous blocks

Continuing the style

To hide the service area at the back of the house, Hugh created a curved, rendered concrete wall and painted it the same colour as the house

Full circle

Small boulders of Wicklow granite represent a rocky shoreline, and are home to four waterspouts. Behind, the circular-decked entertaining area looks out over the garden, and is backed by swaying bamboo

Planting style

A predominantly herbaceous-perennial planting palette has been used (including here white Japanese anemone, day lilies and low-growing *Geranium* species), but does include grasses and other accent plants

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concealed by evergreen shrub planting and *Betula pendula* and *B. utilis*.

At the same time, Hugh was also asked to reconfigure the front garden (see p532), resulting in a simplified design of gravel, entwined hedging, vertical accents of *Cupressus sempervirens* *Stricta* Group and billowy birches.

Coming to life

Hugh undertook the build (with his landscape team of four) from summer to late autumn 2001. 'The realisation of the design was better than expected,' says Teresa. 'I wanted it to be a reaction to my previous garden: for example, there I had the seating area at the bottom of the garden; here I wanted it near the kitchen. It has worked out so well.'

The back garden is not large – 910sq m – but has a more intimate feel than these photographs perhaps show. The resultant

design has five principal areas: a paved area immediately outside the house; a lawn; an entertaining area; the enclosing 'woodland' walk; and a utility space immediately behind the garage.

At the centre of the garden, two circular areas (one lawn, the other cedar decking painted 'Cape Cod' grey) are accessed by paths (either decked or an aggregate granite-grit mix) leading directly from the paving adjoining the house. Either side of the main paths, planting includes sedum, hemerocallis and ferns, rubbing shoulders, unusually, with Irish limestone set on edge. 'The limestone symbolises the rocks that waves would crash against,' says Hugh; but to me, these rocks are more than symbolism – they add movement and contrast.

Away from the path edges, small boulders of Wicklow granite continue the nautical theme, and again give an

'EVEN THOUGH I TRIED NOT TO DESIGN AN ART DECO GARDEN, I TOOK MY LEAD FROM THE HOUSE'

interesting contrast to the lawn, decking, paths and planting. Perhaps this, among the granite boulders, is the most unsuccessful part of the garden: water features protrude upwards, but are too small, low and pedestrian to be appropriate for the scale of the garden. Their intention suits the design, but the reality is somewhat less than successful.

Adding a sense of solidity to the diverse material range, the planting is blocky. It is not a rare palette – indeed a couple of choices, such as evergreen *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Otto Luyken', are standard landscape-amenity fare – but ▶



Front garden

Simpler and more muted than the back, the front allows for vehicular use and is a fine setting for the house

Height and interest

The billowing shape of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* adds texture to the front garden, with sinuous hedging at its feet creating rhythm, pattern and movement

Hedging structure

Curved, low-growing hedging is kept in check to give height, depth and movement. Along the back wall evergreen prunus divide the space from the neighbours; below that hornbeam; and then yew hedging

Gravel abounds

Designer Hugh Ryan has raised certain areas in the front garden to make the space more interesting. Gravel mulch, from the local Wicklow glacial deposits, link in colour and tone with the hard landscaping in the rear garden

in combination, the overall effect succeeds. Nearest the house, looking into the lawn and deck, swaths of bluish-pink *Sedum spectabile*, orange-red *Hemerocallis* 'Rocket City', *Hosta fortunei* var. *auricomarginata* and *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* give plenty of floral and foliar colour. Towards the back of the garden, larger shrubs include white-flowered *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Mariesii' and *Hydrangea quercifolia* (both give good autumn colour) together with *Phyllostachys* (bamboo) species.

The front garden, by contrast, is a much less colourful affair, but works equally well. To allow room for several cars, Hugh did away with any semblance of borders. As a result, the front garden gives a fitting setting to the architectural splendour of the house. To the left side of the space, a raised bank is home to a magnificent existing cedar, below which is an entwined tapestry of evergreens – they duck in and weave out, giving visual movement. To the right-hand side

of the front, yew hedging has been cut low, to scroll beneath a mini-copse of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*. The whole of the drive is topped off with Wicklow gravel. As a unified setting for the house the result is cool and simple.

Enchanting results

'Normandie' is a truly interesting garden: it is clearly designed, focused on what the clients wanted, but not slavish to the maritime 'theme' or the Art Deco house. Both the front and rear gardens stand up for themselves, where other spaces may have been daunted by the challenge of the built form.

By using a restrained planting and colour palette, along with high-quality and unusual stone, Hugh has created a series of special outdoor spaces. Maybe subtly themed gardens, enveloping dominant houses, can work after all. ■

Chris Young is Deputy Editor for *The Garden*



FREE FLOW Instead of traditional borders and flower combinations, in the front garden Hugh has used hedges to provide interest, including *Luna apiculata* 'Glanleam Gold', evergreen prunus and *Elaeagnus x ebbingei* (above)

i Teresa and Maurice Healy's garden is not open to the public. ■ **Hugh Ryan Landscape Design**, Republic of Ireland. Tel (from UK): 00353 402 36386; website: www.hughryan.ie