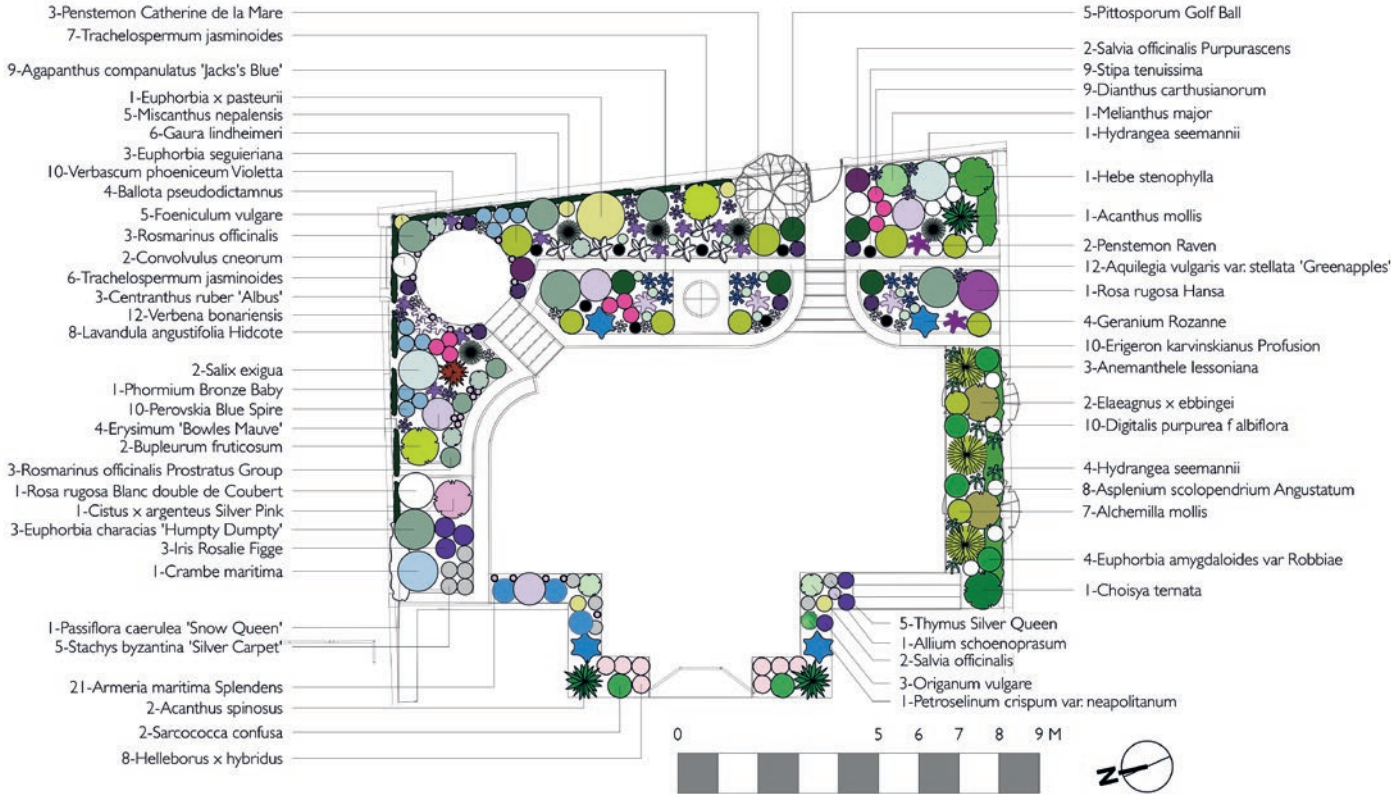




TO THE LIGHT HOUSE

PHOTOGRAPHS: Richard Bloom

Sue Townsend MSGD tells Barbara Segall how she has used soft waves of planting to brighten the outside space of an East Anglian coastal home.



Taking full advantage of the East Anglian coastal light, garden designer Sue Townsend MSGD has, with planting and hard-landscaping, brightened and lightened this garden beside the sea to maximise its use as a space to share with friends and enjoy for its intimate nature.

The owners originally wanted to give the terraced garden a simple makeover, to replace some of the traditional English country garden plants that were failing, repair some crumbling brick walls, and have the old paving relaid. Following a meeting with Suffolk-based designer Sue Townsend MSGD in 2019, however, they agreed with her that much more could be done that would not only improve the garden but make the house feel lighter and brighter and more in keeping with its position overlooking the sea.

'The owners wanted to feel that they were in an enclosed, plant-rich space that was large enough for them to entertain their friends comfortably,' Sue recalls.

There was also the matter of the view. Although the garden is just a stone's throw from the beach, it lies below ground level and behind a wall so views of the sea are only visible from the top floors of the house.

Leaving the paved area clear for dining and entertaining, Sue has filled the series of terraces that rise up to the wall with plants that billow and wave, to mimic the sea, with a central flight of steps that lead one up and out through a gate,

onto the beach on the other side. 'There was terracing in the original garden,' says Sue, 'but it was dated and in poor repair, and aside from some wonderful agapanthus, we removed all the plants, which were inappropriate to the site and probably a little dated. 'We kept the soil and I redesigned the terraces, introducing an intimate seating area on the top level, where the owners can enjoy the evening sun, and on the lower level, I designed a curved stone bench to encircle a fire pit.' The built structures are made of yellow quartz paddlestones, to give the effect of drystone walling, and topped with sawn Yorkstone coping stones, which double as seating. 'Now you can sit on the walls right among plants that include fennel, grasses, trailing rosemary and *Oenothera lindheimeri*, and the tall, slender stems of the *Salix exigua*, planted at intervals along the fence line,' Sue comments. 'And when you view the garden from the house, there is movement, which was previously missing.'

THE PROCESS
Everything had to be chosen to withstand the salty wind, low rainfall, and coastal conditions. 'I thought about how it would look during the whole year,' Sue explains. 'I imagined how the evergreen structure, the climbers, including *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, and shaped shrubs would work at different times of the year. In spring, the lime green of euphorbias lightens the terraces, with tulips and alliums growing through. →

PLANTING DETAILS

Trees - half standards, lollipop
Shrubs - 1L, 2L, 5, 7L, 10L; *Rosa rugosa* - bare root
Herbaceous - 9cm, 1Litre or 2L
Climbers - 1L, *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, 1.5m to 1.75m



OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: Sue has filled the amphitheatre-like terraces with curved, sinuous plantings of *Stipa tenuissima* and mounded *Erysimum* 'Bowles Mauve', and used *Salix exigua*, *Stipa tenuissima* and *Euphorbia seguieriana* for contrasting texture and colour.



'This is not a garden for fiery red autumn colour but *Geranium* 'Rozanne' and *Oenothera lindheimeri* keep the flowering going through to November, while grasses such as *Stipa tenuissima* and *Miscanthus nepalensis* offer great winter structure of seedheads and arching stems. The daisy flowers of *Erigeron karvinskianus* stitch the seasons together over a long flowering period and the owners like purple, pink and white-flowered plants, so perovskia, lavender, agapanthus and sea thrift were among my plant choices.'

'Structure is very important,' the designer continues, 'and I decided to mark key points on the terraces with a visual anchor such as the round shapes of *Pittosporum* 'Golf Ball', softened with the grey of lavender and its added aromatic value. I think the plants need to fulfil many options: they need to look good but also, I choose them for their texture and scent. This always adds an emotional level to the garden.'

Practical elements are important too, such as having herbs near the kitchen door, so they have a short route from harvest to use. Also, features such as the fire pit and loungers can be moved around easily to suit the scale of entertaining.

In the main, Sue chooses bare root rather than container-grown plants, for environmental reasons and because plants such as irises and roses establish better if bare root. 'I aim to source everything locally although inevitably, some plants and materials do come from further afield, but local provenance is key.' ○



Sue Townsend, MSGD

is an award-winning garden designer based in coastal Suffolk. Designing gardens that are not only beautiful but also can cope with climate change and attract wildlife are key to her ethos; suetownsendgardendesign.co.uk.

ABOVE LEFT: *Pittosporum* 'Golf Ball' provides strong punctuation at the end of one of the terrace plantings. **ABOVE RIGHT:** planting around the new raised seating level includes *Geranium* 'Rozanne', *Stipa tenuissima* and *Erysimum* 'Bowles Mauve' with *Oenothera lindheimeri* and *Dianthus carthusianorum*. **BOTTOM LEFT:** *Agapanthus campanulatus* 'Jack's Blue' was retained from the garden's original planting.



WHO'S WHO

Plants, Beth Chatto, bethchatto.co.uk; Howard Nurseries, howardnurseries.co.uk; The Romantic Nursery, romantic-garden-nursery.co.uk; Woottens of Wenhaston, woottensplants.com

Some of the shrubs and climbers, Palmstead, palmstead.co.uk

Yorkstone, Yorkstone Supplies, yorkstonesupplies.co.uk; (yellow quartz paddlestone stone walling), CED Stone Group, cedstone.co.uk

Landscaper, David Taylor Landscapes, dtaylorlandscapes.co.uk

Lily water bowl, Urbis Design, urbisdesign.co.uk

