

PUSHING THE BOUNDARY

Intrusive parking and blocked views stopped this Surrey garden from fulfilling its potential, but by moving and removing hedges and replacing an indifferent lawn with easy-to-maintain gravel and planting beds, Maitanne Hunt MSGD has created a garden that is characterful and stylish as well as sustainable and biodiverse

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Having moved the car parking spot from in front of the 1970s-built house, Maitanne has created a modern topiary garden, with low seating to make the most of the planting, as a nod to the mock Tudor style of the building. A new beech hedge runs round the boundary line, and *Malus x robusta* 'Red Sentinel' mark each corner and guard the garden gate.



When in November 2020 Maitanne Hunt MSGD first visited this garden, which is situated at the end of a cul-de-sac in Esher, Surrey, she found a layout that was emphasised by negatives and which made little of the site's positives.

At the front of the 1970s-built mock Tudor building, to the right of the garden path, lay a strip of lawn with an unremarkable planting bed beneath the window. A similar grass patch lay around the corner, running along the east side of the house.

To the left of the front path, a grey-brick-lined parking area dominated the view of the house and with a coach house behind the car, it also blocked the view and access to the large lawn on the west side of the house.

Aside from a mature oak and a couple of young trees and straggly-looking shrubs, the only other existing planting of note took the form of hedging – *Leylandii* that hid the car-parking area from the road, and at the end of the west-facing lawn, a run of laurel through which Maitanne could glimpse the local nature reserve and pasture for horses and cattle that lay beyond.

While she could see the potential in the borrowed view of that bucolic scene, the garden otherwise appeared to be unloved and uninteresting and the soil, Maitanne found, was unexceptional.

The garden owner, a City businessman, was not a gardener but he knew what he wanted for this L-shaped third of an acre: that the lawn and car-parking area be transformed into a beautiful English cottage garden and for there to be colourful flowers. He was also very aware →



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Maitanne included *Fragaria vesca* 'Mara des Bois' in the new raised beds at the front of the house, as a nod to the Tudors' love for wild strawberries. The front garden, before the redesign. *Euphorbia seguieriana*. Bluebells have been planted into the patch of lawn that remains beneath the mature oak beside the coach house.

that he needed the help of a professional to achieve a successful end result and as he later told Maitanne, he had interviewed several garden designers before finally choosing her because he liked her 'ideas and enthusiasm'. 'The main challenge was to move the parking area away from the front of the house,' says Maitanne. 'That first impression as you come through the gate is so important – you want to see a garden, not a car park.' The overgrown hedge of *Leylandii* which separated the car-parking area from the road was, Maitanne found, not aligned with the adjacent beech hedge on the other side of the garden path. Having investigated the outline of the property's official boundaries during a visit to the Land Registry, to her pleasant surprise she found that the *Leylandii* had been planted too far away from the road's kerb, which meant the parking area was a car's width or so narrower than it should or needed to be.

A request was made to the local council for permission to remove the existing hedge and plant a new one further out, in the correct spot, closer to the edge of the kerb of the road. 'We did this during the first lockdown,' Maitanne remembers, 'and we literally had to track down the individual councillor to get approval.' With permission granted, Maitanne was able to finalise her design for the new car parking space. By planting a hedge of *Fagus sylvatica* along the true front boundary, this opened up a space beside the coach house that is wide enough that the owners can park their car there instead of in front of the structure. With a separate entrance inserted in the new hedge for car access, Maitanne had overcome her main challenge – to remove the car from sight. The transformation of the garden to the west and in front of the house could now begin. The laurel hedge on the main lawn has been removed, to open up the →



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Maitanne Hunt MSGD began her working life in the world of finance before deciding to retrain at the English Gardening School. She took her Master's degree in the restoration and conservation of historical gardens at the Architectural Association, School of Architecture, and then set up her own practice. She now works to ensure that every garden she designs harmonises with both the house and the environment. She is a fully registered member of the Society of Garden Designers, the British Association of Landscape Industries, and the Association of Professional Landscapers. Maitannehunt.com





Islands of planting that includes *Artemisia* 'Powys Castle', *Helenium* 'Moorheim Beauty', *Pittosporum* 'Silver Ball', euphorbia and *Salvia officinalis* 'Purpurascens' adds colour and a biodiverse dynamism to the gravel floor that has replaced an indifferent lawn. Views of the pastoral nature reserve were created by removing a laurel hedge.

WHO'S WHO

Contractor The Garden Builders, gardenbuilders.co.uk

Tree surgeon Tim George, timgeorgetrees.co.uk

NURSERIES

Majestic Trees, majestictrees.co.uk

Europlants, europlants.net

Deepdale Trees, deepdale-trees.co.uk

Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens, bethchatto.co.uk

Sutton Seeds, suttons.co.uk

Brookside Nursery, brooksidenursery.co.uk

Pictorial Meadows, pictorialmeadows.co.uk

Farnham Common Nurseries, fcn.co.uk

Best4hedging, best4hedging.co.uk

Petrichor Bulbs Specialist, bulbspecialists.co.uk

Claire Austin Hardy Plants, claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk

Provender Nurseries, provendernurseries.co.uk

David Austin Roses, davidaustrinroses.co.uk

Larch Cottage Nursery, larchcottage.co.uk

ACCESSORIES

Pots The Pot Co., thepotco.com

Furniture Fermob, fermob.com/en



views of the nature reserve, and the lawn beneath the existing mature oak tree that stands at the far end of it has been threaded with bluebells, to further link the space with the rural scene beyond. Closer to the house, the lawn has been replaced by gravel and dotted with islands of organically shaped planting beds.

'In discussion with my client, I explained how replacing an indifferent lawn with gravel and colourful, fragrant and pollinator-attracting plants would eliminate the need for mowing, reduce maintenance, and increase diversity and sustainability,' says Maitanne. 'Water usage would also be significantly lower and could be switched to benefit the perennials and shrubs in the beds.'

To complement the red brick of the house, she used coral- pink- and red-coloured flowers or foliage plants, with a few rust tones alongside silver and green foliage plants to lower the intensity of *Helenium* 'Moorheim Beauty' and other such summer dazzlers.

At the front of the house, gravel now flows across the full width of the space and as a nod to the house's mock Tudor style, the layout resembles a parterre garden, with a slatted bench at one end provided for moments of quiet contemplation. Eight square planting beds, four on either side of the path, are edged with Corten steel and each is planted with a large topiaried pyramid or baubled column of *Taxus baccata*, which rises above perennials – the cosmos and geranium noted on Maitanne's planting plan were used as a temporary planting before being replaced the following year by *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine', *Achillea* 'Walther Funcke' and *Helianthemum* 'Wisley Pink'. *Fragaria vesca* 'Mara de Bois' are another Tudor-inspired touch, while five *Malus x robusta* 'Red Sentinel' imbue the space with seasonal flowers, foliage and fruit.

On the east side of the house, spring colour from hellebores and fragrance from *Sarcococca hookeriana* 'Winter Gem' give life to the shady turf garden there, while *Astrantia* 'Hadsphen Blood' and *Digitalis parviflora* 'Milk Chocolate' provide summer interest.

By June 2021, six months after going on site, the garden was complete. 'It's been transformed from a car park into a quirky mock Tudor gravel garden, with planting that is richly diverse and has waves of colour throughout the year,' says Maitanne. 'There is a phase two – in 2024, we're going to make a new entrance so we can do further work in front of the coach house...'

In the meantime, however, what was a blank, suburban canvas has been imbued with a semi-formal, bright and beautiful spirit. ○