

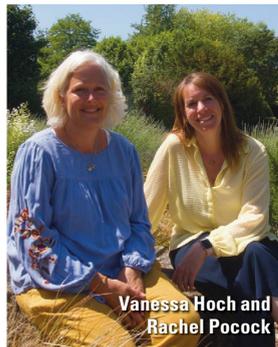
INDUSTRY ZONE

Compiled by Louise Curley

Education & career advice plus the latest on SGD Members and projects



VaRa transformed this steeply sloping site



Vanessa Hoch and Rachel Pocock

MEMBER PROFILE

VARA GARDEN DESIGN

Vanessa Hoch and Rachel Pocock, both Pre-Registered SGD Members, run Hertfordshire-based design practice VaRa Garden Design

Do you work alone or as part of a team?

Our design practice is very much a partnership duo. We also have a wider 'team' of our go-to contractors, specialists and suppliers, depending on the project's requirements and location.

What is your style?

We try to be sympathetic to the space and like all our gardens to have a feeling of warmth and be inviting. We like to zone spaces and use planting and materials for texture, year-round interest and colour; keeping a limited palette helps bring cohesion to our designs.

What projects do you work on?

Mainly residential projects in Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex and north London, but we have done a project as far as the Isle of Wight. We have recently been commissioned for some commercial work, and lately have been asked for lots of planting redesigns. Although we like designing end-to-end, we do love the instant hit of planting, leaving a client with a transformed space in just a few days.

Which completed projects are you most proud of?

A sloping garden, completed last year, was a challenge to say the least. It now looks fantastic: no lawn, lots of planting, an amazing sculpture by Jill Clarke, a bespoke water feature and lots of lovely routes and spaces for our clients to explore. Generally, a project is a success when our client keeps in touch about the development of the garden and we can re-visit and enjoy it with them.

What are some of the challenges you face as a designer?

Getting clients to understand the added value of involving us as designers for the whole process, to ensure the design retains integrity from beginning to end.

What are you working on at the moment?

Finalising a garden for the charity Greenfingers to be built at Rainbows Children's Hospice in the Midlands. Our residential projects include a large rural garden for a brand new architect-designed house in Hertfordshire.

What software do you use?

We have dabbled in SketchUp, but we really enjoy the process of hand drawing designs, and our clients seem to appreciate it. If needed, we call on CAD technicians.

How do you envisage your career developing in the next five years?

First thing on the list is another show garden, this time at RHS Chelsea, and we'd also like to complete adjudication to become Registered SGD Members.

How do you use social media?

Facebook and blogs have been a great way of sharing what we do. Vanessa is the Tweeter and Rachel, the Instagrammer. We both use Pinterest to help communicate moods and concepts.

What's your go-to design book?

The Garden Source book is just great for dipping into for inspiration on styles and moods for a client. The latest book purchase was *New Nordic Gardens* by Annika Zetterman.

varagardendesign.co.uk

INFO

Would you like to be profiled in the GDJ?

Get in touch and tell us what makes your practice, course or work worth shouting about. Email: gdj@jamespembrokemedia.co.uk

INFO

SEE YOUR WORK
IN THE GDJ

Have you worked on a community, charity, public, commercial, health sector, school, private or show garden project that deserves to appear in these pages? Send a short summary and high-resolution photographs for consideration to gdj@jamespembroke.com.



Photo: Peter Prior



Photo: Matthew Thomas

Sargeant aimed to design a space for newlyweds to create their own stories



Photo: Maria Seard

MEMBER PROJECT FIELD OF DREAMS

Juliet Sargeant FSGD took on the challenge of creating the gardens for a wedding venue in Sussex

A bride in tears was not what I was aiming for; usually my clients are thrilled and excited as they watch the garden unfold, but Field Place was a different kind of project. We had the benefit of a fabulous client, in the management team of the 18th-century wedding venue; their brief was clear and their commitment total.

However, Field Place Manor House, although run by an independent organisation, is owned by the local council. The inevitable hoop-jumping took many months and by the start of the build in October, we were already behind schedule. The deadline was their annual wedding fayre in March, where they take the majority of their bookings; 'easy' we thought, until the rains heralded the wettest winter on record. It was when the site was under water that the bride-to-be decided to check out our progress.

What I love about designing private gardens is the combination

of detective work and psychology involved in getting to know the clients, in order to design spaces that 'fit' with the way that they relate, and want to relate, to nature and the landscape.

A public space is different; even with open consultations, a certain amount of creative 'filling in of gaps' is required. I find it useful to imagine some 'typical' clients who may visit the garden, but it is also an opportunity for me to design what I would love to see in that space.

Field Place is a listed site with a small Georgian manor house and barns. So, as with all my projects, I started with research. I was very excited about stories of six miles of Second World War subterranean tunnels under the site; my mind raced with ideas of a 'bunker garden' and pattern-making to delineate the history beneath our feet. However, information remains sealed for 73 years, and I couldn't quite square that Blitz theme with the romance of weddings and 'the

happiest day of my life'.

The wedding manager was very clear about how the garden should function, not only as a venue, but also as a marketing tool, for her to show couples and build the business; photographs are an essential part of that. So, I moved my ideas from telling the story of the site, to creating spaces for people to create their own stories and build their own memories.

The Field Place wedding garden is a typical English garden of rooms, roses and romance. There are large party spaces, small escapes and 'trysting corners'. And of course, there are walks and avenues – perfect photo opportunities for that long walk to a new life.

It warms my heart to see a garden that once was owned by a single landed family enjoyed by hundreds and used to celebrate the coming together of people from different walks of life.

julietsargeant.com

Photo: handspringdesign.co.uk



Specialist woodworkers like Handspring Design can create something unique

SEEK OUT

CREATIVE WOODWORKERS

Adding bespoke wooden elements to a design is a sustainable way to add craftsmanship and character

While traditional fence panels, wooden decking and raised beds are elements of a build that can be tackled by landscape contractors, bespoke wooden furniture, gates, pergolas and fencing require the skills and knowledge of a specialist woodworker. They'll know the best wood for specific jobs, will be able to source the materials and be able to combine practical skills with their creative talents to elevate a design and give a client something truly unique.

Wood is an environmentally friendly material if it's reclaimed or harvested from a sustainably managed source, especially if it's from somewhere local to a project. It also sequesters carbon and has low embodied energy, making it a great choice for designers and clients looking to reduce their carbon footprint.

Coppicing – a sustainable woodland management technique where trees such as willow and hazel are periodically cut down to the ground – was practiced for centuries; it fell out of favour but interest is growing in this craft again. Brother and sister coppicing team Tim and Imogen Radford of Wonderwood Willow create woven fences, transforming what might have otherwise been bland boundaries into work of arts, along with woven sculptures and structures like treehouses. You can search for local coppiced products such as cleft gates and hurdles and wood weavers at coppice-products.co.uk.

Consider the time taken to create bespoke

elements and how this might affect the timeframe of a project – for instance, a willow fence woven on site will take longer compared to installing ready-made fence panels. Wood will become slippery and rot more quickly in areas of high rainfall, so is the local climate suitable? The lifespan of different woods varies, with softwoods rotting more quickly than oak and sweet chestnut, which are long-lasting, home-grown alternatives to imported tropical hardwoods. Wood may need treating, but this can have an environmental impact. Swedish company Sioo has developed an environmentally-friendly, water-based wood preservative using silica.

Chris Nangle, based in Shropshire, makes handmade outdoor furniture including ranges crafted from especially durable greenheart timber, recovered and upcycled from old dock piers, green oak and charred timber – their charred oak seating was commissioned by Heatherwick Studio for the Coal Drops Yard in London.

Sheffield-based Handspring Design use UK grown FSC-approved oak and Douglas fir to create timber structures, sculptures, shelters and seating, using traditional construction methods alongside modern techniques. Their speciality is steam-bending and laminating oak strips to make curvy, organic timber structures, and they provided bespoke woodworking for Phil Hirst MSGD and his gold medal-winning and 2018 Best in Show garden at RHS Chatsworth.

INSIDER INFO

ADJUDICATION NEWS

Esra Parr, Sarah Kay and Joanne Evans have passed the first stage of their adjudication, Jane Finlay has passed her second project, and Oliver Bond and Stefano Marinaz have become Registered Members of the SGD after successfully completing their final projects. Congratulations to them all. sgd.org.uk/join_the_sgd

WALLED KITCHEN GARDENS

The Walled Kitchen Garden Network, set up to study and protect these parts of our social and garden heritage, is holding its annual forum on 3 October at Audley End, Essex, as part of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the restoration of the walled kitchen garden there. To attend, contact lucypitman@virginmedia.com

ROOF GARDENS

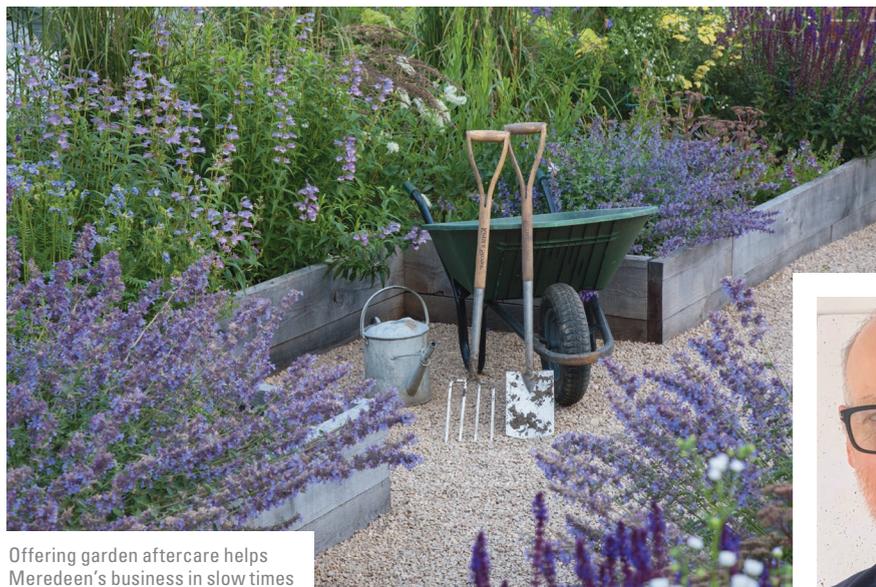
Join John Wyer FSGD for this online SGD CPD lecture on how to build roof gardens. Co-founder of Bowles and Wyer, he has designed and constructed many roof gardens in his career and will cover what to consider, a section of suitable plants and examples of designs. To book a place go to sgd.org.uk/events

LET'S TALK MONEY

Costing and quoting for garden design projects can be complicated. Andrew Wilson FSGD will give you the confidence to discuss budgets and fees and will use examples of gardens of varying scales and costs. Held at RHS Wisley on 27 November. For more information and to book a place go to rhs.org.uk/education-learning

CARBON AUDIT

Northumbria University offers a CPD Carbon Champion course which will help you identify the environmental risks and opportunities within your business and supply chain, including how to measure greenhouse gas emissions and calculate your carbon footprint. One day on site (Newcastle; £275/London; £295); or online over two half days; £275. To book or register interest go to northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/continuing-professional-development-short-courses-specialist-training



Offering garden aftercare helps Meredeen's business in slow times



Clive Meredeen

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT EXPANDING YOUR OFFERING

Pre-Registered Member **Clive Meredeen** discusses how he has diversified his business

I switched careers from an office environment into horticulture and design fairly late in life, and I knew I wanted to spend a good proportion of my time outdoors getting my hands dirty working in people's gardens. Having completed RHS horticulture qualifications before qualifying as a designer and taking a sabbatical to work for a friend with a garden maintenance business, I knew I could offer a blend of maintenance, planting and design.

When I started my business three years ago, I needed to offer a range of services to start earning and keep myself occupied and fulfilled. As I've built up my portfolio of completed gardens, more and more of my work is looking after these gardens. If I manage to create a relationship of trust with a client and demonstrate good plant knowledge in the design, it often follows that they ask me to look after it. These days every client asks for a low maintenance garden, and I certainly don't build in high aftercare requirements, but many clients underestimate the need to nurture a new garden, in the first couple of years in particular.

There is often a long lead-in time creating gardens with a hard landscaping element, so providing maintenance and aftercare helps to maintain a more even cash flow. Sometimes I

carry out a small one-off maintenance project and the clients ask me to redesign and replant a section of their garden.

Design work can lead to aftercare and aftercare can lead to design work. Another benefit of providing aftercare is real world learning: the opportunity to watch and learn how plants develop over time and which practices and techniques help them thrive. There is only so much you can learn about plants from a book or a website.

It's also tremendously fulfilling to build long-term relationships with clients and share their enjoyment of their gardens. This year several previous clients have told me how vital their gardens were to their ability to cope with the COVID-19 lockdown.

I try not to fill my diary with regular aftercare commitments so that I have some agility to respond quickly to new business leads and work on design projects. I've also got involved with local community gardening groups such as Forest Flora, a community interest company set up to promote community gardening in Waltham Forest and promote horticulture as a rewarding career.

clivemeredeengardendesign.co.uk

MEDIA OF THE MONTH

GARDEN MASTERCLASS ONLINE

Garden Masterclass was established by garden designer and educator Annie Guilfoyle and Noel Kingsbury, author of more than 20 garden books, to offer a programme of workshops given by the horticulture industry's finest at garden venues. Then the pandemic struck, and while events were postponed until later in the year, Kingsbury and Guilfoyle, recognising many people found themselves with time on their hands, decided to offer a series of interviews/presentations using Zoom. These sessions were recorded, and there's now over 50 hours of free content (donations are welcome) available on their YouTube channel. There's also a selection of recorded, pay-to-view webinars available on Vimeo.

Guilfoyle and Kingsbury have called on their contacts including designers, head gardeners, editors and photographers, which has resulted in a diverse and fascinating range of topics and speakers, with a good international mix. Some are tasters of the actual workshops, such as Marian Boswall MSGD talking about her approach to sustainable design; others include Dan Pearson MSGD presenting his own garden in Somerset; Zac Tudor, who works for Sheffield City Council, discussing a sustainable planting scheme in the city; and Katy Merrington, cultural gardener at the Hepworth Gallery in Wakefield, giving a heart-warming talk about her first year in the role and how the garden has been important to locals during the pandemic.

This stimulating content is exactly what garden design and horticulture has needed.
gardenmasterclass.org/online