

PLANNING AUTHORITIES

Having recently moved into a new house, garden editor Clare Foster describes how she consulted two garden designers to come up with plans for redesigning her garden

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



For the past year, we've been renovating a Grade II-listed farmhouse in Oxfordshire. The house sits in three quarters of an acre – the perfect size for a working mother of two boys, with a dog and a husband who loves to mow and build, but steers clear of any other form of gardening. Having never commissioned a garden designer before, I wanted to understand the process myself, and sought out two whose designs seemed in line with my own tastes. I had come across Jane Brockbank, a London-based designer, at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and Melissa Jolly, who lives in Oxfordshire, had been introduced by a friend.

THE GARDEN

The garden is a slightly odd shape, having been divided up over the years, with a portion at the front of the house incorporating a drive, an existing vegetable garden with raised beds and a greenhouse, and a good-size back garden of about half an acre, mostly laid to lawn. At the back, a slight slope had been terraced at some point with a low brick wall and crazy paving steps, its proportions matching the original back of the house but not the more recent side extension, so it now looks at odds with the rest of the garden. The end of the garden is marked by a row of tall, overgrown beeches, probably originally planted as a hedge, and there are a few existing trees, including a lovely *Magnolia x soulangeana* and an ancient wisteria. At the front is a small pond, a large ash tree and shrubby planting against a fence, beyond which is a row of three bungalows.

My brief for both designers was for a relaxed, easy-going space that would provide a view from the windows at the back of the house, with some decent planting areas, but leaving enough lawn for the boys to play cricket and football, and somewhere to put up a marquee. Other must-haves included: a cutting garden; screening for the bungalows at the back; space for compost bins; and a solution for the driveway area that would take cars away from the back of the house immediately outside the sitting-room windows.

THE PROCESS

I met each designer at the house to show them round the garden, and then I commissioned a detailed survey for them to work from. They took photographs and asked questions about how I would use the garden. After the initial site analysis, they arranged meetings several weeks later to present their concept plans. Melissa presented her ideas on a computer, using CAD

software to show me the different views around the garden. I found these to be a useful visualising tool – the programme was even able to show me what the view of the garden would be like from my bedroom window. Jane presented her master plan on paper, with mood-board photographs to illustrate her approach; she also makes Plasticine or cardboard models and provides hand drawings for some clients.

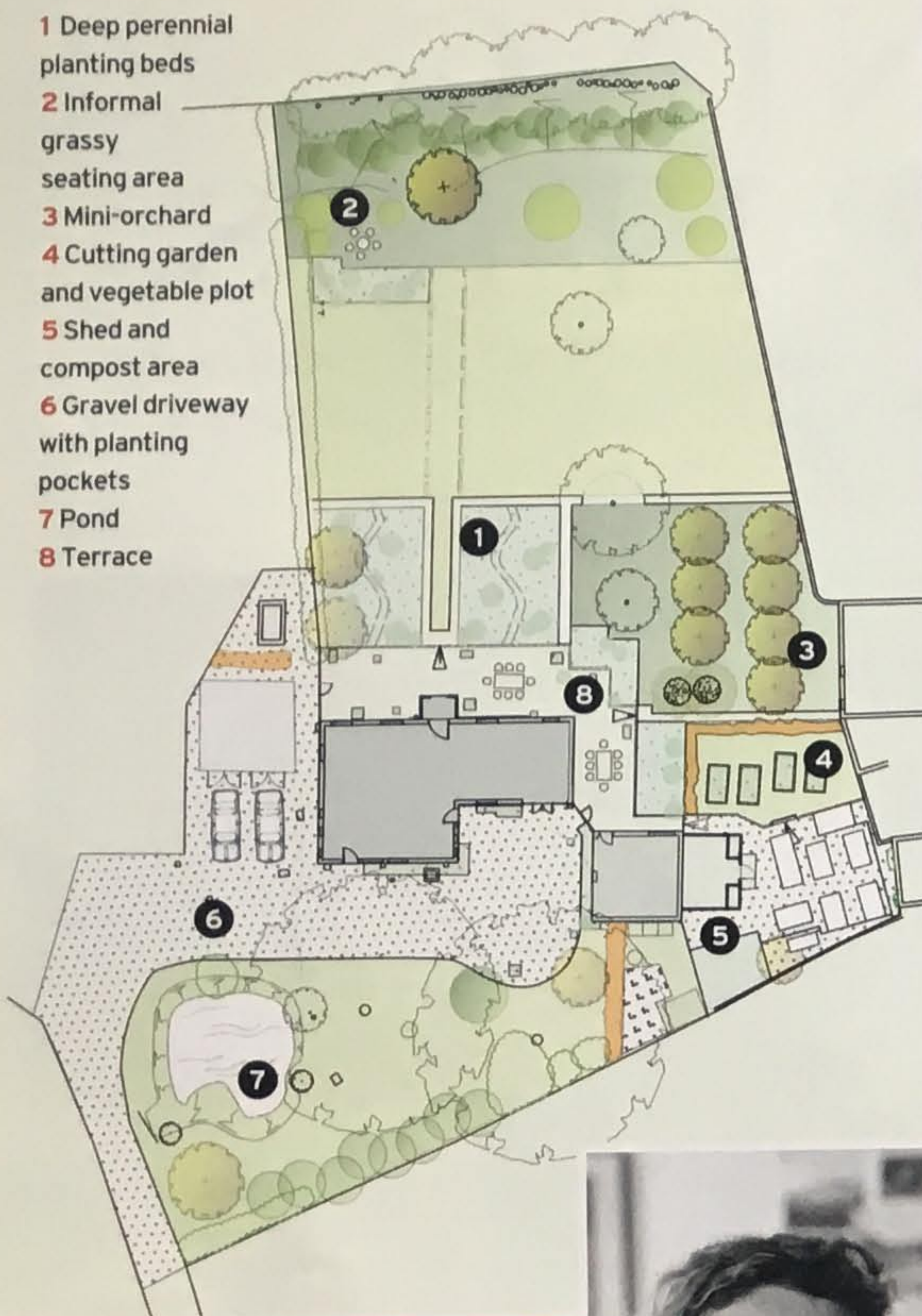
Some people require plans only and most garden designers will offer a master-plan service without the client having to implement the full design, but for those who decide they want to see the project through, the next phase of the design process is to have more detailed plans drawn up, with hard-landscaping specifications and planting schemes. Once these are approved by the client, the construction stage can start. Some larger landscape-design companies may have a landscaping contractor within the business, but if not the designer will suggest a contractor and oversee the process, with the contractor invoicing the client directly for that element of the project. Once the hard landscaping is done, the garden designer sources the plants and returns to oversee or carry out the planting themselves.

CONCLUSION

I was thrilled with both of the plans that the garden designers came up with. Some of their ideas were remarkably similar – both had gently re-landscaped the back garden, removed the existing terrace and designed a new courtyard at the front to replace the car-parking area – but each came up with various different details that I thought would work equally well. My plan now is to live with the garden for a year or so; to work in it, sit in it, watch where the sun falls, see how the family uses it, and then decide what the next step will be. See over for each designer's plans and moodboards.

Clare Foster in the garden she has just inherited on the edge of a South Oxfordshire village

- 1 Deep perennial planting beds
- 2 Informal grassy seating area
- 3 Mini-orchard
- 4 Cutting garden and vegetable plot
- 5 Shed and compost area
- 6 Gravel driveway with planting pockets
- 7 Pond
- 8 Terrace



Jane Brockbank

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Jane comes from a fine-art background. After having children, she worked as a florist, and this led to a two-year course in horticulture and garden design in 1999. She has been designing private gardens ever since, both rural and urban, and has designed gardens at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, including the gold-medal-winning Nature Ascending garden in 2009. 'I don't like to be too prescriptive in my design,' she says. 'I want the layout to be almost neutral, so comfortable that you don't really notice it. I don't like over-designed gardens, and prefer very simple shapes and natural planting.'

JANE'S DESIGN

The design (left) includes a mini orchard where the grass is allowed to grow long, two large planting beds to line up with the back of the house that will provide a tapestry of plants to look down on from the upper windows, and an informal terrace using a mixture of brick, reclaimed stone, cobbles and old roofing tiles, with pockets for planting. Areas are delineated by stone edging to match up with the proportions of the house, while the orchard area and planting beds use the magnolia tree as a pivotal point. A narrow, informal brick path – inspired by the orchard path at Great Dixter – takes you through grass to a seating area at the back of the garden. At the front, she suggests a line of willows to screen the bungalows, and a chestnut lath fence and gate, to reflect the lath-and-plaster walls inside the house. 'The emphasis is on different textures giving a link to the house. It's all about pattern and detail,' she says. Even in this space of less than an acre, her design incorporates lots of different opportunities for planting: perennials and grasses in the full sun behind the house; herbs and gravel planting next to the vegetable garden; woodland-edge planting at the back of the garden; meadow plants in the orchard; and wetland plants around the pond.

KEY PLANTS FOR MAIN BEDS

Campanula persicifolia 'Telham Beauty', *Centaurea macrocephala*, *Euphorbia palustris*, *Ligustrum lucidum*, *Molinia caerulea* 'Heidebraut', *Rosa chinensis* 'Mutabilis', *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna', *Sedum* 'Jose Aubergine', *Senecio polyodon*, and *Salvia lavandulifolia*. ▷



JANE'S MOODBOARD, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: One of her existing gardens with a relaxed mix of perennials and grasses. Orchard trees and meadows. *Campanula persicifolia* 'Telham Beauty'. Chestnut laths. *Rosa chinensis* 'Mutabilis'. *Sedum* 'Jose Aubergine'. *Euphorbia palustris*. Great Dixter's orchard path



ESTIMATED COSTS

Initial meeting and master plan: £3,420. Detailed drawings, planting plans and specification documents: £6,000. Plants: £10,000. Construction: £100,000. Plus hourly fee for overseeing project (approximately eight per cent of total project cost)