

The House & Garden guide to the LEADING GARDEN DESIGNERS OF TODAY

Completing her three-part guide to the UK's most talented garden designers, Clare Foster meets 10 rising stars

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



Our up-and-coming garden designers include (from left) Alice Bowe, James Aldridge, Flora Gathorne-Hardy, Jane Brockbank and Marcus Barnett, who were photographed at the Thames Barrier Park in east London



JAMES ALDRIDGE

There aren't many garden designers who can say they followed their vocation from an early age, but James Aldridge always knew he would work with plants in some form or other. 'As long as I can remember I've been interested in the natural world,' he says. 'I have constantly been drawn to the great wildernesses, and these untouched areas evoke a feeling that influences my work. I'm conscious of the psychological effect of being in a calm, green space.' James studied horticulture at Imperial College London's Wye College, and then worked as a gardener for several years, initially for Rosemary Verey and later at Highgrove, before setting up his own business as a garden-maintenance contractor for top-end garden designers. This was the catalyst that would propel him into design, and he enrolled on a course at the Inchbald School of Design in 1999. After some years' working for other designers—namely Christopher Bradley-Hole and Luciano Giubbilei—James set up his own garden-design business in 2003. Inspired by architects such as John Pawson and Luis Barragán, his work is pared down and simple, with strong architectural structure and precise detailing, contrasting with bold, confident planting finely tuned to each garden's particular environment. Design ethos: 'I want to distil the essence of those wild spaces and combine it with architectural, timeless designs that will bring a sense of calm in an otherwise hectic world.' www.jamesaldrigedesign.com; 020-7252 8232



MARCUS BARNETT

Marcus Barnett spent seven years as an officer in the army before taking the sideways step into garden design. 'It was just something I had to do,' he says. Following his heart, he decided to do a course at the Inchbald School of Design in 2003, and has never looked back. The year after he graduated, he designed a courtyard garden at the Chelsea Flower Show with fellow student Philip Nixon (see overleaf). It won best in its category and the pair went on to create a further two award-winning Chelsea show gardens together, putting themselves firmly in the public eye. Meanwhile, Marcus was already running his own design practice, creating private gardens for clients throughout the country, and today his studio is buzzing with enquiries from as far afield as Saudi Arabia and the Dominican Republic. He is also planning an exciting garden, sponsored by *The Times*, for this year's Chelsea Flower Show. Whether the brief is for a slick urban plot or a traditional country garden, Marcus's work always has a modern edge, influenced by modernist architecture. 'It's a classic case of less is more,' he says. To balance this approach, his planting schemes are soft and naturalistic, with an emphasis on perennials, grasses and clipped evergreens. Design ethos: 'Garden design is all about solving challenges in innovative ways. I want my gardens to inject a sense of curiosity, to make people feel they are going on an adventure.' www.marcusbarnett.com; 020-7736 9761



ALICE BOWE

At the age of 30, Alice Bowe has achieved what most would hope to do in a lifetime. As well as running a successful garden-design business she writes a regular column in *The Times*, has set up a garden-product website, opened a haberdashery shop, and is publishing her first book this spring. She has a fine-art background, but realised that she wasn't a painter and went straight from her degree course at Oxford to she wasn't a painter and went straight from her degree course at Oxford to she study garden design at the Oxford College of Garden Design in 2003. She was soon thrown in at the deep end when asked to come to look at the garden of an acquaintance. Rearranging a flower bed turned into a major redesign, and she teamed up with fellow student Sarah Price (see overleaf),

to carry out the project with aplomb. Since graduating, Alice has taken on projects up and down the country, from a plot for an exciting new-build to a 32-acre estate in Northumberland. Her gardens are diverse in style but all show a passion for colour and plants. 'I started doing an RHS horticulture course but gave up when I realised the best way to learn is by growing things,' she says. Design ethos: 'I take inspiration from all aspects of art, architecture and design, and like to think I paint with plants just as I paint on paper.' www.alicebowelandscapes.com; 0121-224 7390



JANE BROCKBANK

With a background in fine art, Jane began her career as an artist and textile designer. But, struggling in the angst-ridden world of art, she worked for a time in a florists' shop, where she realised that designing gardens might be a way of tying together all the things she was interested in. After retraining, Jane started life as a garden designer in 1999. Initially she designed small urban gardens, being 'passed around lots of nice north-London families', and is now designing a much wider range of gardens both in London and further afield. In 2009 she designed an award-winning Chelsea Flower Show garden in collaboration with Angus Thompson (see overleaf). Current projects include the development of a 200-acre estate in Cornwall, and a new collaborative venture with Paul and Pauline McBride of Sussex Prairies. Jane's work is characterised by subtle yet dynamic planting within a modern aesthetic. She focuses on naturalistic planting combinations, with an emphasis on how plants inter-relate in nature. 'I like my planting schemes to look as if they've just blown

I want my gardens to inject a sense of curiosity'

MARCUS BARNETT

in from the countryside,' she says. She also has a strong commitment to environmentally considerate design, using local and recyclable materials, and local nurseries selling British-grown stock. Design ethos: 'What I'm trying to do is turn up the volume on nature, taking the inherent qualities of a site and intensifying them.' www.janebrockbank.com; 07944-345272



FLORA GATHORNE-HARDY

Flora Gathorne-Hardy specialises in community-based projects and takes an ecological approach to design. Having studied geography and urban design at Cambridge, Flora completed a diploma in landscape design at the University of Central England, before establishing her company, Topio, in 2000. Working with collaborator Miche Fabre Lewin, she offers a landscape-design practice that, she says, 'bridges the sciences and the arts, using creative research and communication skills to help develop highly sensitive and imaginative designs'. Current work includes the wooded landscape around a new Maggie's Centre in Oxford, where she is working with local communities to ensure that the planting and management of the site supports the ecology of the land and people's access to the wider area, and an involvement in a project dedicated to 'greening the Romford ring road'. Central to Flora's approach is the belief that sustainable design stems from working with people as well as plants. 'My passion is to help create spaces where people can connect with nature and themselves, and this means having conversations with the people who use the space,' she says. Her inspiration comes from Geoffrey Jellicoe's seminal book *The Landscape of Man*, which explores the history of man's intervention with the landscape. Design ethos: 'Topio celebrates the art of place and the life of plants, and above all people's relationship with the land.' www.topio.co.uk; 01865-512255