

# “The garden is the gin to our tonic!”

Seb Cabot and Eoin Smith’s new easy-breezy **ALWAYS-GUEST-READY** plot is a social butterfly’s dream

## GARDEN makeover

BEFORE

Little more than a bare square of lawn, the garden brought nothing to the outdoor party!

Seb, Eoin and George now have the perfect space for garden get-togethers

### OUR GARDEN PLAN

**LOCATION** Wilmslow, Cheshire  
**LOOK** Softened geometrical  
**SITE Size** 11m x 17m  
**Faces** South east **Soil** Sandy loam

#### OUR BUDGET

Garden design **£5,000** Gravel **£1,650**  
 Gabions & stones **£3,909** Raised beds & sunken area **£4,768** Turf **£1,144**  
 Fertiliser & mulch **£908** Plants & trees **£11,916** Cabling & lights **£8,253**  
 Porcelain paving **£10,120** Pergola **£6,600** Fence, gate & trellis **£5,780**  
 Furniture **£1,510** Contingency **£4,167**  
**TOTAL: £73,976 inc VAT**

#### HOW LONG IT TOOK

Initial tidy up & groundwork **2 weeks**  
 Patio & raised bed **2 weeks** Pergola & electrics **1 week** Soft landscaping turfing & planting **1 week**  
 Gabions **4 days** Lighting **1 week**  
**TOTAL: 10 WEEKS**

Want to grow knockout plants too? Turn to p38

Artemisia ‘Powis Castle’

Hidden away behind a modest former council house in suburban Wilmslow, this chic designer garden is a sight to behold. It’s hard to believe it was once an empty square of lawn, overlooked on all sides. “The previous owners did a great job of renovating the interior and bringing it out of the 1980s, but they hadn’t touched the garden,” says owner Seb Cabot. “It was a

square patch of lawn with a fence around it, and a small patio of wobbly flagstones.” Seb moved here with his partner Eoin Smith, and dachshund George, in May 2021. “We wanted to use the garden for socialising and entertaining, relaxing and pottering, and to grow our own fruit and veg,” says Seb. “We didn’t have a lot of space where we lived before in Manchester, so we wanted to

create our own oasis, enjoy the space and improve the planting. We’re very sociable too. Hospitality has always been a cornerstone of our day-to-day existence, so we wanted space to indulge that.” With little to inspire them in the garden, it was hard to know where to start. “We wanted to improve the feel and flow of the space, but we’re not ones for getting bogged down in the detail,” admits Seb.

“We decided to hire a designer to help, so did a Google search and came across David Keegan of DK Garden Design (dkgardendesign.co.uk). We were so excited when he agreed to work with us. He made us feel comfortable, and that everything was under control. You need to make sure your designer understands you and what you want to achieve. It’s a big investment. David ticked every box.”

FEATURE: MELANIE WHITEHOUSE  
 PHOTOS: DK GARDEN DESIGN



SMART IDEAS TO STEAL

\* BRING IN THE GABIONS to create a sculptural element, as well as structure.

\* FASHION A FOCAL POINT with a magnolia tree on the horizon.

\* ADD SOFTNESS and movement with tall straight feathery grasses.

IN GOOD COMPANY

Seb and Eoin's first meeting with David was an informal chat over a cuppa. "David came round to get to know us and discuss what we wanted, our likes and dislikes, including colours, textures, finishes and materials," says Seb. "I told him how much

**CAREFREE** calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster' grasses dance in the breeze like no-one's watching.



I liked geometric design and we gave him a tour of our very boring grass square."

David still remembers the broken flagstones, uneven steps and raggedy lawn. "A blank canvas is a positive thing though," he explains. "I'd rather start from scratch than have elements that the owners have inherited and want to keep."

The idea was to create a series of pocket gardens, starting with the pergola terrace surrounded by soft planting, then a secret picnic lawn screened by gabions – wire cages filled with large stones – and more planting. "I wanted to keep the central lawn, so it future-proofs the garden as a family-friendly space if Seb and Eoin ever want to sell," says David. "And, because they wanted to grow veg too, we created an allotment area, screened using gabions filled with stones. Finally, there's a secluded gravel area that catches the evening sun, now known as 'The Snug.'"

Previously, the garden was very open and overlooked, but the new interconnected pocket areas are more enclosed and private. "I think you should feel safe in a garden, surrounded by plants and nature," says David. "To connect the different areas there's a clear run down the centre, with the inset stepping stones across the lawn and a magnolia at the end, framed against a backdrop of pleached hornbeams."

The couple's dachshund George had worn a diagonal path across the lawn from the house to the fence, where he would bark at the dog nextdoor. "I hoped this new design would break that habit," says Seb. "I'm happy to say it's worked; he now uses the garden in a very different way."

David often uses gabions in his designs. "For me they add a sculptural element," he says. "But they need to be filled carefully. The landscapers took as much trouble positioning the stones as they would building a dry-stone wall. It makes such a difference to the final look."

LET THE FUN BE-GIN!

Work began in February 2023, and it took two-and-a-half months to complete. The only major hitch was with the plant delivery. "Ours is a terraced house, so the only entrance to the garden is through a covered alleyway," says Seb. "There's limited parking too – not enough for an articulated lorry. There were loads of large trees and big plants to bring in, but in the end the landscapers – Garden360UK (mygarden360.com) – managed to wheel everything in using trolleys, parking 200m down the road."

When it was finished, in mid-April, Seb and Eoin were delighted. "We love it more every day," says Seb. "We still can't believe it's ours. We love how it's split into different areas but still feels like one garden."

"David has helped us unlock its potential, and it has transformed how we use the space. Before, we'd just dine occasionally on the small patio. Now, we use the whole garden depending on the time of day or the activity, from reading a book or enjoying a G&T, to experimenting in the veg garden. The new patio is our entertaining and social space, and George loves exploring. My favourite bit is the path up the middle, with the gabions either side."

"We love all the new textures created by the plants and the hard landscaping. There's a huge variety of plants that have given the garden more structure, from the *Dicksonia antarctica* tree fern to the pleached hornbeam, grasses and bamboos that move in the wind. The colours are simple whites, purples, oranges and yellows, and it's relatively easy to maintain."

"The patio flagstones and gravel really complement each other in The Snug, with



**POOCH MOOCH** – Dachshund George loves a mingle in the beds and borders.

**THYME TO CHILL?** This herb-scented spot is the perfect sun-trap.



Purple sage



**DOUZE POINTS!** The pergola is a winner, especially for Eurovision parties!

**DRESSED TO IMPRESS** borders are filled with colourful pops of orange, red and yellow heleniums, including 'Moerheim Beauty'.

clumps of fragrant thyme popping up. The fact there's so much going on, yet nothing looks too busy, is a testament to David's design skill."

On warm summer nights, 46 garden lights create the wow factor as dinner

guests arrive. "Before, there was no lighting but now it's absolutely jaw-dropping," says Seb. "With the bifold doors open, we can use the garden as another room. Anyone who steps through the doors immediately wants to go off and explore."

How we did it...



**1 GROUND PREP BEGINS** with removal of the old turf and patio – a blank canvas bonus is having less to debris to deal with!



**2 GO, GO, GABIONS!** Painstakingly filled with stones by the landscapers, they form a screen in front of the allotment garden.



**3 THE PERGOLA BASE,** wooden uprights, timber beds and trellis screening go in, and tiles are laid for the patio. Phew!



**4 STEPPING STONES** are laid in the centre of the garden, with pleached trees added for shade and screening.



**5 RAISED TIMBER BEDS** are built for the allotment garden, and excitement builds as the first fruit trees, veg & herbs go in.



**6 THE PLANTS** are positioned ready for their new homes in the raised beds and the end is in sight for this garden glow-up.