

“We can eat outside all year round!”

Simon and Tanya Marks’ outdated Cheshire garden is now a swish outdoor space with room to entertain in **ALL WEATHERS**

The generously sized back garden of Simon and Tanya Marks’ Edwardian house on the edge of the Derbyshire Peak District was perfectly adequate when the couple moved there back in December 2005. Although overgrown trees made it very dark and the bottom of the garden was prone to water-logging after rainfall, it served its purpose as a home for a trampoline and a plethora of toys for their two young children. But fast-track to 2020 and the couple wanted to make more of this now clutter-free south-facing outside space. “We love outdoor life and like dining outside with friends whenever possible,” says Tanya. “Nothing warms the heart more than good company, fine wine and generous portions of interesting food.”

Having dabbled with a couple of minor garden improvement

schemes, Simon and Tanya were prepared to invest in a major makeover. “We wanted to achieve a seamless outside/inside feel so the garden was an extension of our home, filled with year-round colour and scent. Access was also an important consideration, so it wasn’t a chore to go out to eat or do the gardening, enjoy a cup of tea on a sunny morning or just to sunbathe,” says Tanya.

In search of inspiration, the couple visited stately homes including Chatsworth House to look at the gardens and hunted online for ideas. And when friends mentioned garden designer David Keegan they took a look at his website (dkgardendesign.co.uk) and liked what they saw. “We’d seen some of his projects

locally and, before contacting him, backed this up with online research,” says Tanya.

It wasn’t long before David visited and, while his assessment was an ‘average, dated back garden’, he found lots to like. “I loved that it was south-facing, and there were some nice acers I was determined to keep,” he recalls.

ENTERTAINING HUB

Central to the Marks’ brief was a covered kitchen and dining area, to complement a garden room housing a home office and storage unit that was already under construction. “There was a Wendy house-type shed in one



BEFORE

The tired waterlogged space was dark and lacklustre



AFTER

Fresh, bright and modern, with new lawns and easy-care decking

Aluminium pergola, from £12,990, cbsolarshading.co.uk

Faro Porcelain Paving, £66/m², londonstone.co.uk

SMART IDEAS TO STEAL

- MAKE A MODERN ROCK GARDEN** with cobbles and thyme.
- PLACE LIGHTS** behind screens.
- ADD NEAT EGING** to lawn-side borders.





Designer David's vision was of a space that made best use of all areas

OUR GARDEN PLAN

LOCATION Marple Bridge, Cheshire

THE LOOK Contemporary

SITE Size 275m² Faces South
Soil Clay

OUR BUDGET

Paving **£5,000** Millboard decking **£8,000** Pergola **£13,000**
Corten screens **£2,000**
Kitchen **£3,500** Furniture **£5,000**
Plants & planting **£8,500**
TOTAL: £45,000

HOW LONG IT TOOK

Clearance **1 week** Groundwork prep, including installing electrical cables
2 weeks Installing paving, decking & pergola
2 weeks Soil works, cobbling & planting
1 week
TOTAL: 6 weeks over 6 months



Enhanced Grain Smoked Oak Millboard, from £130.10/m², millboard.co.uk

A TEXTURE TREAT of cobbles, boulders and rusted Corten screens draws you in.



A SLEEK SLICE of granite slabs sweet-talks you into exploring everything the garden has to offer.

Add a splash of winter red to your plot, p57

corner of the garden, which was to be removed and this struck me as the perfect location for the outdoor kitchen and dining area," David says.

But there was lots to do before construction of this sleek entertaining space could begin. "The lawn sloped badly to one side of the garden, which led to flooding, so I decided to lift the entire lawn so it was on one level, and add a drainage layer to the sub-base," explains David. "My main design focus was to make every part of the garden a usable functional destination. Far too often gardens tend to focus on one area at the expense of the entire space."

DETAILED DESIGN

Work began in spring 2021 and, sometimes slowed by the British weather, took six months

from beginning to end. "We learned that you need to go with the flow," says Tanya, "and trust the designer. David is a creative and you have to go with that, otherwise you stifle the creativity."

"We had to hit optimal planting times, which is why the renovation was spread over such a long period. But we were delighted with the finished garden – it is such a sharp contrast to what was there before and takes advantage of all elements of the space. We'd never have thought of using the space this way as we lack that creative flair – and we'd probably never have been brave enough to overhaul it totally without David's input!"

The garden now works day and night, four seasons of the year, thanks to smart lighting. Corten steel screens are double-walled and

contain internal lighting, adding after-dark drama. Hooded lights illuminate the path and an LED striplight integrated into the structure of the pergola ensures that this area is still a functional space on a winter evening. "It's sublime, and can flex from such subtlety to Blackpool Pleasure Beach!" reports Tanya.

And oh! What a pergola! Automated louvres in the roof give shade from the sun as well as shelter from the rain. Sitting underneath this impressive structure is a standalone stainless-steel outdoor kitchen bought from bbq-barn.co.uk, where you can choose which components to include for a bespoke-to-you design. And the table and chairs were sourced from sky-linedesign.co.uk, along with the rest of the garden furniture, for a cohesive look.

FABULOUS UNDERFOOT

But it's perhaps at ground level that this garden is most impressive. Silvery-grey Millboard composite decking and porcelain tiles, inset with black granite, offer a sleek sophisticated look. Silver-grey feature cobbles interplanted with thyme infill oak steps for fabulous texture. And granite paving provides a practical slip-resistant solution on the perimeter pathways.

A decked area directly outside the house offers a comfy seating area within easy reach of the inside. Granite stepping stones provide an easy route across the generous lawn, also planted with scented thyme. And a circular steel sculpture set among Japanese silver grass and evergreen ferns adds a punctuation point.

The Marks now spend far more time outside and their teenagers love their revamped outdoor space. "The new garden connects seamlessly with the house and the neutral grey paving is practical and a lovely contrast to the colourful planting," says Tanya. "We especially like the pergola with its cooking and dining space. There is a lot more wine and adventurous food consumed outside now!"

Cold-season colour

As well as summer blooms, David chose plants that would bring warmth to the garden in autumn and winter.

* **Acer palmatum 'Orange Dream'** grows orange-yellow foliage that matures to lime-green in summer and then turns a striking yellow in autumn.

* Reliable and low-maintenance, **Cornus sanguinea 'Winter Beauty'** has vibrant autumn foliage and orangey-red stems in winter.

* Also known as heavenly bamboo, **Nandina domestica 'Compacta'** boasts brilliant red foliage and berries.

HOW WE DID IT...



THE TURF IS STRIPPED, a drainage layer installed and the area levelled. Construction of the garden room is finished and paths laid.



THE OLD SANDSTONE PAVING outside the back doors of the house is cleared and sleek Millboard decking laid in its place.



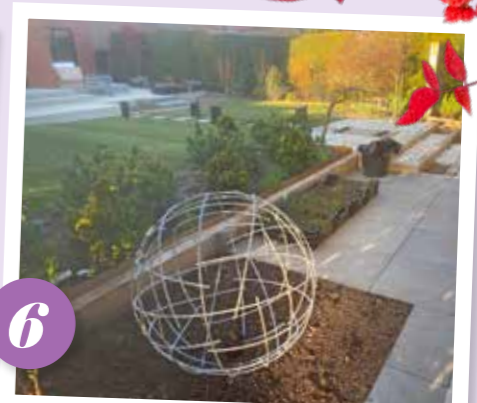
PAVING FOR THE KITCHEN and dining area is added. With the Corten screens already in place, the framework for the steps is built.



MATURE IVY PLANTS are delivered, to be planted behind the pergola and provide screening from neighbours.



THE PLANTING BEGINS. The trees are in, and the thyme between the pavers in progress, but there's lots still to do!



A SCULPTURAL STEEL BALL from aplaceinthegarden.co.uk is secured, the steps filled with cobbles and the lawn turfed.