

The new Hot Garden at RHS Garden Rosemoor in August: monarda, lobelia, helenium and grasses bring an informal riot of colour into the heart of the Formal Garden



CHRIS BAILES

WORK IN PROGRESS

(left to right) With the hard landscaping completed, the former Square Garden presented a blank canvas ready for planting early in 2008; initial establishment and growth was rapid; by late summer the beds were already awash with colour



STEPHEN RECORD



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DAVID SQUIRE

WHATEVER THE GARDENERS' intentions – and often despite their best efforts – the fabric and planting of a garden are essentially impermanent, and will inevitably change over time. Accommodating or adapting to change is a challenge that all gardeners, amateur and professional alike, have to face from time to time. At the turn of the millennium, the team at RHS Garden Rosemoor in Devon was faced with a number of challenges in the four gardens that lie at the heart of the Formal Garden. After more than 15 years, a combination of time, weather and the wear and tear of up to 130,000 visitors a year had all taken their toll. A number of problems required major work to correct, including potentially the complete rebuilding of the gardens in question.

After discussion with the Gardens Advisory Committee, the body that advises RHS Council on the management and maintenance of the Society's four gardens, it was agreed that renovation and, where necessary, rebuilding should go ahead. This presented the opportunity both to upgrade the gardens' hard landscaping, and to update their plantings into a more contemporary style.

The first phase, completed in 2004, was the renovation of the two rose gardens, which were essentially rebuilt and replanted to their original designs. Attention then focused

SQUARE TO HOT

The redevelopment of the Square Garden at RHS Garden Rosemoor has proved to be a great success in a remarkably short period of time. Curator **Christopher Bailes** was in at the start

upon the two colour-themed gardens. Designed originally by Tom Stuart-Smith, their contrasting layouts and planting themes of 'cool' and 'hot' colours had proved successful and popular with visitors since their opening in 1991. The Square Garden was the first to be scrutinised.

Enclosed by hedges 2.4m (almost 8ft) high, the garden slopes appreciably from east to west. The original design consisted of two concentric squares bounded by loose-stone paths, with a central paved seating area. The mixed border planting theme had been refined over the years to focus on vivid (hot) colour combinations. Purple and yellow foliage provided the underlying structure for a variety of hardy and tender perennials with red, orange, yellow and purple flowers, supported by bulbs and annuals. Unlike the two rose gardens, it was decided to bring fresh design ideas into the renovation of the Square Garden.

Out to tender

Submissions were invited from a number of garden designers based in the Southwest. Their brief was to provide a fresh and imaginative landscaped setting to display the distinctive planting theme of the Square Garden. Despite its original name, there was no requirement to be bound by the garden's existing rectilinear layout. The design of both of the colour-themed gardens would continue to be 'plant-led', displaying a wide range of plants in support of the planting theme. The chosen designer would also be expected to work closely with Rosemoor staff in developing and implementing the planting plans.

The successful design was submitted by Exeter-based Roger Webster, whose work can also be seen in the Rill Garden at Witan Street at RHS Garden Wisley. His concept was imaginative: the rectilinear layout of the original garden was conserved, but effectively turned inside-out, with the original central seating area moved to the edge, ►



Officially opened in July 2008, the new layout of the Hot Garden allows visitors to immerse themselves in the riotous planting. Here, in its first summer, it was already performing admirably

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running almost the entire width of the highest section of the site. This turned one of the site's main problems, the fall of around 1.5m (5ft), into a strength. Such a terrace served two purposes: it offered a viewing platform across the garden, cleverly exploiting the lie of the land, and would become in time a shady seating area (see plan, right).

Hard landscaping took place in winter 2007–2008. The terrace is floored with granite paving in contrasting greys, and bounded by an informal wall of local stone. Four large raised planters feature seasonal plantings (orange-flowered, purple-leaved *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Oxford' was particularly noteworthy last summer), below gold-leaved Norway maple *Acer platanoides* Princeton Gold ('Prigo'), which will provide shade. Paths are surfaced with buff resin-bonded gravel, and edged with grey granite setts.

Planting ethos

Roger's design freed-up the entire garden area below the terrace, allowing a fresh approach to planting. Since the Square Garden's first incarnation, planting styles have moved on: naturalistic planting mixing perennials and grasses, now seen in many gardens, was in its infancy in 1990 when the garden was originally designed. The space below the raised terrace, some 18m (59ft) square, provided the ideal opportunity to introduce this style into Rosemoor, and two winding paths through the area allow visitors to get close to the plants.

The effect of the slope to the observer from the terrace was reduced by planting shorter subjects to the east, and taller to the west. Plants of around 30–60cm (1–2ft) predominate by the terrace, gradually rising to around 1.2m (4ft) at the bottom of the slope, making their flowers more visible and the planting more dramatic.

The garden team lost no time in selecting many new plants for the central area. Grasses were chosen for autumn effect from flowers and foliage: reds and purples from *Panicum virgatum* 'Rehbraun' and 'Squaw' are echoed by *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Krater' and 'China' at a higher level. *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *caerulea* 'Heidebraut' also provides strong autumn tints, as does evergreen *Anemanthele*

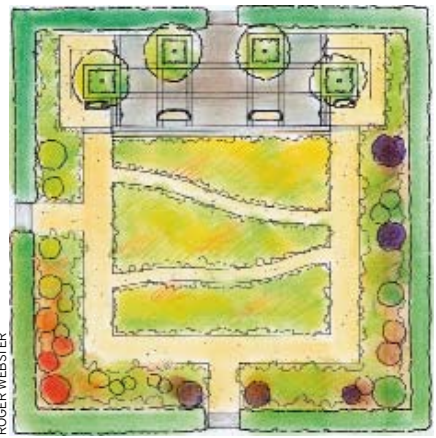
lessoniana. All bring the added benefit of winter structure, the deciduous species cut back only in spring.

New perennials to Rosemoor include warm-yellow *Crococsmia* x *crococsmiflora* 'Coleton Fishacre' (good in combination with *Lobelia* x *speciosa* 'Hadspen Purple'), mildew-resistant *Monarda* 'Gardenview Scarlet', and fiery *Achillea* 'Paprika' (Galaxy Series), all ideal for this style of planting. Exotic-looking ginger relative *Hedychium densiflorum* 'Assam Orange' has been thrown into the mix for its late orange spikes and yellow autumn colour. *Rudbeckia triloba* has proved a real star performer, with masses of bright yellow, black-eyed daisies for weeks.

The original mixed border theme has been retained for the perimeter areas. Unity between the two planting styles was assured by retaining the theme of structural planting of purple and yellow foliage in both, and by repeating plants from the central area in the surrounding border. Some Square Garden stalwarts, such as spring-flowering *Kniphofia* 'Atlanta' and autumn's *K. rooperi*, whose brilliant orange pokers 'book-end' the display, still provide sterling service under the new regime.

Although still in its early days, we are delighted with the initial results of the project. Interest begins with bulbs in April and May, with the perennials peaking from July to November. The imaginative reworking of the hot colour theme has brought a more contemporary planting style to the Formal Garden – hence the new name the Hot Garden, describing what the visitor can expect to see. Rosemoor, in common with the other RHS gardens, seeks to refresh and extend the range of what we have to offer visitors, adding the best of the new to proven performers. ■

Christopher Bailes is Curator of RHS Garden Rosemoor



ROGER WEBSTER

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INVERTED SQUARE

In the former Square Garden, the seating area was in the middle; in Roger Webster's revised design for the new Hot Garden (above), there is a seating terrace at the top of the garden looking down the slope



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EVOLUTION OF AN IDEA (left to right) Initial planting and watering in (April); *Acer platanoides* Princeton Gold ('Prigo') newly planted (May); bursting into golden leaf a few weeks later (June); the sea of late-summer colour interspersed with grasses; tagetes and *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Oxford' against bronze-leaved New Zealand sedge *Carex comans*

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Great Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH; for details, see *RHS Members' Handbook 2009*, pp19–21 or visit: www.rhs.org.uk/rosemoor