

Grand designs

Creating a garden near the sea brings its own unique challenges, so we asked award-winning designer ANDY STURGEON to show us how it should be done

WORDS *Paula McWaters* PHOTOGRAPHS *Jason Ingram*





Andy Sturgeon designed this garden for Katherine Henderson-Bowen, whose Pembrokeshire home Awelon has glorious, uninterrupted views of Manorbier's sandy bay and medieval castle. Five years on, all its best features are still flourishing and Katherine, her son Kal and her B&B guests enjoy making the most of this very special spot.

What is the first thing you should consider?

The fine balance between shelter and keeping the views open. You want to celebrate where you are but if you wish to grow attractive plants, they are going to need some protection.

What is the best way to assess your site?

The prevailing wind is hugely important, so find out where it blows from, how hard and how often. If in doubt, ask resident sailors – they are always experts on the subject. Also, gather

local knowledge by observing what plants are growing well in neighbours' gardens and whether they are in an exposed position or tucked away behind a hedge or fence.

How should you measure your plot?

Start with the house and take it from there. To make sure you know exactly where the key features are on your plan, measure them from at least two different spots on the house. Find out where north is and mark that, too – you need to know where the sun will be.

Where do you start when drawing up a design?

I like to create a real sense of arrival, something that leads people in and draws them from one part of the garden to another. If the way in is not obvious, it can feel uncomfortable. At a B&B like Katherine's, where guests are often arriving for the first



OPPOSITE Katherine Henderson-Bowen's Pembrokeshire home Awelon has uninterrupted views over Manorbier's sandy bay. The contemporary kinetic sculpture is by local artist Ivan Black THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Purple scabious; a raised deck is the perfect way to catch the best views; day lillies (hemerocallis) add a splash of colour; granite setts have been used for the main pathways



time, it is important to be guided naturally and effortlessly towards the front door.

How can you define different paths?

By creating a kind of hierarchy. In Katherine's garden, the main path to the front door is wide and framed by an oak and stainless steel pergola. Subsidiary paths leading off into the garden are narrower and have more plants spilling on to them that you need to push through to explore – that makes them tempting.

What tricks can you use to introduce interest?

One of the best ways to create an element of surprise is to have paths and steps where you can see the beginning but not necessarily the end. That makes the garden more exciting and entices people to explore. In Katherine's garden, we've designed a series of focal points, such as pots and shaped bushes, to draw

people on to the next area, bit by bit. Katherine has added a contemporary kinetic sculpture made by a local artist (*ivanblack.co.uk, 01834 871303*). Its subtle movement in the wind is highly effective and is often commented upon by her guests.

How can you get a water feature to look right?

You have to consider the wind. For example, if the garden is exposed, the water from a fountain or waterfall can blow around too much. Something at a lower level, or in a very sheltered spot, is best. We had to adapt Katherine's spout water feature because the wind was blowing it around. Even experienced designers get caught out sometimes and have to rethink their ideas.

How do you plan seating areas?

Provide choices: a shady spot; one with a great view; one with enough space for a dining table and so on. Put chairs



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT The main path to the front door of the house is framed by an oak and stainless steel pergola; the quirky welcome sign and pebble door knocker; Mediterranean-style planting gives the house a holiday feel; Katherine with her dogs on the beach OPPOSITE A fountain or waterfall needs careful positioning — this spout water feature was placed in a sheltered courtyard, away from the strong coastal winds



||| *Andy's Top tips* |||

- 1 Create planting beds right up against the house walls – it anchors the house in its plot and helps to push seating areas further out into the heart of the garden.
- 2 Use seaside-type elements like driftwood, rope and nautical accessories sparingly to avoid the overall effect looking twee.
- 3 New oak railway sleepers on stacks of slate make simple yet sturdy benches.
- 4 For a budget landscaping material, use shingle.
- 5 Keep some mature shrubs and trees if you can – they provide ready-made shelter and a framework on which to hang your new design.
- 6 Lighting adds a magical dimension to the space, both for summer nights and in winter when looking out on to the garden on dark nights.





in different places around the garden and sit on them to test out where your garden's best spots are. In Katherine's, we made a raised deck to catch the best views and surrounded it with planting so that it didn't feel exposed. When you plan a dining area, make sure it is big enough so that you don't have to squeeze behind chairs to get past.

How do you make the right plant choices?

Again, research what does well locally. Lush palms, such as the Chusan palm *Trachycarpus fortunei* and Mediterranean fan palm *Chamaerops humilis*, give an exotic holiday feel. Plants with thick, waxy leaves, like *Pittosporum tobira*, look good too and have the added advantage of scented flowers. The shrubby spurge *Euphorbia mellifera* has a strong architectural feel and fills a big space. Strap-like leaves move well in the wind. In Katherine's garden, crocosmia, day lilies,

phormium, astelia and agapanthus all fit this description.

What hard landscaping materials should you use?

Coastal light can be very strong, so you may want to avoid very light paving in case it throws off too much glare. In Katherine's garden, we chose black limestone as a good contrast to the white-painted house and to pick up on the dark roof. We teamed it with granite setts for the smaller paths and some decking to vary the pace. Keep things simple for the best effect.

For details of Katherine's B&B Awelon in Manorbier, visit manorbierbedandbreakfast.co.uk or call 01834 871587. For more information on Andy Sturgeon Landscape and Garden Design, go to andysturgeon.com or call 01273 553336.

🌿 [Go to coastmagazine.co.uk](http://go.to/coastmagazine.co.uk) to find more UK gardens. Tell us about your coastal garden at twitter.com/coastmag or facebook.com/coastmagazine



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Deep-blue agapanthus; strappy-leaved plants wave in the breeze; pea-lie flowers of evergreen *Polygala myrtifolia*; crocosmias are showy and easy to grow THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Mexican dasyliirions thrive in coastal gardens; locating the best seating spots around the house is essential; ferns provide interest in a shady spot; a series of framed bushes draws people to the next area