

# At last they've got the message

Garden designers are being involved from the start, says **Pattie Barron**

**R**EAL garden designers who know about plants and care passionately about the environment are, at last, being involved from the start in new housing schemes.

Now we have some well-conceived, naturalistic gardens that enhance our lives, as well as helping to reduce pollution, absorb rainwater, prevent flooding and lessen urban heat. Instead of the same old evergreens, there is a rich diversity of trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs selected not just for their looks, but for their ability to adapt to climate change and attract and nurture wildlife.

### DIFFERENT APPROACH

"Historically, it was landscape architects who were called in for the big developments," says Matthew Wilson, an award-winning garden designer who recently completed the landscaping for new development **Cloudesley House** in Islington.

"Now there's a definite move to employ garden designers," he says. "Developers and contractors aren't always aware of the differences, but they are huge. A landscape architect will specify the balustrades on the building and the lighting in the car park, but it's not a required component of landscape training to know about plants."

"Garden designers like Andy Sturgeon, Dan Pearson and myself are increasingly asked to work on



### LANDSCAPING THE GARDENERS

schemes, and speaking for myself, I don't know about balustrades, but I just need to know a man who does. The result is that we work with landscape architects, collaboratively."

Instead of fitting the landscape afterwards into an allotted space, the greenery is part of the whole concept from the start. Wilson says:

"Cloudesley House is a Victorian school building, and in the middle of the building was an old gym. Initially, a developer would think, 'I can get five flats in there', but this time, the developer said, 'Let's take the roof off and make a contemporary courtyard'. It's very encouraging."

"In the past, it was about landscaping the spaces left over – now, the building is arranged around the landscaping," says Andy



**Green light:** Lillie Square at Earls Court will have one of the largest garden squares in west London

nothing more to do than form a green vista. Now, says Sturgeon: "The challenge is to make something more garden-esque and flowing, but that can still be easily maintained. There are still the evergreen shrubs, but we're making more imaginative choices than the usual hebes and phormiums."

### SUSTAINABLE SPACES

What's in the pipeline is making gardens as well as allotments, both on high as well as at ground level, where residents can flex their green fingers. "And you can't underestimate the value of play space for children," says Sturgeon, who created the rooftop gardens at **Battersea Power Station**, where there are also allotments for residents. "At Lillie Square, there's not only a designated playground, but the whole landscape is 'playable' throughout."

The new way of landscaping London is not about creating jaw-dropping vistas on a panoramic scale, but about making sustainable green spaces that will benefit both residents and the passing public, as well as the broader environment.

Sturgeon sums it up neatly: "Five years ago, when we'd go into a meeting, developers didn't even have the vocabulary, but now they have."

"Finally, city landscaping is more about the horticulture than the paving."

**High point:** the rooftop gardens at Battersea Power Station – residents can also flex their green fingers on the scheme's allotments

Sturgeon, referring to Earls Court's **Lillie Square** development, a former 7.5-acre car park. He has designed one of the largest garden squares in west London, to sit in the heart of the development. More than 50 per cent of the site is devoted to green space – a commendable first.

"We were briefed to make the landscape more meaningful. Now, wherever you are in the development, you're in and among the plants." In the past, landscaping had

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