

# Symmetry & serendipity

A new house and garden have been sensitively superimposed onto the layout of an old kitchen garden near Edinburgh »

Author: Jo Whittingham, freelance garden writer with a regular column in *The Scotsman*.  
Photography: Ray Cox



## Combining old and new

Beyond the curve of the house's wave-like, sedum-covered roof, the geodesic solar dome is hemmed by traditional planting: foxgloves, globe artichoke (*Cynara cardunculus* Scolymus Group), Scotch thistle *Onopordum acanthium* and asparagus. The dome's form echoes the symmetry of the clipped yew-hedge circle at the centre of the walled garden's formal layout, dating from 1830.

**Midsummer eaves scene**

This seating area at the house's southeast corner is sharply framed by the sweeping roofline and black basalt gravel paths, but softened by Lindsay's informal planting. Two *Acer palmatum* 'Emperor 1' (syn. Red Emperor), with generous *Geranium x magnificentum* and *Aquilegia vulgaris* beneath, sing out against the fresh foliage of the old orchard beyond.



**Celtic crossing**

Looking south, the sundial, encircled by yew hedges, stands at the centre of the garden, surrounded by shrub roses such as *Rosa* 'Roseaie de l'Hay' and colourful herbaceous planting including *Papaver orientale*. Each of the enclosing quadrants has a slightly different character: in one, the raised vegetable beds are carefully aligned to support photovoltaic panels; in another, productive beds of perennial vegetables and soft fruit bushes surround the solar dome.



High sandstone walls line Inveresk village's main street, typically concealing grand 17th- and 18th-century houses, built as country retreats by the elite of nearby Edinburgh 250 years ago or more. It is something of a surprise, then, to turn through an imposing gateway in this historic East Lothian village and find an unmistakably 21st-century house melding effortlessly into the vibrant walled garden surrounding it.

The Green House at Eskhill is the creation of Robin and Lindsay Burley, who recall standing in the walled kitchen garden of neighbouring Eskhill House (which was then their home) in 2008. 'We were wondering what to do with the large, dilapidated 19th-century lean-to glasshouse that stood against the garden's south-facing wall,' says Lindsay. 'Then we thought – this would be the perfect place to build a house.' So that is exactly what they did.

With a professional background running a housing association, Robin had extensive experience of modern sustainable design, and this project provided him with the perfect opportunity to put his own interests and ideas into practice. On this sensitive plot it was essential to minimise the house's visual

impact on the garden, so the front elevation was glazed to echo the appearance of the old glasshouse, and the wave-shaped roof, sweeping down towards the borders, was clothed in sedum to blend in with the planting and surrounding mature trees.

**Treading sensitively**

While the house was to be extremely modern in design, the walled kitchen garden contained many charming old features that the Burleys were keen to retain. In the garden's northwest corner, the 18th-century dovecot – converted into a two-storey summerhouse in 1908 – required extensive renovation before it became a wonderful, contrasting addition to the contemporary house.

Key to the whole design was the preservation of the garden's four principal paths, dating from 1830, which divide the plot into quadrants and intersect at its centre, still marked with the original sundial. They give the garden a clear, symmetrical layout, and have also been ingeniously used to link the interior of the house with its outdoor surroundings.

Robin was keen to have the line of the Caithness flagstone paths continuing through >>

**Energy and exuberance**

Densely packed beds deliver a powerful hit of bright colour. Buddleia foliage forms a silver-grey backdrop for yellow *Hemerocallis lilioasphodelus*, *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation', and rich blue geraniums. Bearded iris, including pure white *Iris* 'Cliffs of Dover', spread rapidly in the sandy soil and are regularly lifted, divided and replanted throughout the beds.



**Green House at Eskhill**

15a Inveresk Village, Musselburgh EH21 7TD; 01312 714000; lindsay@eskill.com  
 Size: 0.4ha (1 acre).  
 Soil: sandy.

Age: completed 2016 but based on 1830 layout.

Aspect: faces southwest.

Key season: late spring/early summer.

Summary: reinvention of a walled kitchen garden, contrasting original features with a modern, eco-friendly design.

Open: 17 June 2–5pm and by arrangement 1 July–31 August for Scotland's Garden Scheme (scotlandsgardens.org).

Access: details to appear here



the flooring of the house,' Lindsay says. This, combined with the expanse of garden-facing glazing, produces a tangible connection between indoors and out, which creates a wonderful relaxing atmosphere.

A ground source heat pump was installed to provide underfloor heating for the stone floors, but as Robin recalls, 'In order to lay 750m (820yds) of pipes, we had to almost tear the garden apart before putting it back together again.' The original paths were lifted, pipework laid and the soil level raised, before re-laying them in Caithness flagstone paving.

#### Conserving the past

They took great care to keep the circular yew hedges and restore other old elements of the garden, and it is this respect for the garden's heritage, combined with thoughtful new design, that allows the clean lines of the contemporary features to work so well within the original formal layout. The bold, geodesic solar dome mirrors both the central yew circle and the garden's symmetrical design, while the geometric forms of the raised vegetable beds, oriented east-west to angle the photovoltaic cells that they support towards the sun, recall the earlier kitchen garden beds. All the stone from the garden was reclaimed and used to lay new paved surfaces and create a pond.

All these elements are brought together by Lindsay's colourful, informal planting, which is loosely symmetrical in the beds close to the house. The planting consists of a playful mix of bulbs, herbaceous perennials, shrubs, fruit and vegetables, at its most exuberant in early summer. 'A lot of it is serendipity,' she says. 'It's where things happen to have fallen or self-seeded.'

In what has been a kitchen garden, keeping the plot productive is important. Apricot, pear and morello cherry trees are trained against the walls; plentiful soft fruit, as well as perennial vegetables such as asparagus and rhubarb, fill the beds around the solar dome. Planting for wildlife is also important to Lindsay, and she packs the beds with foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*), ox-eye daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and other nectar-rich flowers for pollinating insects, as well as keeping the garden pesticide-free.

Robin and Lindsay continue to add to the garden's planting, along with developing techniques to maintain the sedum roof. Comfortable in their new surroundings, they have achieved their aim: to create a place that is, in Lindsay's words, 'sustainable for oneself, as well as the environment.' ●

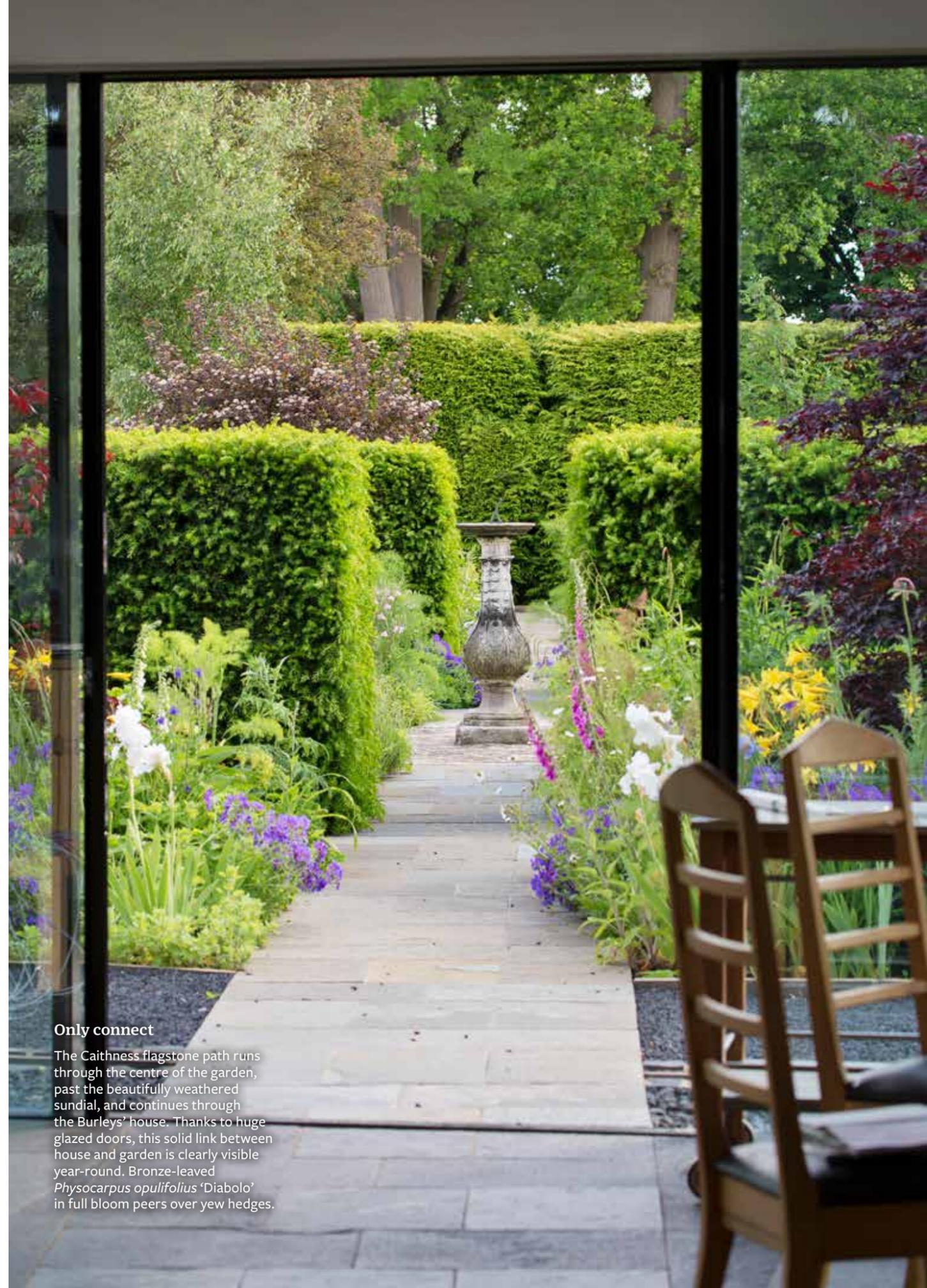
#### Solar eclipse

Beside the deep magenta shuttlecocks of plume thistle *Cirsium rivulare* 'Atropurpureum', the architectural foliage of tall herbaceous plants such as *Onopordum acanthium* (Scotch thistle) and *Macleaya cordata* (plume poppy) fills the borders alongside the central path. By high summer they will have almost obscured the solar dome from view.



#### Welling up

Water from Eskhill's well flows from a simple, swan-necked copper pipe into an old stone trough found in the garden. The overflow feeds a rill that Robin designed to run along the full extent of the house's glazed southern aspect and finally into the pond.



#### Only connect

The Caithness flagstone path runs through the centre of the garden, past the beautifully weathered sundial, and continues through the Burleys' house. Thanks to huge glazed doors, this solid link between house and garden is clearly visible year-round. Bronze-leaved *Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Diabolo' in full bloom peers over yew hedges.