



IMAGE MARTIN HASWELL

Super Natural

A natural swimming pool is the focal point in Fleur James' striking, contemporary Cotswold garden

WORDS **VERONICA PEERLESS**
PHOTOGRAPHS **IAN THWAITES**

When Fleur James moved into her newly built house, with stunning views over the Cotswolds, there was no garden to speak of – just a small terrace, a very steep, grassy slope and a paddock. On this unlikely site, Fleur wanted a beautiful garden in which she could relax. And what she desired most of all was a swimming pool.

Fleur also wanted to be able to 'chase the sun' around the house, from where it rose on the east terrace in the morning to a sunset-watching spot in the evening. In addition, she wanted plenty of colourful, year-round planting that would need little maintenance. "Although I enjoy being in gardens, I've got no desire to get digging," she admits.

Fleur already knew the man for the job: Stuart Gibbs, who had in the past worked on her previous garden nearby. He had a challenge ahead of him: not only was the site rather tricky, but it was within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This meant that the local authority would need to approve any plans for the garden. "Normally, the planning process takes six to eight weeks," says Stuart. "In this case it took about nine months and three proposals."

Stuart's design for the garden continued the strong architectural form of the house, echoing the

materials and shapes used. The round, edged lawn near the pool and retaining walls of Cotswold stone echo the bower in the middle of the house. Stuart terraced the slope, creating three different levels and a good number of flat, usable spaces, including the all-important 'gin-and-tonic terrace' for the evening. The spaces are joined by a spine of paths and steps.

Stuart suggested to Fleur that a natural swimming pool would suit the site perfectly, and she was immediately sold on the idea. A company was chosen and the pool dug, with a very strong retaining wall. Initially, however, the finished result was a disaster. "It just didn't work," says Fleur. "It was slimy, green and unpleasant. There was no proper follow up or help from the company, I couldn't swim in it and it looked ghastly. I was on the verge of getting a regular swimming pool put in."

Luckily, a different company, Poolscape, was able to remedy the situation. "They reworked it," explains Stuart. "They had to take out the previous system and install their own. Now, it is gin clear and works perfectly." "They took it from disaster to fabulous – it was miraculous," says Fleur.

"As soon as the weather warms up, I get up, have a coffee and pop in," she adds. "My grown-up children and their friends also love it. It is close enough to the

Below Selected rushes and reeds in half of the swimming pond filter water and help to keep it crystal clear, while *Perovskia* and *Lythrum* provide plenty of colour. **Below right** Cotswold stone has been used for hard landscaping the stairs and terraces, tying the house and garden together.



house to be used frequently – I didn't want it to be too far away. The water is not heated, but a cheap wetsuit from the supermarket works wonders." Fleur does plan to heat the pool this year, however.

The pool is surrounded by naturalistic planting, which is echoed throughout the garden. The local authority requested use of native plants, so Stuart included strips of wild flowers, native hedging as screening and cultivated forms of wild plants, as well as ornamental plants in cool and hot colours and roses, which Fleur loves.

Fleur is thrilled with the whole garden, but her favourite part is, of course, the pool. "I'm very pleased with it. I love the sound of water, and how it changes depending on the season. A lot of wildlife darts in and out, and birds pop in for a drink."

"When ordinary pools aren't in use, they sit in the garden like a dalek," adds Stuart. "This pool looks relaxed and settled, and connects with the garden and the landscape beyond."

Above With its maroon leaves, a backdrop of *Physocarpus* helps *Echinops* and *Rudbeckia* stand out.

Above right Planting in cooler colours features in the area around the pool, here repeated lavender bushes.



FACT FILE

■ **Garden design** by Stuart Gibbs, Cotswold Gardeners. Tel: 01452 728837; cotsworldgardeners.co.uk

■ **Garden** built by Graduate Gardeners. Tel: 01452 770273; graduategardeners.co.uk

■ **Swimming pond** by Poolscape. Tel: 07974 390452; poolscape.co.uk

■ **Perennial seed mix** supplied by Emorsgate Seeds. Tel: 01553 829028; wildseed.co.uk

■ **Stone** for the dry stone wall supplied by JA Bullock – Natural Stone Supplies. Tel: 01242 602085; naturalstonesupplies.org

■ **Stone pavers** supplied by Westminster Stone. Tel: 01978 710685; westminsterstone.com

■ **Daybed** from Ocean Designs. Tel: 01159 410633; ocean-designs.co.uk



Design Details

Swimming pond

Poolscape, which rectified the pool, uses the Biotop system developed in Europe 30 years ago. Poolscape's Peter Miles explains that natural swimming pools are about reducing phosphate levels in the water, keeping algae at bay and the water clear. This is done using a system of plants, filters, pumps and skimmers. Half the pool is for swimming; the other half comprises regeneration zones, where impurities and excess nutrients are removed by plants and micro-organisms. One zone is planted with native reeds and rushes, the other with waterlilies. A pump house and skimmer are submerged beneath decking.

The pool needs little attention – an automatic device cleans the bottom of the pool – and Peter visits around four times a year to undertake essential maintenance on it.

Hard landscaping

Stuart wanted to reflect the materials used in the house, and the surrounding area. He used local Cotswold stone for the retaining walls and Indian sandstone, and sets and cobbles on the terraces.

Planting

Around the pool, the planting has a cool theme and includes *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle', *Hosta* 'Devon Green' and *Hosta undulata*, *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Morning Light', *Verbena bonariensis*, *Perovskia* 'Blue Spire,' and *Rosa* 'Little White Pet'. In the

Above Water lilies in one of the pond's regeneration zones.

Above right The bench takes in the beautiful view from one side, and visiting pond wildlife on the other.

Below A combination of Cotswold stone and Indian sandstone blends in well with the house.

main garden, planting employs warmer colours and includes *Hemerocallis*, *Helenium* 'Kanaria', *Rudbeckia fulgida*, *Rosa* 'Amber Queen', *Monarda* 'Squaw', *Phygelius* (cape fuchsia), *Sedum spectabile* 'Matrona', and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus'.

Screening

The garden is screened and sheltered by a bank of native planting, which includes hazel, field maple, the wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana*), holly and the guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*). Hedges within the garden are hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*).

Wildflower strips

The soil in the garden is stony clay brash, ideal for growing wild flowers that prefer a poor soil. Stuart sowed a perennial seed mix that includes meadow buttercup and ox-eye daisies. These areas are strimmed twice a year, in July and October.

Stone bench

The bench was handcarved for Fleur by Peter Miles from Poolscape. "On one side, there is the beautiful view [of the garden]. On the other you can enjoy the 26 different types of dragonfly and great crested newts that visit the pool," he says. ■

