

## ELEMENTS OF GARDEN DESIGN



## GATES AND ENTRANCES

A GARDEN ENTRANCE SHOULD PROVIDE VISITORS WITH A SENSE OF ANTICIPATION AND CURIOSITY, WITHOUT COMPROMISING SECURITY. IN HIS CONTINUING SERIES, CLEVE WEST ADVISES ON HOW BEST TO MAKE AN ENTRANCE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLEVE WEST AND DEREK ST ROMAINE



First impressions are important. Even if you can't recall all the details of a house or garden you've visited, it's likely you will remember its entrance. But the entrance, especially to front gardens, is one element where logistics often override aesthetics. While it may be the most stunning entrance in the world, if it's difficult to find or access the intended effect can be lost.

The entrance therefore needs to be as simple and practical as possible, with ample space to wait comfortably at the front

**TOP: GENEROUS GATES CREATE A FOCAL POINT AT WYKEN HALL. LEFT: A SIMPLE, CLEARLY DEFINED ENTRANCE WELCOMES VISITORS TO THE HOUSE.**

door. A porch or shelter from the elements is even better.

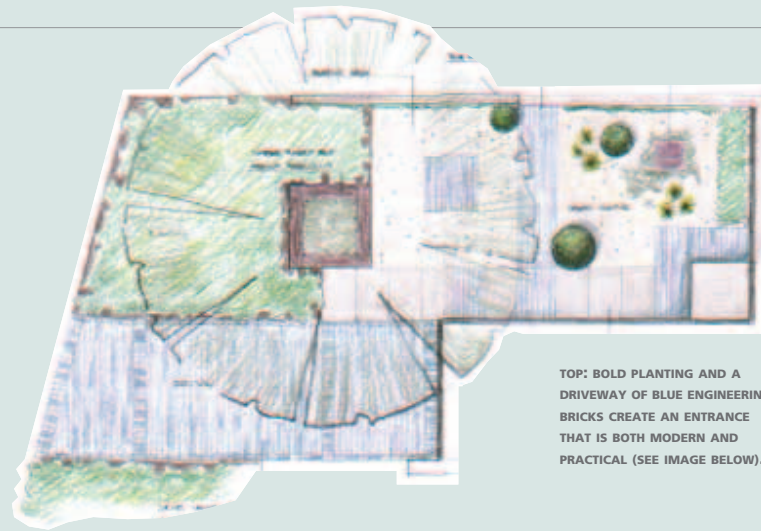
Scale is important too – the larger the house the more generous you can be with driveways and paths, but don't overdo it or guests will flounder on a huge expanse, not knowing where to go. A contained entrance at a large house engenders a sense of intimacy and security.

Unfortunately, the world's ever-increasing vehicle population means that many urban front gardens are being turned into carports, removing any sense of a garden. A sensitive use of materials and clever use of the space available for limited planting can minimise the damage. If there is room for a garage don't forget the house is more important. Its design may contrast or complement the

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THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A PORCH PROVIDES SHELTER FROM THE ELEMENTS. 'GREENING' A CARPORT WITH *WISTERIA SINENSIS* REDUCES ITS VISUAL IMPACT. STONES, POTS AND A STATUE HINT AT THE STYLE OF GARDEN BEYOND. AN ORNATE CORN-MOTIF GATE AT WYKEN HALL ALLOWS A VIEW INTO THE GARDEN. VISITORS CAN BE ENTICED TO EXPLORE WHAT'S BEHIND A GATE.



TOP: BOLD PLANTING AND A DRIVEWAY OF BLUE ENGINEERING BRICKS CREATE AN ENTRANCE THAT IS BOTH MODERN AND PRACTICAL (SEE IMAGE BELOW).

architecture of the house but it's important it doesn't dominate. 'Greening' walls with climbing plants is a useful way of marrying different materials, toning down colours and reducing the visual bulk of new buildings.

Where there is space for planting, keep the design simple to allow a direct route to the front door. Fussy obstacles and

ornaments that have to be circumnavigated will delay and irritate. These should be saved for the back garden where there is time to linger and explore. That's not to say a focal point should never be used in a front garden. A well-placed sculpture or ornament can say something about the owners and what to expect in the house and back

garden. If security is an issue, a specimen tree, shrub or topiary can be used instead.

The entrance sets you up, preparing you for the next stage of your journey. As always, simplicity is key. Grand entrances place a heavy demand on what comes next so make sure the rest of the garden lives up to expectations. An

understated entrance can offer a subtle contrast to what awaits. Also, bear in mind that the entrance to the back garden is often preceded by a journey through the house, and this can play an important part in how we are introduced to the space. Minimalism in the front and rear gardens will lose its impact if the house is a jumble of bric-a-brac.

Its ability to say 'keep out' or 'welcome' makes the gate a powerful tool in a garden. Used to keep animals and children in as much as keeping intruders out, a gate's design depends on what it is intended for (security or decoration) and the materials used to create the boundaries that it accesses. A solid wood or steel gate in a high stone wall sends a clear message of privacy. A wrought-iron gate with railings allows a view through but can still be made secure by its height. For extra security and convenience modern automatic gates used with lighting sensors can be operated from inside the car or home.

Aside from their practical uses, gates and entrances have the power to draw you towards different part of the garden. In doing so they elevate the importance of what lies within and reaffirm a sense of place. Even if the gate is locked, it's almost impossible to resist peeking through or wondering what lies beyond. Simple tricks like these make us use our imagination, giving a sense of drama that can bring a whole new dimension to a walk around a garden. Quite often a physical barrier may not be necessary, depending on the given light situation and our individual response to it. In a shady, overgrown environment dappled light through a



LEFT: *YUCCA GLORIOSA*, *STIPA ARUNDINACEA*, ROSEMARY AND A HORSE CHESTNUT SOFTEN THE ENTRANCE TO THE PROPERTY.

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gap in a hedge or a pool of sunlight in a clearing is uplifting and inviting. However, a dark entrance to a woodland or bamboo thicket, while fascinating to some, may be equally forbidding to others. This play on our emotions (hope, fear, inquisitiveness) makes them some of the most potent entrances, but they require either careful planning or judicious clipping and pruning if you are fortunate enough to have the raw materials to hand.

A gap in a hedge with open countryside beyond can accentuate a view or draw you to a vantage point to appreciate the panorama. A stile or a narrow gap in a dry-stone wall that takes you to a field beyond invites a journey while providing a barrier to stop cattle from entering the garden. A moon gate in a forest or a field will lavish enough drama to give even the most insignificant space identity. And don't forget the sky. A clearing in a tree canopy, accidental or fashioned from imaginative pleaching, provides dramatic natural light effects by

day and at night accentuates the mind-boggling, infinite nature of the stars like a giant observation sphere.

Even small gardens can use gates as a design tool. An outside keyhole on a garden shed adds a humorous touch. For the practical joker, opening a gate could trigger sound, movement or water every time someone enters or leaves the garden. A false gate in the wall or hedge of a small garden will suggest another 'room' to be explored, and give the illusion of space. A door ajar in a wall with a mirror behind may once have been a good trick but is now dated, verging on twee. Unless there is an actual view to take advantage of it would be better to leave it closed or grow a climber behind it to give the impression of an impenetrable thicket behind. Where neighbouring children play together regularly a gate in the fence can stop them climbing over it. Not as much fun but it will save you having to repair the fence and replace flattened plants.



**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: A TREE AND SOME STEPS FORM AN ENTRANCE POINT, LINKING SEPARATE AREAS OF A GARDEN. A GATE SET INTO A HEDGE INVITES VISITORS TOWARDS AN OPEN FIELD BEYOND. A JAPANESE MOON GATE IS A**

**DRAMATIC PORTAL INTO THIS GARDEN, CREATING EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE PLANTING AND DESIGN WITHIN. A SIMPLE TIMBER GATE AND STILE IN A MEADOW GARDEN ENTITLED *TIME THE HEALER*, DESIGNED BY LEYHILL**



**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: TOPIARY, BOX HEDGES AND A GLAZED WATER FOUNTAIN ENHANCE THE GRAND SCALE OF THE ENTRANCE TO WYKEN HALL IN SUFFOLK. A MODERN, SCULPTURAL GATE OF CARVED WOOD BY JOHNNY WOODFORD BECOMES A UNIQUE**

**FOCAL POINT WHEN SET INTO A SIMPLE STONE WALL. AN IRON GATEWAY HALF-HIDDEN BY CLIMBERS GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF A MYSTERIOUS GARDEN BEHIND IT.**

Sculptural gates can become focal points in themselves and add drama, fun and originality to their obvious practicality. They can be simple or complex and will preferably involve custom-designed hinges and latches that will enhance their unique nature.

Gate dimensions will vary but in general one metre is the standard width for a single gate and 2.4 metres for vehicular access. The height will vary according to what surrounds the gate and its intended use. Materials used depend largely on what boundaries and buildings surround the gate. Timber, being versatile and relatively light, is probably the most common material used for gates. It works well with timber fencing, stone walls and hedging. A timber gate in metal railings (and vice versa) just doesn't

hang well (no pun intended). Use the same material for continuity. Metal gates can be made from solid plates or wrought or cast iron. They are particularly useful for sliding gates at driveway entrances. A protective coat of paint will be necessary unless it is your intention to let them rust to create a more organic look.

Finally, don't be too quick to oil a squeaky gate. Besides being an effective burglar deterrent, the sound – providing it doesn't set your teeth on edge – can help to give the garden its own identity. I know the musical notes of the large wooden gate to my allotment by heart and just thinking of it makes me relax as I am transported to a place I know and cherish.

