

CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

In the ROUND

With colourful perennial planting and a convivial fire pit at its heart, the garden at the Bell Inn in East Sussex offers a sociable ambience in a magical setting

WORDS JODIE JONES PHOTOGRAPHS RACHAEL WARNE





platform, Jo designed a circular palisade of weathered timber sleepers and high-backed benches around a central fire pit. "Not only were the sleepers economical, they also suited the rustic aesthetic. It was important to me that this garden sat well within the wider landscape."

The surrounding borders are woven through with ribbons of the ornamental grass *Calamagrostis* × *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'. "People think you should only put such tall plants at the back of a border, but here at the front they act like veils, increasing the illusion of depth in quite narrow beds and gently dividing the space into different zones," says Jo.

"All of the planting had to be low maintenance and happy in the free-draining conditions, so I went for a limited palette of really reliable options," she adds. *Verbena bonariensis* and *V. hastata*, ox-eye daisies and the tiny Mexican fleabane, *Erigeron karviskianus*, are already seeding with such gay abandon that it is hard to believe the garden is just entering its second summer.

Spring bulbs and late-summer dahlias introduce seasonal colour to the permanent planting, but other elements will take time to mature. "Currently, the garden is enclosed by hazel hurdles," says Jo, "but behind these is an edible hedge packed with elder, quince and hazel, and some more unusual options such as Szechuan pepper and *Amelanchier lamarckii*. In a year or two, we will be able to take away the fences and the garden should knit into the surrounding landscape." It is a neat metaphor for an inn garden that lies at the heart of a village and its community, just as Richard intended.

GARDEN GUIDE

Orientation Offset from the inn, the garden is open on all sides.

Soil type Imported top soil.

Special features Guest lodges: raised seating area with central fire pit.

Garden design Jo Thompson, 01580 201179, jonthompson-garden-design.co.uk.

Location The Bell Inn, Ticehurst, East Sussex, 01580 200234, thebellinticehurst.com.

