

Words **Arielle Galbraith** Photographs **Ray Cox**

Social life

Susanne and Dave Tanner love entertaining, so the garden of their new-build home in Edinburgh's south side is all about partying.



FOUR YEARS ago, when Susanne and Dave Tanner first looked at a potential site on which to build a house on the south side of Edinburgh, the garden was just an appendage of the site office. "It was just mud - flat mud," says Susanne. Although they had to wait an extra 18 months until the developers were able to release the land and they could start building, the couple knew within seconds of seeing the site that it was the right one for them. "We just sat back and watched the house being built," says Susanne.

They decided to tackle the south-west facing rectangular garden immediately. Fortunately the blank canvas was a good one. The garden has a 7ft wall that runs along the south and west, providing privacy and shelter. "I wanted to do the garden at the start - otherwise it wouldn't get done," says Susanne. "We built the conservatory and extended the patio, covering it with dark slate to match the roof." They also got in touch with Carolyn Grohmann of Secret Gardens. "Carolyn did the design for our last house and we wanted to involve her again. In fact, we were so keen we started drawing up plans before the house was built."

The brief to Carolyn was simple. "We love entertaining - this garden is really all about partying," explains Susanne. "We have barbecues on weekends with family and



Left to right: the summerhouse is planted up with large leafy plants, while the patio is covered with dark slate; a black stained pergola is designed to support a swing and features spiky architectural plants such as *phormium*; cressonias by the lawn, which is edged with cobbles; Susanne Tanner

friends, and we have children's parties. We didn't want sharp lines - we wanted curved paths edged in cobbles for added interest." The couple also knew they wanted some grass, although Susanne jokes that the wonders why, as neither of them enjoy cutting it.

Carolyn takes up the story: "Susanne and Dave had just returned from Morocco and wanted to incorporate a Moroccan theme into the design. The first design included an Arabic-style seating area complete with sand underfoot and an Alhambra water feature, with carved wooden Arabic-style screens used as a trellis. Moroccan lanterns and tiles were also to be included."

At this point Susanne announced she was expecting a baby and the list of priorities changed radically. "Out went the Moroccan theme and in came family-friendly spaces," laughs Carolyn. The planned seating areas were retained, but they were made adult and child-friendly. For example, the black stained pergola tucked in at the side of the house was designed to support a swing.

"When I design a garden, I try to make it possible for adults to quickly reclaim the space, by just tidying up a few toys and bringing out the GRG's," says Carolyn. She reimagined the lawn as a circle, edged it with cobbles and included a bench backed by a row of cypress trees shipped from Italy to create a sophisticated child-free foot. The garden, which is framed by a gravel path that runs in front of the house, looks especially good when viewed from upstairs. Its crisp design retains a fresh look all year.

Before anything could be done, there were a number of practical issues to address, such as poor soil quality and drainage. Carolyn brought in Stephen Ogilvie and his efficient team of workers to help. "As often happens with newly built properties, the soil was of poor quality and the subsoil was

compacted by diggers and site traffic," she explains. "To improve drainage, large amounts of drainage gravel were rotated into the soil along with quantities of soil improvers. Those efforts were rewarded as the garden now drains beautifully."

With entertaining still firmly on the agenda, Susanne was keen to have a summerhouse. "It was a bit of a gamble, as it had to be placed so close to the conservatory, but by planting it up with large leafy plants, it seems to hold its own," says Carolyn.

Balanced evenly on both sides of the path are maroon-leaved cōtinus and heuchera, which tone with deep purple lavender and red-leaved phoritis. Spiky architectural plants include coriyrine, phormium and bamboo. The large leafy plants had to be football resistant - by this time Felix, now 2, had been born. However, Carolyn points out that unless you stick to berberis and laurel, it is difficult to guarantee that plants won't be damaged by balls.

A row of three Acer Platanoides 'Deborah' were planted along the stone wall, softening the lines and providing additional height and privacy. A small collection of apple and pear trees were planted against the west wall to give Felix a chance to pick fruit.

Despite all the appearances, this garden is not yet finished. Susanne still hankers after the Moroccan theme. "I am thinking of having a Moroccan bench along the back of the fence below the pergola - with a low table for drinks and nibbles to catch the later afternoon sun," she says wistfully. It would be the perfect place for a party. ■ Carolyn Grohmann, Secret Gardens (0121-443 8818, secretgardensdesign@bt.com); Stephen Ogilvie Landscape Services (0131-447 0145/0176 29041, www.stephenogilvie.co.uk) was responsible for the landscaping, drainage and laying the paths

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