

PROJECT
DETAILS

Project value
Approx. £15k

Build time
3 weeks

Size of project
475m²

Awards
Winner: Small
Project, Big Impact
Planting Design

Double click to zoom

SEAMLESS
SCENERYWEST SCOTLAND
COASTAL GARDENRACHEL BAILEY
GARDEN DESIGN LTD

Views to the east of the Isle of Bute frame this sloping garden at the front of the property. A blank canvas, the space was bounded by an existing hedge, a stock fence and a stone wall.

The clients wanted an informal garden which was lower maintenance but still bursting full of planting to soften the hard surfaces and settle the house into the landscape. Foliage texture, colour and size was important – especially height, as they wanted to make the most of the garden's location and views – and had more prominence than flowers. A pink, purple, blue and white colour scheme was preferred, with pastel shades desired over bright.

Design and build

From the outset, Rachel Bailey Garden Design and PD Landscapes decided to work with the existing soil/substrate for both cost and environmental considerations. This was especially relevant for the majority of the site (front garden), which was builder's rubble. This afforded a low fertile medium that would result in a lower maintenance planting scheme and meet the client's brief.

The soil to the side of the house was slightly acidic and rocky – large rocks were only removed where they coincided with a planting area. Where needed, onsite soil from the back garden or a combination of low fertility seed

compost with horticultural sand (front garden) was used as a medium to settle the plants in their planting holes. These media rather than compost were used so as to encourage the plants to extend beyond their planting holes and put down deep roots.

In the front garden, the ground was contoured and made more interesting using large boulders and rocks, either found onsite or acquired from a local quarry so as to match the natural stone, which was schist, found onsite. These rocks also offered a foil ▶

1 Timber steps leading through the garden

2 Boulder of local rock in planting



for the planting. The entire ground was then mulched in 50 to 100 mm of gravel (10 mm).

Offset generous sized timber steps with gravel tread aided the transition from the lower part of the front garden to join a meandering path that led from the drive through the garden to the south-side of the house. A flow was created around the garden amongst the planting to various seating places. The steps also offered a foil for planting and added interest.

Planting

Rachel Bailey selected plants that would thrive in a low fertility, alkaline medium, would be happy in an exposed location, and would enjoy the sharp drainage afforded by the material.

Plants were also selected to be reminiscent of the coastal hills of the west of Scotland, where low-growing shrubs, ferns, grasses, and herbaceous perennials such as *Achillea* and *Sedum* (i.e., *Sedum acre*) are settled amongst rocks and are juxtaposed with coastal plants.

Whilst Rachel could not draw upon the exact plant species of the local hills (*Erica*, *Calluna* and *Molinia caerulea*, which require acidic soil), she looked at their qualities, texture and colouring to influence the planting scheme.

A pared down list of plants was repeatedly used throughout the front garden, and planted so that one interweaved with another, mirroring plants in the hills. The main plants were repeated throughout the front garden and were anchored with the evergreen shrubs including *Rosmarinus officinalis* and *Hebes*. The front and side gardens, which had very different soil, were linked using plants that were similar in colour and/or form, but would thrive in the different soils. The plants were also planted deliberately small to allow them to acclimatise to the soil and environmental conditions.

Materials

The main materials were boulders and rock, timber and gravel. After several phone calls to

local quarries to find Schist rock, Rachel finally settled on a relatively local quarry – Bonnar Sand and Gravel, Loch Fyne – that had rock of a similar ilk to that found onsite.

With the client, she 'hand' selected all of the large boulders from the quarry, numbering and photographing each one so she had a good idea where each would go when back onsite. All 18 tonnes were delivered by lorry and craned off into their rough position. A large machine that was onsite for drainage work at the back of the property was used to orientate and 'plant' the rocks in their final position.

Challenges

For Rachel Bailey Garden Design, the main challenge for this garden was the general lack of soil in the front garden. An extension to the old stone house was demolished a few years before the garden was designed and it was 'buried' in the front garden. A layer – of no more than 50mm – of topsoil was spread over the building waste. On testing the soil in the front garden, it was unsurprisingly alkaline in pH. The soil round the side of the house was very stony, and slightly acidic – more typical of the area.

To add to this challenge, the garden is coastal, exposed to south-westerly winds and being on the west coast of Scotland, the area is subjected to high rainfall. On a positive note, because the site is coastal and on the west coast of Scotland, the climate is relatively mild.

The site was also in a remote location at the tip of the Cowal Peninsula resulting in large amount of travel for the contractors and for deliveries of supplies.



3



4



5



6



7

- 3 Summerhouse which has views to Loch
 - 4 *Achillea* 'Anthea' and *Origanum*
 - 5 *Achillea* 'Anthea' and *Sesleria autumnalis*
 - 6 Rocks & planting mimic local landscape
 - 7 Boulders & path softened by planting
- All photographs ©Rachel Bailey



BLANK CANVAS



BOULDER PLACEMENT



ROCKS, STEPS AND GRAVEL IN PLACE



BOULDER DELIVERY



PLANT DELIVERY



SETTING OUT PLANTS

ABOUT RACHEL BAILEY GARDEN DESIGN LTD

Rachel Bailey runs an award-winning studio in the West of Scotland. Rachel is also a permaculture designer with a long-term interest in sustainable design. The studio creates anything from naturalistic wilds capes to more traditional sub-urban and town gardens, all with a strong focus on planting and the environmental impact of their designs.

www.rachelbaileydesign.co.uk

REFERENCES

Designer
Rachel Bailey
www.rachelbaileydesign.co.uk

Contractor
PD Landscapes Ltd

Planting
Macplants in East Lothian
www.macplants.co.uk

McClarens Nurseries Ltd
www.mclarensnurseriesltd.co.uk

Grasses
Knoll Gardens
www.knollgardens.co.uk

Boulders, rock and gravel
Bonnar Sand and Gravel Co. Ltd
www.bonnar.com

Summerhouse
Logspan
www.logspan.com