

# Meet the DESIGNER

Rae Wilkinson believes it's important that people understand the design process and the benefits of having a designer on board when embarking on a new garden project



Whatever the scale or nature of the project, **RAE WILKINSON** creates bespoke designs to fulfill clients' individual aspirations and requirements, connecting each garden to its unique setting with inspired sensitivity. Her deep knowledge and intuitive feel for horticulture and materials enables her to create beautiful, usable and sustainable outdoor spaces for a wide range of clients

**Q** What is your process when a prospective client makes contact to ask about designing their garden?

**A** A brief discussion on the phone or via email helps to establish what the scope and scale of the project is, and whether my design services would provide useful input. We will then set up an initial consultation appointment to look at the client's outdoor space, talk the project through in more detail and gain the visual and practical information required to enable me to put a formal proposal and design brief together.

**Q** Depending on size and complexities, what timescales can homeowners expect from concept to completion of their project?

**A** Project progression timescales from concept to completion will always depend on the scope of the project as well as build timescales, so there is a fair amount of variation timewise. A typical project starts with the initial idea in the form of a concept design, which will

usually take at least a couple of weeks to prepare once I am working on it, depending on complexity. Even though I will have instant ideas about what will work for an outdoor space, it's important for the design process to have time to evolve and reach the best conclusion, and for the drawings to be prepared. Following concept design approval, the technical details are drawn up through the production of a full design package. This usually takes a further few weeks to prepare depending on the scale and complexity. This phase covers planning applications where required but predominantly provides the tender package

which enables contractors to understand the details and to price the project. During installation, I would ordinarily be providing input through a third phase via site visits, additional drawings and working on elements such as the final detailed planting plans and schedules.

**Q** Once you have ascertained a client's needs and budget, what is the next stage?

**A** A design proposal follows the initial consultation and is tailored to the individual project requirements.

**Right:** A vegetable and cutting garden can be a wonderful addition where space allows and the right combination of structure and ornament can make it a wonderful visual, like in this vegetable parterre designed by Rae





The first design phase provides the basic layout and palettes for the scheme, often alongside some 3D visuals. This starts with the brief which is fed into by our conversations and a questionnaire provided to the client at initial consultation phase. The next phase covers the more detailed design package and leads into appointing contractors and project progression.

**Q So you've presented your ideas and settled on a design – how do they find a landscape contractor? Do you recommend or employ the landscaper on the client's behalf, or do they find someone themselves?**

**A** I have good long-standing working relationships with various contractors whose work I trust, but though I can

**Clockwise:** The textural and structural effect of plants like ornamental grasses en masse can provide the perfect blend with a restrained palette such as this private pool area designed by Rae and built by Outdoor Options; as shown in this modern urban garden by Rae, carefully designed elements such as sculptural walls in combination with bold textural planting and ornamental trees can create a dynamic outdoor space which provides a calming retreat. Built by Living Landscapes; this meditation space created by Rae shows how even a small space can bring much needed peace and nature connection within our busy lives. Built by GK Wilson Landscapes; carefully curated small spaces can provide an oasis of function and relaxation, in this barn courtyard Rae has used dark cladding as a backdrop for seasonal foliage to be enjoyed while relaxing, and to bring birds into the space. Built by Manor Landscapes

advise on this, the client makes the final choice. Working standards can vary and it is important that the right landscape contractor is chosen for the project. I tend to recommend that contractors are selected from viewing their work and from accreditation to industry bodies like BALI (British Association of Landscape Industries) or the APL (Association of Professional Landscapers), as well as meeting them in person.

**Q How closely do you work with the contractor once the project has started?**

**A** I like to provide full project monitoring if the project allows, in the form of liaising with the contractor and client both on and off site. This means that the design can evolve on the ground where required and that the design intention is carried through well.

**Q What about changes along the way – say your client has had additional ideas, how would you incorporate these?**

**A** Gardens are by their very nature an organic process and will often evolve along the way. While changes or additions to the brief will amount to extra time, it's important that the designer is enabled to advise accordingly and manage changes within the scheme in the best way possible so that it still works as a whole.

**Q How does the finance side of things work – will the client pay per visit, per design or per hour?**

**A** Each designer will have their own way of working when it comes to fees and payment, and this will be discussed at the outset. I will usually outline the fees and inclusions via a proposal per project phase based on the time input required, and there are generally three main phases for a standard project. The site visits and meetings are either included or time charged – including the initial consultation. I also occasionally work on a percentage fee or on a consultancy basis if these are the preferred approach for a particular project.

**Q Would you suggest or commission particular accessories or features?**

**A** Carefully chosen additions such as sculpture or furniture can provide the final visual touch or focal point which makes the scheme really come together, so I am always keen to be involved in assisting with choosing or commissioning these items.

**Q Do you provide an ongoing consultation service – like advice for maintenance, replanting and minor adjustments – as the garden matures?**

**A** The management of the evolution of a landscape within the design vision can require careful input to succeed over the years. A maintenance schedule is created for each client upon project completion and a garden often needs my further horticultural and visual assessment and input over time as it matures, so ongoing guidance can be very important and is something I regularly provide for clients. [raewilkinson.com](https://www.raewilkinson.com)

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