

GARDEN  
makeover

Golden Cream  
stone walling, POA,  
catswoldnaturalstone.co.uk

# "I didn't want to hide that the garden had once been a quarry"

A wild Oxfordshire plot has been transformed into a **SPECTACULAR SPACE** for Miriam Maus and partner Ben

Missing the countryside, open spaces and the feel of community that comes with village life, Miriam Maus, her partner Ben and Australian terrier Zac decided to move from suburban Oxford to a more rural location nearby. The detached house, built in 1976, that became their new home was situated on the site of an old quarry and because it's built into the side of a steep incline, has an upstairs living

room and a bedroom opening directly onto the garden. "The garden was a big attraction of the house but at the same time incredibly daunting," remembers Miriam. "The fact that it's on different levels with lots of separate areas presented us with potential. The biggest drawback was that the bottom of the garden was connected to the top by a narrow and often slippery set of wooden steps. But where and how to start?"

The couple love gardening, growing their own veggies and dining alfresco with friends, so having a more accessible outside space was important to them, and redesigning the garden was always on the cards. But five years after moving in, the time was finally right. "I've been lucky and have always lived somewhere with a garden and access to nature," says Miriam. "I pretty much took that for granted until the pandemic; the first lockdown in spring 2020

brought it home to me how much outdoor space contributes to my wellbeing."

## A GARDEN OF TWO HALVES

A neighbour had used garden designer Doug Holloway (dougholloway.co.uk), and, liking what they saw, the couple met him and commissioned a design. "I was asked to redesign the whole garden, with emphasis on the connection between the lower and higher

*The lower area was untamed and crumbly underfoot*

levels," explains Doug. "The garden was broken into two spaces: an upper area that was relatively wild with mature trees and curved asymmetrical lawn terraces, and a lower area three metres down, which felt incredibly deep. These spaces were only

connected via an almost vertical set of wooden steps covered in algae, which I slipped on during our first meeting!" Each area had its own challenges and potential. "The lower area was shady but from midday started to get the light," says Doug. "It had a real sense of having been carved out of the earth when it was a quarry. The wild walls were full of life, the layers of crumbly stone packed with *Alchemilla mollis* and valerian."

## SMART IDEAS TO STEAL

- ✓ **LET SPILLING PLANTS** soften paving edges.
- ✓ **TURN STEPS** into a garden sculpture and make a feature of your plot's split levels.
- ✓ **USE SOCIAL MEDIA** to find an amateur drone pilot to take aerial photos of your plot.

Make the  
most of your  
patio, turn to  
p12

Golden Stone Porcelain  
Paving, from £66 m<sup>2</sup>,  
londonstone.co.uk

BEFORE





Ben, Miriam and Zac love their new statement outdoor living space

## OUR GARDEN PLAN

**LOCATION** Near Oxford

**THE LOOK** Contemporary classic

**SITE Size** Working area 350m<sup>2</sup> (whole 1400m<sup>2</sup>) **Faces** North west **Soil** Clay

### OUR BUDGET

Clearing site & digging **£10,200**  
Stone/bricks/porcelain/copings/3D scan **£15,000** Blocks, concrete, sand, cement **£4,500** Waste removal **£1,200** Pergola **£800** Equipment hire **£1,500** Topsoil **£1,080** Plants & trees **£2,400** Labour **£21,000**  
**TOTAL: £57,680**

### HOW LONG IT TOOK

Clearance & foundations **3½ weeks**  
Building walls **2 weeks**  
Laying porcelain paving **2½ weeks**  
Laying steps & copings **1 week**  
Planting, finishing up **1 week**  
**TOTAL: 10 weeks**

The upper level was also quite wild, which Miriam and Ben liked, but the various hedges seemed disorganised to Doug, and the curved lawn didn't sit well in its surroundings. "I believe places change and develop identity over the years, so I didn't want to try to hide the fact the garden had been a quarry," he says. "There were curves in the landscape that were a legacy of the quarry works but the whole place lacked flow and coherence. "I focused on connecting the two spaces, working with the curving spaces the quarry had left and designing steps that created a sculptural element and complemented the curves elsewhere."

Doug's design included planted terraces to break up the height and soften the hard landscape. He cut curves into the lower patio to create flow and sandwich the walls between soft living borders. Because the quarry walls could potentially move over time, he worked with engineers to make the walls structurally sound – these were built with a stone skin over a concrete block wall with metal inside.

"In the upper area I redefined the space and the curves by enhancing the sense of it being an amphitheatre, creating a new elliptical lawn encircled by wildflower banks," Doug says.

### HISTORIC HINTS

Miriam and Ben loved Doug's garden design and his sympathetic approach to the plot's quarried past. Work started in the spring of 2021 with Doug's own landscaping team rebuilding the garden to create this 21st century space suited to the Modernist-style house. "The team was brilliant, and a real pleasure to have around," says Miriam. "By the end of the summer we could use the patio, and the planting in that area was pretty much done."

### ARCHITECTURAL GEMS

planted among clouds of wafty grasses spill over onto the patio, softening the hard edges.



Catmint

Foxglove 'Alba'



'TOTALLY TANGERINE' geums add a vivid accent.

Finishing off the coping stones took a bit longer, mainly because of post-pandemic supply issues. "There was no doubt it was a disruptive process, but we never regretted having started it because we knew how much potential our space had and how unsatisfying it had been before."

Now soft golden sandstone walls give a nod to the quarry that was once there and are complemented by the pale gold porcelain paving on the patio. A set of curved elegant steps carved out of the side of the quarry provide easy access between the two levels and have a sculptural beauty all of their own. White painted render and contrasting grey antiqued limestone coping stones add to the

architectural effect, and the sun casts sweeping shadows as it circles the space.

### A SPACE TO LIVE

Abundant planting softens the walls and paving. "I often focus on long-flowering plant groupings with pockets of colour," says Doug. "I try to create atmosphere, and it's not effective if that only lasts for a month or two."

The wraparound pergola, which frames a shady back entrance, was rebuilt and mature climbers chopped back to allow proper growth.

The completed project has transformed the way Miriam and Ben use the garden. "We could never have come up with a design that brings it all together in the way Doug did," says Miriam. "He brought his expertise and experience to the

job, great ideas, and introductions to specialist suppliers. We use the garden much more now, especially the top garden, which is so much easier to access and feels more like part of our living space. The steps make a real statement and I really love the planting. When the beds and trees are in full bloom, the place feels both alive and peaceful at the same time.

"For large parts of the year, the patio feels like an extra room. The space Doug has created for us is perfect for entertaining, large enough for a group of people, and yet the planting and low walls give it intimacy. It's also important for me to have some downtime outside, sitting in a deckchair with a good book and a cup of coffee or glass of wine. We love eating outside and have been known to have dinner in our fleeces!"

## GARDEN MAKEOVER

**A FLOWING** golden space punctuated by pockets of soft foliage.



### Doug's tips for a steeply sloping plot

- 💡 Terraces break up the vertical distance and stop a garden feeling dominated by walls and built elements.
- 💡 Integrate planting into the terraces so the whole garden works together.
- 💡 Aim to create a unique interesting space on each level – for example, a patio surrounded by planting – where you want to spend time.
- 💡 Make a focal point on each level of the space.
- 💡 A sloping garden has the benefit of views, so think about how you can enjoy them to the max.
- 💡 Use every part of the space – you can enjoy the biodiversity of a bog garden in a dark corner as much as a south-facing sun trap.

## HOW WE DID IT...



1

**THE OLD WOODEN STEPS** linking the upper and lower levels are removed, and the soil dug out and area cleared.



2

**A FRAMEWORK OF CONCRETE** with metal reinforcements goes in against the bedrock, then the wooden moulds removed.



3

**BREEZEBLOCK WALLS** are built with metal inserts to hold back ground movement. Don't fancy pushing a barrow up that slope!



4

**COVERED IN CREAM SANDSTONE**, those enormous walls are starting to look dreamy! The patio is cleared ready for paving.



5

**WITH PAVING DOWN**, topsoil is added to the beds and the plants go in. As you can see, Mother Nature helps with the watering in.



6

**COPING STONES FITTED**, render painted, and paving and planting completed, this wild plot is finally looking like a garden!