



aims

The aims of this module are to enable you to:

- explore key elements of garden design
- understand the importance of an accurate site survey
- understand how to translate client needs into an effective design
- begin your design notebook.

context

This module explores some basic principles of garden design. It looks in particular at the importance of the client and considers how to work effectively with clients. It also explores ways of developing your own creativity and 'designer instinct'. You will also learn how to carry out an effective site survey.

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introduction

As you work through this course you will have the chance to develop a wide range of skills, techniques and abilities. You will also learn more about yourself. Working effectively as a designer involves far more than simply learning a set of techniques and rules - it also requires an eye for line and style, confidence in one's own judgement, an ability to listen to the client, and a sense of what will work best in a particular location.



You probably already have a pretty good idea of which garden styles you like and which turn you off? It may even be that you are known among your friends as a person with a strong sense of style and a good understanding of design? During the course you will be developing these natural abilities further to achieve a professional and instinctive understanding of good design.

becoming a designer

Developing your skills and understanding as a designer is a lifelong process. This course is only the beginning of a long and we hope very happy journey - we can give you the basic tools and set you on the right course, but there will always be more to discover.



So, training as a designer involves more than simply developing an armoury of skills and techniques - important though that is - you also need to begin developing your instinct for good design. You need to build your knowledge of the work done by past and current designers. How can you do this?

- * Begin to look at the world with a designer's eye - when possible visit gardens to look at the work of other designers. (There are also some good examples of garden design on the Internet.) Study their work with a critical eye - which bits work and which bits require more development? Can you see what they were trying to achieve? Do you like the result?

- * Learn more about the history of garden design - what did past designers do and why? Do their ideas have any lessons for us today? We shall be looking at the history of garden design later in the course.

- * Talk to other designers and to gardeners in general. What do they like about garden design today? What do they dislike?

- * Talk to friends and acquaintances. What do they look for in a garden? What do they want from their garden designer?



You already have many skills that will be helpful in your work as a garden designer. The aim of this course is not to teach you how to do something totally new - but how to use the skills you already have in a different and more effective way, as well as developing some new skills. It is important to say this at the outset, because there is a great mystique around the art of garden design that many students find daunting. There is a belief that the 'successful designer' is in some way set apart from the rest of the population - a rare and talented creature. The truth is, of course, that successful designers are often not all that different from unsuccessful ones. It is simply that they have taken the time to develop their existing skills and learn techniques that bring their design work into a different category.

It is true that some people have a natural ability with design and a fresh perspective on life that captivates clients. If you are one of these people with a considerable raw talent for design then you are fortunate indeed. Yet much of what passes as 'talent' is actually a craft - and like any other craft the necessary skills and techniques can be taught.

During the next twelve modules your tutor will accompany you on a journey of exploration through your own design abilities. You will learn how to use a range of techniques and develop a variety of skills. You will begin to discover your unique perspective and style as a designer.

the basics

equipment

All you really need to begin is a pen or pencil and a piece of graph paper. However, as the extent of your work and the scale of your projects increases, you will find that you need more equipment. We shall look at this in more depth as the course progresses.

notebook

Most garden designers keep at least one notebook with them most of the time. You may have noticed that some of your best ideas crop up at the most inconvenient times! Perhaps just as you are drifting off to sleep, or in the middle of a bus journey. By the time you get back to your desk you can almost guarantee the idea will have gone. A small

notebook allows you to jot down these ideas as they occur without being too conspicuous. It is also a good place to note down any ideas you see when you are out and about, as well as contact details for suppliers, manufacturers and other useful services.



Select a notebook that you know you will enjoy using. It should be of a practical design - one that you can carry easily, so if you carry a handbag, you might want a book that will slip into your bag easily.

journal

As you work through the course, we would recommend that you keep a study journal. It need not be seen by anyone else and can be particularly helpful if you have no friends or colleagues who share your interests with whom you can discuss various points. Choose a journal that looks and feels good, which you will enjoy writing in. Use it to record your thoughts and feelings and to answer the questions raised throughout the course. Have a discussion with yourself; write out various viewpoints on an issue. You might later decide to discuss some of these issues with your tutor.



storage

As you begin to collect pieces of research, for instance, catalogues, photographs, old plans, relevant magazine and newspaper articles and snippets collected from the Internet, you will soon find that you have quite a collection of paper. A small filing cabinet, or some other filing system, will help you to keep this in order.

Take some time to devise a storage system that works for you. Time spent on research will be wasted if you cannot find the relevant catalogue or information when you need it. You might, for instance, decide to file your research cuttings according to subject or alphabetically.

design basics

As we work through the course we will explore a number of different approaches to design. At the same time you will begin to develop your own identity and style as a designer. Here we are going to begin by considering some fundamental aspects of garden design.



Read the 'Introduction' of *John Brookes' Garden Design*.

Key points to consider bear in mind here include:

- * the needs of the client
- * the restrictions and needs of the location
- * expression of local climate and natural vegetation
- * size, shape and natural layout of garden area
- * for an existing garden - features to be retained, this might include trees, walls, bridges and garden structures.



the needs of the client

The needs of the client are central to the work of a garden designer. Clients have their own ideas about how their garden should look - they may be very definite or they may be quite open-minded, willing to give the designer much more freedom to interpret their needs. The way the client intends to use the garden should be fundamental to the design, so in order to fully understand the client's requirements you will need to take time to get to know them and understand their lifestyle. It is important for clients to feel comfortable and relaxed with you (see notes below on interviewing skills) because in order to produce a satisfactory design you really do need honest answers at this stage. It's pointless producing a beautiful, high maintenance garden for clients who work long hours and do not plan to employ a gardener. Similarly, a stunning water feature is unlikely to be welcomed by clients with a child under five years of age, since it restricts their use of the garden considerably.

Some of these points may seem like common-sense but as you study more garden designs you will be surprised at the number of gardens that really do not meet the client's needs. To avoid making the same mistake, put your clients to the top of the list. Key questions for clients include:

- * How will you use the garden?
 - for entertaining
 - barbecues
 - relaxing (how?)
 - games
 - children (ages)
 - pets (which ones?)
 - car-parking
 - essential storage/functional areas.

 - * How much time do you have available for garden maintenance? (Or are you planning to employ a gardener?)
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- * Would you like a fruit and vegetable area? Do you want to use cut flowers from the garden?
- * Are there any existing features you wish to retain?
- * Would you like a formal/informal garden? What sort of style?
- * What are your favourite plants?
- * Special requirements. For instance, a wildlife area, or wetland area?

Prioritising the client's needs does not mean bending to their every whim. Sometimes creating the ideal garden requires careful compromise, especially where the client's vision for the garden is impractical or unsuitable. This is where the designer's expertise and knowledge can provide invaluable guidance.

You can find a sample survey form in the appendix to this module.

