

Garden series: part 9

DYNAMIC DUO

Continuing her series, CLARE FOSTER talks to garden designer Marian Boswall and TV presenter Arit Anderson, who have formed the Sustainable Landscape Foundation to raise awareness of best practice in both public and private horticulture

PHOTOGRAPH JOONEY WOODWARD

Landscape architects and garden designers have an important role to play in the current scramble towards a cleaner, greener world. As guardians of our outdoor spaces, they could increase biodiversity in our gardens and introduce systems that enable us to garden in a more environmentally friendly way. But what happens when garden designers, public gardens and other horticultural organisations are not in the picture when it comes to best practice? Enter Arit Anderson and Marian Boswall, two like-minded designers who have come together to form the Sustainable Landscape Foundation. ‘We set out with the mission that landscape design should be delivered with long-term, sustainable best practice,’ says Arit. ‘Designers have a role to share this information with clients, to explain what they are doing and to be educators themselves.’

Coincidentally, both women started their careers in retail before turning to garden design later in life. Marian had worked for Marks & Spencer as a buyer before a career in management consultancy; she then trained in garden history and landscape architecture at the University of Greenwich. Arit was in fashion retail before deciding, in 2012, to retrain in garden design at Capel Manor College. She is now a familiar face on BBC Two’s *Gardeners’ World* and fronts a new podcast, *Growing Greener*. ‘I’m a communicator,’ she says. ‘That’s what I’m passionate about.’

They met in 2013, first on Twitter and then in person at RHS Chelsea Flower Show, where Arit had designed a show garden. ‘I was completely new to garden design and social media, but Marian’s name kept popping up. When we met, there was an instant connection,’ she says. With similar views about the environment and design, they found that, whenever they chatted, they were comparing experiences and thinking along the same lines. ‘We met up at an awards ceremony with the awards categorised by budget and cost, which felt wrong,’ says Marian. ‘At the time, large-scale organisations were still condoning glyphosate and ignoring the use of peat. We were both feeling frustrated at the lack of information out there and realised the industry needed an impartial, light-footed approach without layers of hierarchy to wade through.’ Gathering together a board of influential figures

in the horticultural world, they began to formulate their plan for the Sustainable Landscape Foundation.

Their aim is to raise awareness in both the horticultural industry and the public realm, and their foundation acts as an interface for both groups. ‘We want to start by producing a set of codes and measurements for landscapers,’ says Arit. ‘Designers will be able to get accreditation for the gardens they create, with a rating linked to recycling, use of materials and biodiversity.’ They are running workshops for nurseries, garden centres, designers and landscapers, encouraging sustainable practice and also proper signposting and labelling in the retail sector – to educate the public about plastic-free pots or peat-free compost, for example. ‘We need that repetition of information for the message to get across,’ says Arit.

As well as providing advice for professionals, the foundation is an information hub for gardeners. Following the principles presented by Marian in her recent book *Sustainable Garden**, it sets out a series of clear ideas and projects – from saving water to making compost. It also addresses issues that might not be top of the agenda for the average household, such as using a permeable material like gravel instead of Tarmac to slow down run-off, or laying bricks or pavers on sand rather than mortar, leaving gaps in between for plants to colonise. ‘Eventually, we hope garden owners might get an eco-rating on their gardens, which could reduce their council tax rates in some way,’ says Arit. It is this incentive-driven approach that could also precipitate change in the public sector.

Both Arit and Marian enjoy spreading the environmental message in other ways. Arit is a frequent speaker and ambassador for sustainable gardening, and has helped to change the focus on *Gardeners’ World* since her arrival as a presenter in 2018, while Marian’s design projects are all environmentally focused. ‘I work predominantly on high-impact projects with clients who are investing in working in a sustainable way,’ she says, explaining it starts with a change of attitude. ‘You have to be kind to yourself and to nature. Listen to the land. Understand what it would be like if we weren’t there. A garden is just a stage set, and the players are the animals and insects that use it. Think about stepping back and making fewer interventions, rather than more.’

One of the most interesting parts of the conversation between these two passionate communicators is their reference to ‘tipping points’. This is a term used in climate science to describe a critical threshold that, when crossed, leads to large and often irreversible changes in the climate system. It can also be used to refer to personal thresholds and decisions, explains Marian. ‘For example, we should be asking ourselves do we still want to fly when we go abroad? Do we want to be using weed killers or slug pellets? Should we be using a hosepipe to water our gardens? We’re not telling people what to do: we want to present the facts and help them understand, so they can make their own decisions. We’re not going to change the world by pointing fingers.’

‘There is no point in being paralysed by climate anxiety – we have to be positive about it,’ says Arit. ‘We are among 30 million gardeners in the UK, which is almost half the population.’ Marian is equally upbeat: ‘We are all custodians of the earth and, as gardeners, are in a unique position to make an impact. The mess we can make in one generation, we can undo in the next generation’ □

Sustainable Landscape Foundation:
sustainablelandscapefoundation.com

Arit Anderson (left) and Marian Boswall share a passion for encouraging people to take a more environmentally aware approach to gardens

*SUSTAINABLE GARDEN: PROJECTS, INSIGHTS AND ADVICE FOR THE ECO-CONSCIOUS GARDENER (FRANCES LINCOLN, £18)