



INTERVIEW

with

Suki Urquhart

Garden Designer and Writer

See pictures of Suki's new Potager Garden below.....

Suki Urquhart is a garden designer and freelance writer and had her own column in the Sunday Times for four years writing about people in their garden spaces. She has now moved to France where she is just starting up a new potager garden.

Q: I first asked her about her book, *The Scottish Gardener* (see Book Reviews): it is so comprehensive, how long did it take you to write it?

A: The material was collected during years – decades – of freelance designing and writing. I was fascinated by the people in their gardens, which led to the history of the gardens in many places. I liked the way people manipulated their spaces into gardens that reflected their personalities. With writing, as in cooking, you get left over ingredients which you can then make into something else.

Q: And you – what 'bits' make you – the designer?

A: I started in the rag trade, designing clothes and interiors. I worked with colour texture and patterns. Plants are like paint and fabrics; gardens are not necessarily the 'best collection' of plants, but chosen because of colour and textures which work together – using plants as building blocks.

Q: What about the other elements in design?

A: Hard landscaping is informed by the landscape and what you want to do. I am uneasy about imposing on the scenery; the garden takes the house into the countryside. For instance, I had to Feng Shui a garden once for a Scottish TV presenter. This ancient philosophy teaches you to understand the harmonious flow of the garden in its relationship to the house and surroundings so that the house is anchored within the cultivated areas that support it in the wider landscape.

Q: You have moved to France – how different do you find gardening there from gardening in Scotland?

A: Completely different. The crucial element in a hot climate is water and after planting you cannot allow the plant, once in the ground, just to take its course. Here you have to pay great attention to the watering. So I am experimenting; you have to go with the natural conditions. Grey-leaved plants of course do well; lavender, Santolina, sages and other herbs. The size plants grow to is different. Some are smaller, some grow larger. The growing season times are different and there are often two flowering times because of the heat in July and August, growing virtually stops but starts again in September.

Suki's new house at Grezans



Q: What about French gardens in general – the ones the public go to, for example.

A: Traditionally the gardens here are different; they are more structured with alleés and parterres; new gardens have what I call 'tortured' plants, heavily clipped, pollarded and espaliered. Modern French domestic gardens go from formal design to purely natural planting; often planted up in a grassy area, the choice of shrubs and trees following no pattern but just dotted about.

Continued.....



The Views...



Q: And food gardening? Is the fashion for 'grow your own' the same in France?

A: France is self-sufficient in food, it always has been the practise to grow your own. The street markets are full of locally-grown food. The vegetables are all different colours and shapes there – not all to standard as in UK supermarkets. You get different varieties in different regions. Food is much more important in France where people live to eat rather than eating to live, regardless of income. So people take much more trouble is taken over procuring food.

Q: And will you be doing a book about French gardens, similar to your Scottish one?

A: I haven't really had time to take a look – I am completing a book on food (not cooking exactly). I would like to do tours of the gardens here, although there isn't the range of designs and styles as there is in Britain. I think I would like to contrast gardening and food production here with the same activities historically in Scotland – French gardeners and cooks were bought to Scotland and later we exported our Scottish gardeners all over the world.

Scroll down for The New Potager Garden

The site, near the house



The start....





photographs © Suki Urquhart

Thank you, Suki Urquhart

We shall be visiting Suki's potager garden in the Spring to see how it has progressed....

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