



THE EDEN PROJECT

When garden designer Arne Maynard discovered a faded Fenland pile, he was seduced by its neglected grounds

REPORT VINNY LEE PHOTOGRAPHS RAY MAIN





Garden designer Arne Maynard knows when spring has come, not because of the *Narcissus lobularis* blooming in his orchard or the new leaves unfurling on the pleached *Tilia* trees, but because the deathwatch beetles start talking to each other in the ancient plaster walls of his Fenland home. "People think I'm mad, but I would prefer to leave them be and replace a bit of wood when it goes than live

with the fumes of the treatment needed to get rid of them," he says.

"I wanted a house that didn't require too much restoration, but that had a garden that needed everything to be done," says Maynard of the four-year search that led him to his Lincolnshire home. He was also attracted to the level landscape and remoteness of the area. "The Fens has its own special, old-fashioned feel, as though it has been forgotten by time," he says, an observation which could also be applied to his home.

"We are on a contour line," he says with a note of pride in his voice. "The house is 6ft above sea level, on a dry island in what was

a salt marsh. This place was a Roman settlement, then a monastic grange. Large parts were pulled down in the Reformation but it was rebuilt in 1699 using much of the old materials."

The stages of development can be seen through the house. The kitchen, for example, was a later addition to the main house and now features an unlikely stuffed Highland cow's head and a shiny red Aga. The adjacent large dining room was once the kitchen and was used as a local courthouse. Beyond that is a staircase added when the interior was rejigged in 1780, according to the knowledgeable owner.

"The house was a wreck before the previous owners took over," says Maynard. "They did a lot of repairs to the roof, wiring and structure, but it was great that they hadn't touched the garden." The couple that he and his partner, William, bought it from moved on to a new project and it was arranged that they would leave most of the furniture here until they were ready. "That was fine with us because we moved the contents of our flat in London down here in one trip, filling up the back of the car. Gradually, over ten years, as bits of furniture went back to their rightful owners, we started to buy pieces. It was good to be able to take our time and find the right things."

Among the "right" pieces is the deep, stone-coloured ceramic bath in the bathroom, where panelling was added to conceal the



THE LAYERS OF PEELING WALLPAPER ARE LIKE A BIOGRAPHY OF THE HOUSE'

modern pipework. "The bath was being used as a cow trough and the local farmer kindly brought it here on his tractor."

Every room has a fireplace – essential as there is no central heating (though the walls are thick and the roof is well insulated). You can even see part of the old thatch in the attic, where a section of the old roof has been built in under a later addition.

The bathroom is off a long corridor of bedrooms on the first floor. "This passageway is a Victorian addition; originally the rooms could have been accessed by internal doors," says Arne. In the middle of the three bedrooms layers of peeling wallpaper have been left undisturbed. "The papers are like a biography of the occupancy of the house," he says, before leading on to what he refers to as the safe room. "In the early days we had regular plaster falls from the >>



Clockwise from insert, far left: Arne Maynard; the physic garden; the upper landing, with portrait of Lady Bruce; the small dining room

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Old layers of paint and
wallpaper left undisturbed

<< ceiling and walls so we decided to make one room sound for those who were nervous of sleeping under the old plaster," he explains.

Downstairs, in the part of the house dating from 1699, there is a formal sitting room with a stone floor and a classic arrangement of high-backed chairs around a large fireplace. The rooms Maynard uses most are the small dining room and the study. The dining room has a wood-burning stove and a grandfather clock with an oval table which seats four comfortably. The room has overtones of a period painting, as the dark woodiness of the room is lit by shafts of sunlight from the small-paned window.

In contrast, the study is a sunny room – located on the corner of the house, it has windows on three sides. A bookcase takes up most of the fourth wall, although the centre section has very narrow shelves because it is built around a large stone pillar. On the shelves are hundreds of books on garden design, some by Maynard himself, including his *Garden Design Details*, published by Conran Octopus.


It was the garden that brought Arne to the house, and he feels strongly that there should be no barrier between the two. "When I design a garden I want it to be hand-in-hand with the house and the residents' lifestyle. I love to cook, so the walled vegetable garden was an important feature for me. Also I like the William and Mary period so I put in the more formal aspects, such as the winter knot garden, to convey that." But designing his gardens was no easy task. "I didn't draw plans; I had them in my head."

That required plenty of mental filing capacity because the house sits in 55 acres of farmland and five acres of garden. "Over the years various sheds and outbuildings had blown down or been demolished and left in heaps of rubble. It took five years to dig the surrounding ground and reclaim over 30,000 bricks. They were then cleaned and we used them to build the walls that separate and enclose the various parts of the garden."

Maynard, a fan of topiary, has trained the massive yew tree in front of the house over the ten years since he took up residence. "It's nearly perfect," he says, pointing out a tiny dent on the right side. "It's nice to have dreams, and this one isn't finished yet."

And if the springtime chattering of the deathwatch beetle keeps him awake, he can always move out of the house and set up home in the pair of pavilions between the rose and physic gardens, which would be even handier for the garden. ■

For details of Arne Maynard's design projects and courses held at his home, call 020-7689 8100 or visit www.arne-maynard.com



Clockwise from main
photograph: side entrance leading
to the kitchen; the main
bedroom; windowsill on the
upper landing; urn in the small
dining room; the bathroom