

## OINING FORCES

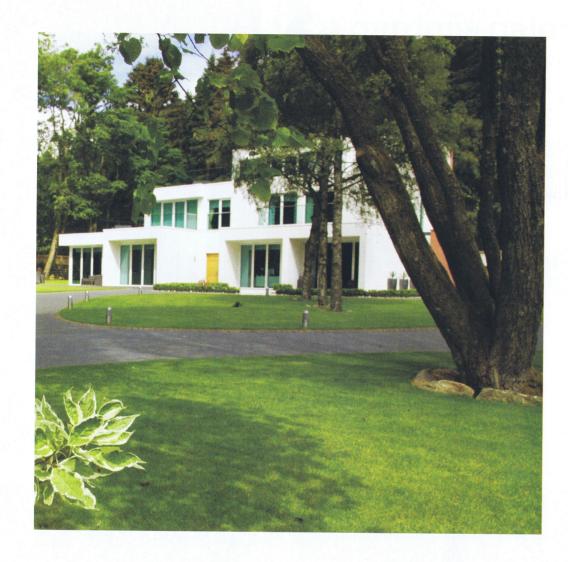
SURROUNDED BY AN ACRE OF GROUNDS, THIS HOUSE SHOULD HAVE BEEN SITTING PRETTY. BUT IT TOOK RADICAL GARDENING SOLUTIONS TO CONNECT IT TO ITS OUTDOOR SPACE

Photography George Leslie Words Rosie Duncan

## IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS A HOUSE. APTLY

nicknamed by gardener Kirsty McLean as the 'wedding cake', it stood angular and ivory white in an acre of open space in the Aberdeenshire countryside. Kirsty, of the Garden Design Company Scotland, and Jake Dickie of Landform Ltd, her builder, were tasked with blending the bold, contemporary house with its neglected grounds and the landscape beyond. "We were asked to bring the house alive," she explains. "The brief was to make it look as if the garden belonged to the house, and to the surrounding area."

Kirsty's first impression was that the house was wildly out of proportion with the >



garden. "The house, of course, was the priority and had been built in the best possible position for a property, without taking into consideration the effect this would have on the garden," she says. "It is undoubtedly architecturally impressive, but it had little relationship to the outdoor space. In fact, it looked a bit like it had been dropped in out of nowhere." With the bulk of the land at the front of the house, it felt as if the grounds were out of balance. The solution was surprising: an extra parcel of land was bought to improve the ratio of house to garden, increasing the already extensive grounds to just over one and a half acres.

The clients, a professional couple with three older children, dreamed of the south-facing garden being a secluded space for entertaining – an idea which became the heart of Kirsty's design. Four months of work transformed the previously empty stretch of land, whose only feature was a row of garages, into a modern garden with separate seating areas and decking for dining, a music cabin and an informal path for walks around the grounds. Everything is connected, including the link from the



kitchen to the main outdoor seating area. This stretch was formerly split by a driveway but is now bridged by a walkway constructed from natural sandstone paving in Caramel Cream from Marshalls Ltd.

Privacy was paramount for the owners. Flanked by a busy country road (which Kirsty says she "wandered up and down for hours" searching for inspiration among a steady stream of dog walkers), the garden was overlooked and called for practical planting, such as mixed, mature yew hedging, to shield the lawn without blocking views of the countryside. "Yew is evergreen, offering coverage all year round, and is very low maintenance," she explains. "I had to bear in mind that the clients weren't gardeners and would be better off with neat hedging that only needed clipping once a year."

At its core, the garden's purpose is to make sense of the house in its rural setting. Step out the front door, and, in the immediate vicinity, the garden echoes the building's sharp, stark lines, with disciplined sections of gravel and minimal planting. Head further into the garden and the style becomes soft and relaxed, with curved lawns and willow hedges. "The design deliberately becomes less austere and more informal and traditional as it recedes from the house towards the natural surroundings," says Kirsty. "It settles the house into the greater landscape." No longer competing with each other, the garden and house are in balance. Harmony has been restored.



