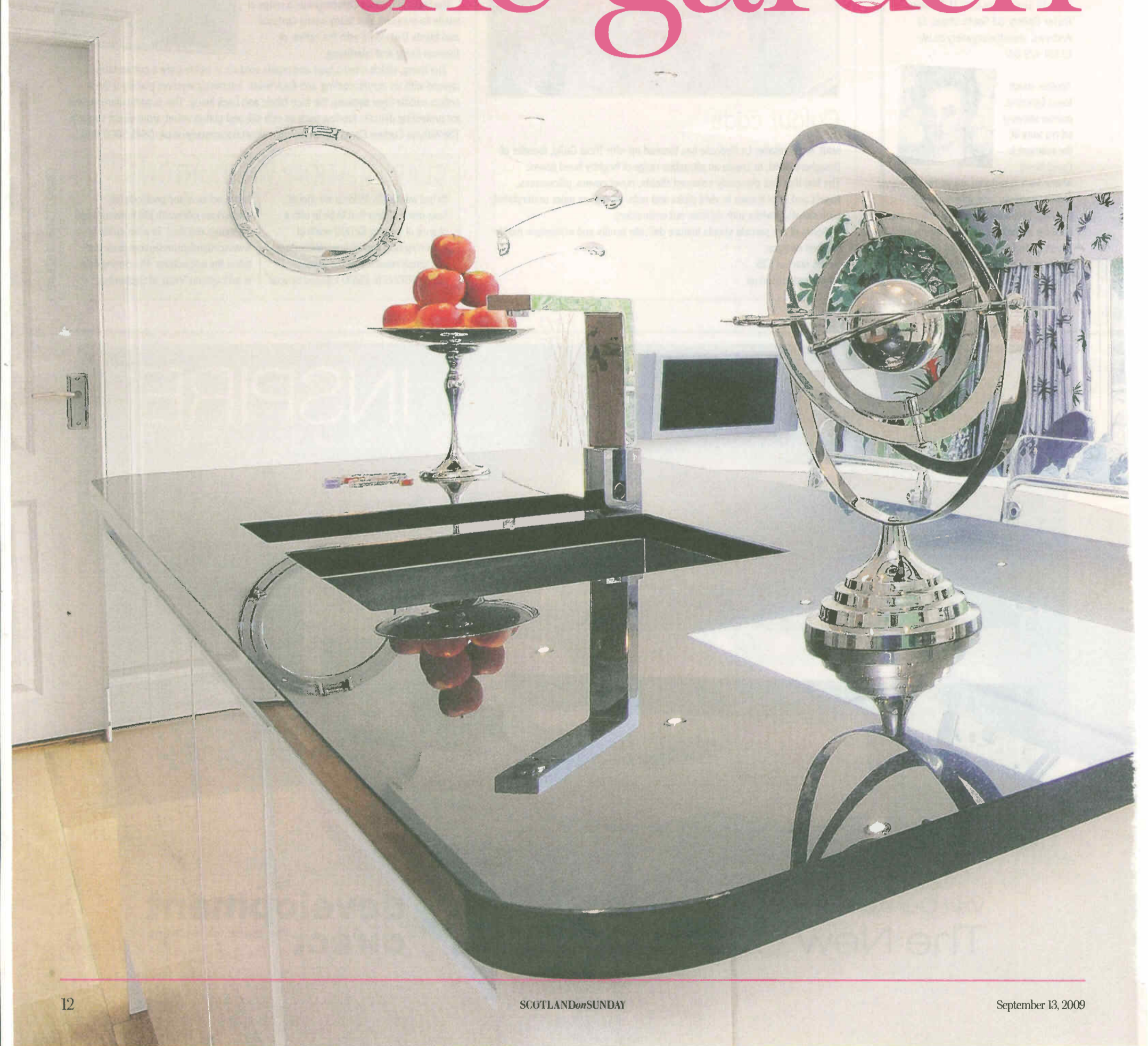


# Tales from the garden



Words **Fiona Reid** Photographs **Neil Hanna**

## How happy childhood memories and a Seventies house flourished into the perfect family home complete with purpose-built games room

**W**HEN Belinda Jarron and her husband David Chalmers moved to The Gardens in Aberlady with their sons Tommy, now six, and Davy, ten, in December 2006, it was a case of coming home for Belinda. Her parents had moved to the house directly opposite number 2 when she was ten years old, and Belinda had stayed there until her university days when she relocated to Bath to study horticulture.

Indeed Belinda knew this house, or rather its garden, from her childhood, when she used to play with the girls who lived here. Their father was a keen gardener, so when the garden was open to the public as part of Scotland's Gardens Scheme four years ago – albeit under different ownership by this stage – Belinda was very keen to have a look.

In reality, there was little left in the garden from its glory days, but the couple fell in love

with it anyway, and with the house. They posted the owner a note to say they'd be interested in buying if she ever decided to sell. Belinda and David were already living in a Cala house within a development on the other side of the village, but, as she says: "It was never going to be our 'forever' house." Four months later they got the call.

From the outset, the couple knew they were taking on a big project. The house dates →



**'We wanted a living space to use year-round, without it feeling tacked on to the house'**

← from the 1970s and was in need of a cosmetic overhaul by this stage, but they were unfazed by the level of work. As for the garden, Belinda and David are partners in Fleurtation Plantscapes, an interior landscaping company that provides creative plant displays for businesses ranging from offices and cafés to hotels, so this was destined to be a highlight of the redesign process.

Indeed, the importance of the garden – and what a garden, from the water feature that provides a soothing backdrop to outdoor dining, to the selection of exotic trees and shrubs and the fruit trees laden with pears and plums – was also key to their approach inside. Although every inch of this house has been upgraded, from the new windows and internal doors to the cornicing and skirtings, the biggest change is undoubtedly the new split-level, open-plan kitchen-dining-family room at the rear of the property, with sliding doors opening on to the west-facing terrace.

The extension doesn't stop here, as what was originally the dining-room has been extended to form a games room designed to accommodate David's 13ftx7ft snooker table. This, in turn, opens into the dining and family area, creating a flow of space, and the latter is bathed in light from the giant cupola, which also pours light into the kitchen area.

Although the couple had considered adding a conservatory, Belinda says: "We wanted a living space to use year-round, without it feeling tacked on to the house." The couple came up with the concept for the extension, and used a local architect they knew to draw up the plans. Credit goes to their builder, Steven Reynolds of Reywood Construction, who they had worked with before, and who advised the couple every step of the way. Having considered concertina-style doors to open up the rear elevation, Steven suggested these sliding floor-to-ceiling doors instead – a better option given the prevailing wind.

The process was often organic, such as when David and Belinda suggested installing a curved wall between the kitchen and the lower-level dining and family area. Steven simply got out his chalk and drew the curve on the floor, having first worked out how much space was required for the stairs on either side. Similarly, Belinda mentioned that she'd quite like floor lighting that came on when she walked into the kitchen. "It was one of those throwaway statements," she admits, but, sure enough, Steven installed the LED plinth lighting.

The predominantly black and white palette, with high-gloss, white units offset by a bank of black units on one wall, and with sleek black granite worktops, was a new direction for Belinda, given that the previous house was very magnolia, while the one before had been decorated in strong hues. It was only after having a colour analysis – determining the best colours to wear – that Belinda started to consider black and white in her wardrobe, which in turn influenced her interior choices. She knows how this sounds: "I thought it was a load of absolute nonsense at first," she admits, "but now I do feel drawn to certain colours. I still love colour but now I'll use it on a cleaner background."

Belinda also credits her husband's keen eye for sourcing things: the mirror-fronted Samsung fridge-freezer was his find, for example, as was the CDA



**Clockwise from top: the first-floor sitting-room; the view of the terrace; the kitchen/dining/family room that opens out into the garden; the games room**



From top: Belinda gives the dog some attention in the garden; a corner of the family room; the Eiffel Tower print in the stairwell; the family bathroom

range cooker. High-quality finishes were clearly a focus. The ground shower room features large-profile black tiling shot through with silvery flecks, while the family bathroom upstairs has a white marble-tiled floor. And there are whimsical, personal touches: a silver sequined curtain started as dress fabric for a friend's birthday party, while the giant print of the Eiffel Tower hanging on the stairwell recalls a family trip to Paris.

While the kitchen-dining-family space is arguably the key selling point in this house – as the couple are now planning to move again – the first-floor sitting-room comes a close second. All the houses in The Gardens were designed with the sitting-rooms upstairs, resulting here in elevated views over the rear garden and beyond. A sliding glass door opens on to a roof terrace that was extended by the creation of the games room below, while the vaulted ceiling echoes the sense of volume downstairs.

There had been a wood-burning stove here, which the couple swapped for a contemporary inset fireplace, although the elongated slate shelf below is original.

Belinda acknowledges that the hardest part of leaving will be the accumulated memories of this location. "A lot of stuff in this house we can do again," she says. "We can recreate this kitchen somewhere else, but you can't get the history back." Still, the couple realised the benefits of all their hard work when they opened the garden to the public in July this year, taking the process full circle, and had a staggering 336 visitors. As Belinda says: "We don't need more space; we don't need a bigger garden, but we'd like the challenge of doing it all again." \*

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