

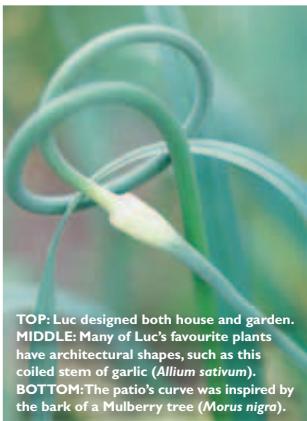


A series of pools makes exploring the garden an adventure. This path crosses one waterway via a 40m rustic boardwalk of recycled chestnut timber.

OPPOSITE: Water even laps against the office building, where concrete 'islands' provide a suitable spot to lounge on sleek furniture.

On reflection

In the countryside not far from Amsterdam, Dutch designer Luc Engelhard has transformed a once-neglected plot into a beautiful garden full of light, water and space. Words Thea Seinen, photographs Maayke de Ridder



TOP: Luc designed both house and garden.
MIDDLE: Many of Luc's favourite plants have architectural shapes, such as this coiled stem of garlic (*Allium sativum*).
BOTTOM: The patio's curve was inspired by the bark of a Mulberry tree (*Morus nigra*).



Luc is a fan of vigorous trees such as willows. These freshly pruned poles, pushed into the ground to screen the patio, have actually taken root. African lilies (*Agapanthus africanus 'Albus'*), displayed in pots by Belgian firm Dornani, are just beginning to flower.



DRIVING ALONG A COUNTRY LANE to Luc Engelhard's garden, through lush pastures bounded by rows of pollarded willows, the hustle of the busy main road from Amsterdam to Utrecht behind you is soon forgotten. Luc, a garden designer, and his wife Christine came to this peaceful spot amid the water meadows of Spengen, 15km northwest of central Utrecht, in 1999. The 32-acre plot they bought then consisted of pastures, an orchard and a plantation of 50,000 conifers – the legacy of a nursery once based here. A derelict chicken shed and a few huts were the only buildings. Despite – or perhaps because of – its stark simplicity, Luc liked the feel of this place. He was soon living in a hut on site while he set about landscaping and planting the garden. An old shed became a makeshift office and canteen while he built a house and permanent office.

Creating the garden took all Luc's experience as a garden designer – 17 years then, 25 now. There were practical considerations: the farm was 1.5m below sea level and its soil made of clay and peat. But Luc decided to make a virtue of this saturated terrain.

"In designing I always bring in elements of the surrounding landscape," Luc says. "Here water is one of the most important elements." His design includes a series of ponds and waterways. One reaches as far as the foundations of the office, its still surface nearly touching the windows. From the office there is an uninterrupted view over the pond to the garden and the fields beyond. "The wonderful thing with water is that it changes with the weather and the skies above," says Luc. "The reflections of plants, trees, sculptures and buildings make it all the more fascinating. It is important to experience the seasons intensely in your own garden."

STRIKING FEATURES

Sculptural forms are to be found all over the garden. Emerging from the water at the front of the house is one of the garden's most striking features, a row of 30 low stone pillars (see page 57) built by Luc from paving stones cut into pieces and stacked in a spiral formation. The pillars seem to move and turn as you view them from different angles, an effect emphasised by changes in the sunlight and the reflections of the water. Such subtle and unexpected effects are deliberate. Luc says: "I like gardens that are not too predictable. There must always be something to discover. A garden must evoke a certain tension, a feel of expectation; a garden must surprise."

Indeed, a walk through Luc's garden is full of unexpected pleasures. Paths lead everywhere, from the

orchard and through a former pasture, where grasses are left to grow, to a rustic pergola made of recycled wood. A path of giant stone slabs laid almost haphazardly leads to the waterside, opposite a field of grazing sheep. Another route winds its way to a little bridge; intrepid explorers with a good sense of balance can cross the water via a 40m chestnut boardwalk. On hot summer days Luc's children like to jump into the water from a tree house in the overhanging boughs of a common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) above it.

FURNITURE

Throughout the garden are beautifully designed tables, chairs, loungers, outdoor fireplaces, garden decorations and sculptures. Some are weather-beaten, others brand new – all are for sale, for the garden functions as an open-air showroom for Luc's own collection and works by leading designers, including Mooo!, Dedon, Extremis, Fermob and Domani.

Luc likes combining new and old natural materials in his furniture and buildings as well as in the hard landscaping of his gardens. For example, one of his tables has a stone top and a brickwork base, with a pair of crude stools made from basalt blocks that were once



DESIGNER PROFILE

Designer Luc Engelhard was born in the city of Gouda, in the western Netherlands, and grew up in Woerden, near Utrecht. During a trip to France at the age of

18, he visited modernist designer Le Corbusier's famous chapel Notre Dame du Haut and was so impressed that he too wanted "to make the world more beautiful". In 1983, after a spell at horticultural college in Utrecht, he started a garden design business. He now also designs furniture, vases and sculptures. Vital in creating gardens, he says, is "good cooperation and mutual understanding with clients". He is currently busy with the design of several projects such as the gardens of an estate in Wassenaar; close to The Hague, and 7,000 square metre garden in the seaside town of Noordwijk.

part of one of the piers in Rotterdam harbour. One of his favourite materials is concrete, which he uses to make floors, table tops, chairs, bowls and vases.

INSPIRED PLANTING

Luc's talent for furniture-making is obvious when you visit this garden but so too is his skill as a plantsman, the fruit of a spell at horticultural college and years of trial-and-error in the garden. He says he is always trying new plant combinations. The prairie-style planting in one sunny spot, for example, features *Rosa 'Mermaid'*, with its creamy-yellow single flowers, scrambling through the upright clumps of purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea 'Moorhexe'*) and airy blue spikes of the relatively low-growing and wind-resistant *Delphinium 'Finsteraarhorn'*. Purple *Salvia superba* 'Dear Anja' provides another vertical accent, while the daisy-like flowers of *Echinacea 'White Swan'* tumble here and there. A shady bed combines false Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum canadense*), the glaucous leaves of *Hosta 'Krossa Regal'* and the dense, mat-forming grass *Luzula sylvatica 'Bromel'*.

Luc enjoys nurturing trees, too. He says he will even adopt trees that are no longer wanted because

they have been neglected or badly pruned. "Structure, texture, bark, foliage, seasonal highlights and the way the foliage filters the light are my criteria when selecting trees," he says. "I like trees that say 'this is the way I want to grow', and get on with it. I love willow and hawthorn. I always compare willows with teenagers," says Luc, who has two children, aged 14 and 12. "They can show such unpredictable behaviour. One moment they are intensely annoying, and the next they are so incredibly nice you truly adore them."

"A willow has the capacity to rejuvenate itself constantly and becomes even more beautiful while aging. Hawthorns are heavily underestimated. In fact they are real fighters that manage to survive and grow under the most difficult circumstances." ■

Further information

Luc Engelhard 'Architectuur' in Buitenvrije Spangen 26, 3628 EX Kockengen, The Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)346 241807, www.lucengelhard.nl

- Open by appointment. For more images of Luc's furniture and sculpture, go to www.dingenvoorbuiten.nl



Ornamental grasses are attractive all year round.

PLANT NOTEBOOK

Designer Luc Engelhard's seasonal highlights: "First there is the excitement of spring, which is so full of promise. In summer the foliage of shrubs, trees and waving grasses softens the harsh contours of the architectural elements. From September colours change dramatically – architectural forms and structures stand out again. Winter is the season of fascinating contrasts, with mild sunny days, stormy weather and even snow. It is difficult to choose my favourite plants. I consider my garden as a kind of sweet shop and love all the plants in it, but here we go..."

SPRING

Because of the strength and beauty with which they grow and bud:
Horse chestnut (*Aesculus*); *Kalopanax septemlobus* var. *maximowiczii*; *Astilboides tabularis*; *Gunnera*.

SUMMER

For colour, texture and foliage:
Amur cork tree (*Phellodendron amurense*); white mulberry (*Morus alba*); smoke bush *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple'; golden-rain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*); ornamental grasses, including *Stipa tenuissima*.

AUTUMN

The warmth of:
Japanese maples;
Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*);
Caucasian wing nut tree (*Pterocarya fraxinifolia*);
sweet gum tree (*Liquidambar styraciflua*).
Beautiful bark and texture:
Tibetan cherry tree (*Prunus serrula*); paper-bark maple (*Acer griseum*).

WINTER

For scented flowers:
Witch hazel *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Jelena'; wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*).
The pink blooms of *Phlomis tuberosa* 'Amazone' dominate in a planting scheme described by Luc as 'experimental'. Behind it, a shed he built himself using recycled oak.



TOP: A lounger by Dedon beneath the shade of a pollarded willow.
MIDDLE: Luc built 30 stone pillars by cutting and stacking paving stones.
BOTTOM: Sages such as *Salvia sclarea* 'Alba' and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Schwollenburg' lend the garden a wild appearance.