

The HAUTE COUTURE of Horticulture

Exterior design is as important as interior decor in Marbella where the outdoor lifestyle has created a huge demand for glamorous designer gardens and raised horticulture to the level of *haute couture*. Belinda Beckett reports on the new *Haute-iculture*.

Photography: FREDERIQUE HORNBOSTEL

Twenty years ago, most northern Europeans' idea of a garden was a neatly-manicured rectangle of lawn bordered with rose beds and an occasional fruit tree. Now those same northern Europeans emigrating to a dream home in Spain are finding that creativity need not stop short of the front door. On the Costa del Sol, where outdoor living is possible five months of the year, the terrace and garden have become extensions of the house, ancillary open air rooms which can be carpeted with grass or tiles, ornamented with exotic shrubs and curtained with a profusion of colourful creepers and climbing plants in the same way you would furnish an interior.

As with interior fabrics and furnishings, the choice of materials is almost without limit. In Marbella particularly, with its special microclimate, where rare and exotic species from the tropics and sub-tropics thrive, whether you own a small patio or several rolling green acres, horticultural miracles are possible and a dull vista can be transformed into a brilliant and spiritually enriching new horizon.

Superior Exteriors

Performing some of those miracles are brother and sister, Javier and Sandra del Rio of Jardineria Natural, both qualified landscape gardeners. The company has more than 30 years experience on the coast, sculpting superior exteriors for private owners, hotels, restaurants, working its magic, too, in urbanisations and public parks.

The riot of colour and greenery in the gardens and cascading over the balconies at the landmark Gray d'Albion building in Puerto Banús is the team's handiwork while, at the opposite end of the spectrum, they have turned barren desert soil into fertile gardens for private palaces in Egypt and Kuwait.

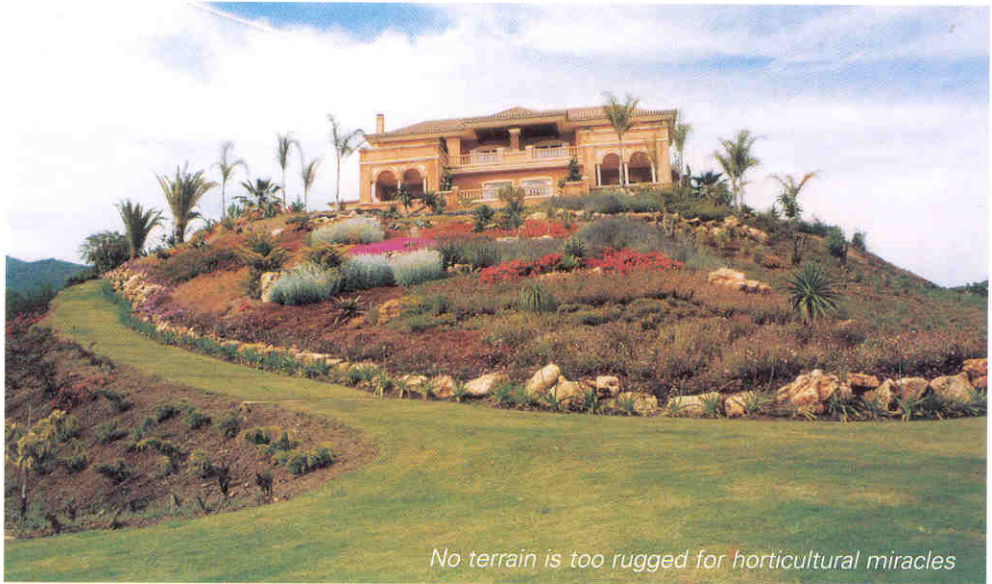
"Just as a house provides for our physical necessities, the surrounding exterior should satisfy and enrich our spiritual values," says Javier. "A correctly designed and well cared-for garden is a place of inspiration, an ideology, a place to awaken our emotions and stimulate the senses of vision, smell, hearing, touch. If a garden does not fulfill these simple criteria, insufficient attention has been paid to its physical entities to meet the owner's needs and create the right balance and harmony."

Careful planning is the key. "One of the mistakes people make when having a new home built is to regard the garden as an afterthought," says Sandra. "This limits the possibilities later on. We like to work with the architect from the outset and this is essential if the client is having a terraced garden, retaining walls, ornamental lakes, cascades, large trees or anything which involves major earthworks."

The international mix of cultures on the coast and the diversity of the vegetation has generated an incredible range of designs. Says Sandra, who also studied interior design: "The Mediterranean garden is especially popular - it is not really a classic garden but rather on the wild side with flowers and bushes growing naturally, but perhaps







No terrain is too rugged for horticultural miracles

“A correctly designed and well-cared for garden is a place of inspiration which should satisfy and enrich our spiritual values”

incorporating a formal area like a patio with a fountain or a pergola for shade and relaxation. The French garden is stylised, with a lot of hedging which can be shaped in the form of a labyrinth around ornamental paths. The Arabic garden is more geometric with orange trees and lots of water.” For one client the company transformed a small patio into a Japanese garden with rattan and bamboo screens, shrubs in decorative oriental pots, a fountain centrepiece and plants growing up through a gravel floor. With the surge of new property being built in the foothills of the Sierras, terraced rockery gardens are also in demand.

Plotting and Planting

From its own nurseries in Estepona, Jardineria Natural can supply an A-Z of plant species with names as exotic as their appearance and which have a special rarity value to anyone used to living in more northern latitudes: names like plumbago and dama de noche, jacaranda and flamboyant, bird of paradise, yucca and mimosa. The majority come from central



Rockeries and fountains can turn a garden into a showpiece



Europe and the tropics - northern European species generally do not flourish here. Staples in any colourful garden are plants which have a long flowering period such as adella, bouganvillea, geraniums, margaritas and hibiscus. These can be mixed with more season species like bogonia and verbena to give a constantly changing palette of colour and nardy green annuals to keep the garden looking lush all year round. For clients who are impatient for a mature garden and don't want to wait for saplings to grow into trees, all kinds of fully grown varities can be ordered - fig, olive, pine, chirimoyo, nispero, cyprus and and a huge variety of palms.

“With Marbella’s microclimate, rare and exotic species from the tropics and sub-tropics thrive”

As in interior design, the accessories are important in any garden. Sandra has used wooden railway sleepers for steps and to contain shrubs. Large terracotta urns turned over on their sides and left to grow into the vegetation make novel plant pots; unusual effects can be achieved for paths with a mix of stone slabs and river pebbles; boulders can be arranged into rockeries to display flora or as a feature waterfall. Jardineria Natural works in tandem with other companies to supply the finishing touches - pergolas, garden furniture, floodlighting, automatic irrigation - even frogs and koi cars for the lily pond.

“The first step is to see the garden, find out what the client has in mind and draw up a practicable plan,” says Sandra. “Most people have a picture in their minds but need guidance on choice of plants which they can select themselves at our nurseries. Our customers have been amazed at the effects which can be achieved which almost always exceed their expectations. We have clients from northern Spain to whom a garden is still such a novelty, they always ring us before they come on holiday and ask us to change all the plants!”

Once the last shrub is planted, the green-fingered can get out their pruning shears and spend many a happy hour pottering while for those who prefer to enjoy nature more passively, Jardineria Natural has a list of recommended gardeners. Your own, personal Garden of Eden can be as wildy extravagant or cost-effective as you like, but consulting a specialist landscaper is a sure safeguard against making costly mistakes and will enable you to exploit your plot or patio to its maximum potential, guaranteeing that everything in the garden looks lovely. **all**

Further information from Jardineria Natural on Tel. 95 281 2574.