

The naturalistic stream is foil lined and has an exterior pump for easy access for maintenance

PHOTOGRAPHS: Philippe Perdereau WORDS: Claire Masset

DUTCH COURAGE

Designer Noël van Mierlo was brave enough to design his first stream garden into this contemporary plot of two parts



The garden transitions into a more contemporary style with a fabricated steel bridge, punctuated with acacia poles, which leads from the swimming pool



Noël van Mierlo

Noël van Mierlo worked in landscaping for 19 years, designing and building high-end gardens, before opening a small design office for residential gardens with his wife Iris in 2012. He is the winner of several awards including Dutch Garden of the Year in 2002, 2008 and 2010; Most Sustainable Garden 2012; and the International Ponds Award for Best Natural Pool 2015. www.vanmierlotuinen.nl

Few designers would attempt to pack a swimming pool, pool house, stream and forest-like garden into a 150m² plot. But Dutch designer Noël van Mierlo likes to think big. “I’d worked with the client before,” he explains. “So when he moved to a smaller house, he commissioned me again. He loves nature and trees and gave me the freedom to create something special.”

The original garden, in the village of Deurne in the Netherlands, was overgrown, so everything was up for grabs. Van Mierlo envisaged a natural stream in a woodland setting, with the addition of an asymmetric steel bridge and angled pavilion to ease the transition to a contemporary swimming pool.

After producing a rough design for the L-shaped site, he spent a lot of time “connecting the dots”, making sure all the elements – both the soft and hard landscaping – were in some way related. He selected the rocks from a local quarry to match the colour of the slates on the house. Similarly, the steel of the bridge communicates with the iron in the stones, and the orange tones of the steel echo those in the brick walls. Varying shades of grey-brown, rust and ochre are the perfect foil for the gradations of green in the planting. The overall effect feels earthy and naturalistic, despite the use of modern materials.

Van Mierlo didn’t just rely on tonal correspondence to create harmony and smooth transitions between the different spaces. The slanted pool house and the shifting angles of the bridge echo the jagged shapes of the rocks and the diagonal

shifts of the tree trunks, creating a garden that feels dynamic and alive. The acacia poles that pierce the bridge produce an exciting concord between nature and the man-made.

Well connected

The swimming pool was built close to the house. “That’s where the sun is most of the day. And it feels fitting to have a contemporary pool close to a contemporary house. Then we had to create a transition to the natural part of the garden in the back. “There was budget to do something amazing. The garden is very high end – every square metre is built,” explains van Mierlo. Materials are all beautifully crafted. The paving by the pool is Swedish granite, the deck is Ipé wood.

For the bridge, he chose raw steel “because it rusts more beautifully than Corten steel”. The pool house and fence are made from bangkirai wood. Originally the pool house was going to have a green roof – hence the angled design, for viewing the plants. In the end, the client decided against it, for maintenance reasons, so Van Mierlo went for a roof of steel and glass instead.

Connection is clearly key in this garden, but so is a close observation of nature. “I spent a lot of time in the Ardennes,

“WE HAVE A LOT OF CONTEMPORARY GARDENS... I SEE A LOT OF FROZEN MOMENTS: 12 MONTHS THAT LOOK ALMOST THE SAME. WE HAVE SEASONS, SO WHY NOT CELEBRATE THEM?” →



The pavilion or pool house, with its glass-and-steel roof, rests at an eye-catching angle on its bangkirai or Yellow Balau wood frame

FIND OUT MORE about the SGD conference 'Water Ways' p43



PERENNIAL PLANTING KEY			
PLANTS, GRASSES AND FERNS		OTHER PERENNIALS AND GROUND COVER	FRONT YARD BULBS
Calamagrostis brachytricha	Persicaria amplexicaulis 'Inverleith'	Epimedium x warleyense	c Crocus sieberi 'Firefly'
Rodgersia podophylla 'Braunlaub'	Astilbe simplicifolia 'Sprite'	Ceratostigma plumbaginoides	n Narcissus 'Thalia'
Hosta plantaginea 'Grandiflora'	Campanula poscharskyana 'Lisduggan Variety'	Dicentra formosa 'Langtrees'	BACKYARD BULBS
Polygonatum multiflorum	Geranium x cantabrigiense 'Biokovo'	Lathyrus vernus	c Corydalis solida
Lunaria rediviva	Pulmonaria angustifolia	Tiarella cordifolia	a Anemone ranunculoides
Helleborus x sternii	Cornus canadensis	Galium odoratum	h Hyacinthoides non-scripta
Carex buechananii	Viola odorata	Acaena microphylla 'Kupferteppich'	PLANTS ALONG THE WATERCOURSE
Carex plantaginea	Leptinella squalida		Damp, solitary:
Dryopteris erythrosora			Onoclea sensibilis
Polystichum setiferum 'Dahlem'			Carex grayi
BORDERS			Primula bulleyana
Digitalis ferruginea			Narcissus bulbocodium (bulb)
Digitalis lutea			
			POND PLANTS
			Thelypteris palustris
			Lobelia sessilifolia
			Comarum palustre
			UNDERWATER
			Ceratophyllum demersum



Photo: Noël van Mierlo

WHO'S WHO

Landscaping, hardscape and planting
Van Mierlo Tuinen
www.vanmierlotuinen.nl

Planting design
Ruurd van Donkelaar
www.ruurdvandonkelaar.nl

Lighting design
Jolanda Tielens
www.lichtaan.com

Swimming pool
Elzen Swimming Pools
www.elzenzwembaden.nl

"I'VE LEARNED THAT IF YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING, DO IT RIGHT – AND WORK WITH GOOD PEOPLE. DOING EVERYTHING YOURSELF IS YESTERDAY'S NEWS"

about an hour's drive away, studying the woods and streams. I wanted to do the real thing. The stream in the garden is just 4m long but it looks real." So too does the planting. "The trees are almost all the same, just like in a forest. It's not like some gardens, which are like a museum of different specimens." Van Mierlo chose Koelreuteria paniculata because of its transparency, freshness of colour and small size. In autumn, its delicate foliage turns glorious shades of yellow and gold.

"I wanted to create a place where the dynamics of the seasons are exposed, so I picked trees that colour beautifully in the autumn," he says. "In the Netherlands we have a lot of contemporary gardens, but most are nothing but an extension of the house. I see a lot of frozen moments: 12 months that look almost the same. We have seasons in this country, so why not celebrate them?"

Secrets of success

The perennial planting is the work of talented plantsman Ruurd van Donkelaar. "I'm more of an architect," Van Mierlo explains, "but Ruurd knows what works in every soil." He believes that collaboration with great people is the secret

to creating a successful garden. He used to have a landscape company, employing about 15 people, but nowadays he runs a smaller design agency with his wife. "I have one priority: to make the best possible garden, so I collaborate with the best. A lot of new gardens are either plant or architecture oriented. It's often one or the other, but it doesn't have to be if you work with the right people."

Fittingly, the perennial plants and shrubs – such as Epimedium x warleyense and Pulmonaria angustifolia – have a lovely woodland feel. Many, such as Dryopteris erythrosora, Viola odorata, and Helleborus x sternii, are shade-loving and relatively low growing. They hug the ground, or appear in small clumps, so that the stream, rocks and space around them can breathe, creating a feeling of spaciousness in a relatively small plot.

At night, the garden takes on a very different feel thanks to delicate lighting. Here, too, Van Mierlo worked with specialist Jolanda Tielens, who used small and carefully placed LED lights. The contours of the tree trunks and leaves are brought into dramatic focus, as are the textures of the bricks and wood near the pool. The greys of the slates and metal turn a wonderful electric blue and the lights in the stream and pool make the whole scene look magical.

Built in 2011, the garden proved a turning point for Van Mierlo. "It was my first garden with a stream. It was a kind of experiment and I'm very proud of it. It proved to me that you can aim for something special and that things are possible. I'm most proud of the complexity made to look like a seamless effort. I've learned that if you want to do something, do it right – and work with good people. Doing everything yourself is yesterday's news." ○