

# GardZen

*A well-designed garden can be a place of sanctuary on even the most stressful of days and bringing nature to your doorstep creates an idyllic space. Noël van Mierlo of Van Mierlo Tuinen tells Luke Thomas about the award-winning Japanese water garden he created*

Gardens aren't always the first thing to receive a loving touch when perfecting a home, but their presence, especially when beautifully realised, can complete a property – seamlessly bringing the outdoors in.

No one knows this more than Noël van Mierlo, owner and lead design at Van Mierlo Tuinen, a specialist in luxurious naturalistic gardens. The prize-winning design bureau works according to traditional methods, and is known for adventurous and green exterior spaces, passionately creating natural wellness experiences in gardens in which man, nature and architecture come together naturally.

Noël explains the company's mantra, Experience your Nature: "I'd like to take you with me in my vision on garden architecture. This originated on my journeys through countries in which nature is much more self-evident than here in Holland. Places like; Canada, the US, Australia and Scandinavia all have a wealth of flora and fauna and I want to convey this through my designs.

"The finished results are gardens with a rich nature experience, as if they've always been this way. A natural wellness space where you're immersed in peace and quiet, luxury and comfort. A lounge terrace alongside a swimming

pool, an attractive hearth-fire under a cool covering, or a delightful sauna with a beautiful view; I find it a privilege to work on a home with nature as my instrument. Besides that, I find it incredibly interesting to have my clients experience how nature can impact on well-being."

Indeed, in Noël's latest project, a Japanese water garden, the cultural and natural elements inspired the design heavily. The modern interpretation of a Japanese water garden with tea house, saw him win the Society of Garden Designers' (SGD) Best International Garden and People's Choice Awards.

The competition judges said: "A wonderful interpretation of a theme combined with contemporary modernity. Beautifully soft both in its hard and soft landscaping, including stunning rock work, the design draws the eye around the space resting on details and ornament while being calmed by the water and planting composition.

"An incredible transformation which is brave, accomplished, well-balanced and aspirational. An inspiring and atmospheric garden."

The space itself is a soothing water garden which combines contemporary European design with a refined Japanese touch.

Says Noël: "According to Japanese garden philosophy, a water stream is the source of life and the pond is life itself.

Rocks are the obstacles in life that we encounter, and by crossing the bridge you're leaving the familiar world behind and stepping into the green world, with the teahouse as a sanctuary for meditation.

"Meandering paths invite you to discover the garden and enjoy the views. Everything contributes to a mindful experience."

The materials used were inspired by Wabi-sabi principles, which extol the virtues of imperfections and beautiful aging. This means the garden will only get a deeper patina over the years, with the paths in the shade allow moss to grow just like on the soft, porous clay tiles of the roof.

A collaboration with artist Xander Spronken, resulted in a special bridge made of 2cm thick raw steel plates, the surface of which will continue to corrode and change.

"This garden is a beautiful example of perfect collaboration. Thanks to close consultation between client, garden designer, lighting architect, architect and an excellent execution of the gardener and contractor, we were able to realise this special project," concludes Noël.

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