

Garden Group Meeting at Terry & Brenda's on the Montgo – 7th April 2009



Keeping true to form the weather was very unsettled for our visit to Terry and Brenda's garden, at the foot of the Montgo. However, 25 of us assembled in the La Emita supermarket car park, on Jesus Pobre road, for Terry to convoy us up to his house and garden.

The plan was for Terry to give us a talk on garden design followed by the important issues involved in garden construction including some insights into plant selection and and garden organization and maintenance, followed by a walk round his garden.

The plan initially went to schedule. We were all seated in his rear courtyard avidly listening to Terry give his presentation



but then the weather turned against us and it started to rain! We retreated to the garage to listen to the second half!

It was certainly a very comprehensive talk from which Terry has compiled a report. This will be sent, by email, to each member.

However, this pictorial account summarises some of the main points.

Terry opened by talking about how he started at the garden design stage *“In my experience I have found the only way to design a garden successfully is by making an accurate scale plan for all or part. I would recommend, also, that everything is seen in context as a whole. It is essential that design makes provision for gardening on flat levels. This can be achieved on sloping sites by incorporating just one large wall dividing upper garden from lower garden or a series of walls forming terraces. Failure to achieve this will result in soil erosion from run-off and loss of precious nutrients together with much mess. It may be wise to consider that on sloping sites, of which there are many in Spain, one large wall might well be more economical than say a series of say three, four or five.*

As you design, give serious thought to the planting areas. How you do this will determine how well stocked your garden looks. In reality, of course, it may not be. It is just an illusion brought on by the design, but it works.

In my garden, for example, it was a deliberate act of design that 65% would be given over to hard standing areas and only 35% to planting. The secret is to make it look the other way round. The benefits are, a reduced work load and an enhanced appearance. Less, indeed, becomes more”.

Terry then moved on to construction and made a number of important points:

“As construction begins, it is important that you have removed from proposed planting areas stones and rocks that will be root impenetrable, to make way for good quality soil, (if you have been wise enough to have drawn a scale plan, you will know exactly where they are going to be).

Before any construction begins, also make sure that any large rocks, or equivalent, are brought in and placed in position. This is likely to be done using a medium or large machine. You do not want to pay twice, these machines do not come cheap!”

Terry uses a wide variety of stone in his garden and he gave useful information on all of them.

For example, he said, *“In my garden I have used the following, Marble, Tarragona, Fossil, Oxidada, large stones out of the ground, volcanic rocks, volcanic gravel, ornamental gravel, and for the drive, pressed concrete”.*

He dealt with all of these, but first gave a word about the ordinary gravel that is commonly used in Spain for drives and walkways. The normal process for using this medium is that the area is graded, upon which is laid black polythene with holes for drainage and on goes the gravel. He said, yes, it's quick and cheap but felt it was just about the worst option of all. Initially it looks fine. However, in a short space of time it would quickly gather waste of every kind, which is impossible to remove and it will become unsightly to look at. It will infest with weeds - they do very well in gravel despite the polythene! In addition, it is most uncomfortable to walk on and also messy in an uncontrolled way. He suggested that one should think twice about this one.

Marble – Terry has used white marble around the pool area.



“This was a bold choice, covering a large area, and also a deliberate design feature, as the marble is taken to run from each end of the villa, exactly at a distance of 75 ft. In doing so the terrace has unified the house with the garden”.



“Its qualities are that it is lifting to look at; it accentuates pool planting; no matter how hot the sun is one can walk on it at any time; on leaving the pool it is non slip; it cleans up beautifully as well as being extremely even for bare foot traffic. I would certainly recommend it.”

Tarragona - This he has used extensively for the rear drive, walkways, terraces



and around the pergola area.



Terry commented and concluded, *“As the name suggests the stone comes from Tarragona and as this is some distance north, the transport costs make this stone very expensive (being three times the cost of local stone). I have been very disappointed with Tarragona for the following reasons --- Cost; it flakes (although any flaking is likely to see us off!); it is porous and susceptible to heavy staining, particularly under planted areas, which can only be cleaned off with a pressure hose, which in turn removes the colour textures from the stone; it is impossible to walk on in bare feet in hot weather. I'd give this one a miss.”*

Oxidada – *“This is a local stone, which we have used in our Secret Garden*



and Japanese Garden,



and it is fabulous, as well as being three times cheaper than Tarragona”.

Terry couldn't see any drawbacks with Oxidada, and “the colour and textures are among the most natural and pleasing that I have seen. It appears impervious to staining and is very hard. When wet it looks even more beautiful. In the Secret Garden it is laid to paving. In the Japanese Garden it is laid as a dry wall with it's edge showing. The edges display completely different natural colours and look every bit as beautiful. This one's a winner!”

Stones from the ground - The Secret Garden was constructed using ordinary stones out of the ground taken from a site that was being developed. Each stone was washed and scrubbed back to its original colour and laid on block work using normal soft sand and white cement to the walls of the garden with the Oxidada stone forming the paving.



Ornamental Stones – *“Ornamental stones should not be confused with normal gravel used for drives and pathways. We have made good use of ornamental stones within the garden. Between the rocks of the Cacti and succulent rockery brown volcanic ornamental stones cover the whole area and add a natural feel.”*





Terry also talked about fossil stone, pressed concrete volcanic and rockery stone.

Using stone summary:

Terry concluded, *“In Spain we are spoilt for choice in an area that, if used wisely, can make an enormous impact on any garden, providing wonderful natural colours in a variety of shapes and sizes that provide magnificent back-drops for plants. Throughout our entire garden I have avoided using ceramics in terracotta colours. Personally, I find these to be quite dull, lifeless and totally uninteresting and devoid of any imagination. They are fine for the house or on nayas if that is what you want, but certainly not for the garden”*

Soil: On soil Terry commented, *“Normally there are two types of soil that can be purchased, red or brown. I would strongly advise leaving the red alone. When wet it is like stodgy clay that cannot be worked, and when the weather is dry and hot it bakes like rock, which in turn impacts severely upon the development of strong root systems.*

Good fertile brown soil is the correct choice. Deal with a reputable supplier. For every 5 cu mtrs soil should be added 1 cu mtr of the additive Estericol

What is Estericol? It is animal waste, (all types), that is treated and left for many months to break down.”

Terry continued by discussing choice of plants, what and where to buy followed by irrigation, pruning and ornamentation.

Ornamentation: This, he said, generally comes after design, construction and planting.

Terry has a fantastic array of sculptures blended in to his garden design covering both the pool area as well as the garden itself.



Terry continued with much more information on a further wide range of gardening issues that was extremely valuable.

He told us that their garden took six years to bring together and it was his intention that, when finished, he and Brenda were going to enjoy it rather than labour over it. He, apparently, spends very little of his time working in the garden. He potters and enjoys every minute, making minor adjustments as necessary. In the general areas of routine maintenance he clearly remains well organised and in control! This significantly reduces the workload further. He never tries to be everywhere at once. He works one area at a time knowing there is always tomorrow or another day. Good advice for us all!

Even though the weather was not 100% we did manage to miss the majority of the rain and, after some light refreshments,



were able to meander around Terry and Brenda's wonderful garden.





In fact, Terry has invited us all back later in the summer to have more time seeing the garden and to ask him any questions on any of the subject matter he has spoken of.

An invitation that I would thoroughly recommend we take up.

Chris & John Parsons
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