



## The design fuses traditional aspects of the landscape

In the ponds that edge the approach to Attadale, on the west coast of Scotland, are the reflections of mountains, lit up in the sunshine which floods across the landscape, grazes the tips of the trees and fills the spaces between the shadows. Looking west, across the waters of Loch Carron you can see the peak of Beinn na Caillich, 22 miles away on the Isle of Skye, a view that Nicky and Ewen Macpherson have enjoyed for 30 years. It was Ewen's father who first moved to Attadale when he purchased the estate in 1952, but it wasn't until the 1990s that the gardens underwent a complete reconstruction.

Nicky's inspiration, as an artist and a gardener, has resulted in a design that fuses traditional aspects of the Scottish landscape with a more modern outlook, introducing a Japanese garden, pieces of sculpture and a geodesic dome. The water gardens were the first area to be restored, and are Nicky's personal favourite. 'They evolved after the storms in the 1980s totally destroyed this part of the garden'. The gales ripped out the majority of the original trees and rhododendrons and Nicky has been recreating and adding to the garden ever since.

'It was the catalyst for a new start,' says head gardener Geoff Stephenson. 'The garden has reached a high standard of technical achievement,' he says, taking no credit for himself. 'The gardens seem to blend almost seamlessly with the hillside.' Even the dome, which he feared would

stand out when the idea was first broached, merges with the landscape, the grey hues of the structure mirroring the shades of the rockface behind it, and the ferns inside carrying your eye through and out to the planting behind and above. 'Mrs Macpherson concentrates on views,' adds Geoff. 'Taking something out allows you to see through to something else.'

This can be seen with the ponds as well, but in a different way. The tranquil surfaces, adrift with lilies, below small, arched bridges, provide a contrast to the rugged environment surrounding them. Yet the textures and spectrum of green leaf colour prevent any incongruity - like the prostrate juniper which, to Nicky, looks like 'a waterfall falling over the cliff'.

It is important to her that the garden remains fluid, not static, and the design is therefore never complete. Contrasting foliage is as important as flowers. Round-leaved darmera, for example, scarlet in autumn, is sited next to spear-like irises, and wide *Gunnera manicata* and *Ligularia dentata* 'Desdemona' beside a clump of narrow bamboo.

Nicky's flexible attitude ensures that problems and changes are incorporated into the garden plan - an approach which has led to a new project almost every year. The Japanese garden, for example, provided a solution for a waterlogged area, and the new dome has helped house tender ferns collected by Peter Hainsworth of

**ABOVE With its stunning views across Loch Carron to the Isle of Skye, Attadale has been home to the Macpherson family since the 1950s. Over the past 15 years, the 20 acres have been developed into a remarkable garden which has interest from spring right through the autumn.**



### glorious gardens

**FAR LEFT** The flaming leaves of a deciduous azalea. **TOP LEFT** The sundial surrounded by a seasonal planting of silvery *Stachys byzantina* and white Japanese anemones. **LEFT** The geodesic dome houses a fine collection of ferns. **BELOW** Inside the dome, the balmy microclimate creates the perfect environment for tree ferns *Dicksonia antarctica* and other rare species.

## with a modern outlook

Achnashellach, some of which had previously struggled in the cold Scottish winters. When Peter passed away, the Macphersons inherited his collection, which today has grown to 2,000 ferns, and more than 100 different varieties, the majority of which are tended in tiny pots outside the kitchen garden - carefully monitored by Geoff, who has become a near expert on the subject.

There is one extremely rare fern within the dome, a *Thyrsopteris elegans* which, Geoff says, is endemic to the Juan Fernandez Islands in the Pacific Ocean, where, incidentally, the original Robinson Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk, was found. Geoff was lucky enough to procure a plant from the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh and it is now thriving in the dome's mild microclimate.

Being inside the dome is a special experience. If you stand on the central stone (transported from another part of the estate) your voice resonates up from your feet, echoing as though bouncing off the walls of a deep cave. Surrounding you are several varieties of moss, lichen and fern and through the middle of it all, a stream running down off the hillside. The ecology is dependent on plenty of rain and shade, which the dome recreates, producing a thumbnail of the Highlands - rather like a mini Eden Project. 'It's a good place to sit with a dram of whisky and enjoy the evening,' Geoff says. 'I quite often bump into Mrs Macpherson heading out here with the same idea!' ►

