

IRELAND

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h o m e

Fergal Phillips



Austen's love of design was inspired by his father's passion for gardening

The garden was very much a traditional one, with lots of herbaceous borders, shrubberies and trees. In spring it was spectacular, because it was surrounded by gorse and heathers. I suppose it influenced my own work really, in so far as I have never been a minimalist. My designs tend towards the traditional, too.

One incident I remember, which I think may have been my first foray into garden design, was when I built a series of dams in the stream. At first I was just doing it for the fun of damming up the water, but then it dawned on me how good they looked. I must have been 15 at the time.

The look of the dams inspired me to build a series of steps out of logs into the bank going down to the stream, with a sort of a bench where you could sit.

I remember dragging my parents down to try it out so they could take a break from the gardening. Dad did come and have a sit down and he said he liked it, but perhaps he was just being nice.

I went to school in Wesley, too, so my brothers and I would commute in with Dad. He taught me English but he didn't pick on me too much.

Whenever I get the smell of wild garlic these days, I am right back there — that and the scent of irises.

✦ *Tim Austen is a judge for the RTE show Super Garden, which will reveal this year's winning garden next week*

Interview by Niall Toner