

WEEKEND

Saturday, 5 June 2010

* THAT WAS THEN
THIS IS NOWThat
was
then

TIM AUSTEN PRESENTER



This picture of myself (left) and my younger brother Zebedee was taken in the garden of our old family home near Enniskerry, Co Wicklow. It was a beautiful place — if you looked out from Powerscourt you could see it with the Sugarloaf Mountain in the background. And yes, Zebedee did get a lot of ribbing about his name and *The Magic Roundabout*, the TV show it came from.

I have two other brothers, Barnaby and Benjamin, and there's six years between each of us. My dad was a teacher and my mother later set up her own catering business from home. Our house had a fantastic two-acre garden, surrounded by trees.

Back in the 1970s, it sometimes felt like we were living out in the sticks. It was a lovely childhood — I suppose I got my love of the outdoors as a child — but I remember the isolation.

My parents were very green-fingered, they developed the whole garden. We used to have visitors come to see the garden as it was part of the Wicklow Garden Festival.

I went to primary school in Kiltarnan then to Wesley in Ballinteer. My dad taught there; he taught me for a while, which was a bit odd. We didn't interact very much in the classroom.

When I left school, I decided that I wanted to work outdoors, maybe as a vet. I went to do a degree at Birmingham University and afterwards did natural conservation work with the British Trust.

I spent about 10 or 11 years working in the UK and then returned to Ireland to work as a landscape architect. By then, I knew

that garden design was what I really wanted to do.

As a kid, I was always making designs in the garden. We had a stream and I made a series of dams in it and cut steps in the slope, all for my parents.

In 2007, we started our own business in Wicklow town and entered the Bloom in the Park competition the next year, designing a showgarden. In 2008 we won a gold medal for the people's favourite natural garden.

Last year, I was the overall winner. Gary Graham, the originator of Bloom, is also one of the judges on RTE's *Super Garden* with me. I was approached to be a judge and, as I'd done a bit of TV work before, I decided to go for it.

Looking back at this picture, I remember there were heavy snowfalls back in those days. It didn't deter us from going outside. My mother always encouraged us to go outside the house, and we'd spend a lot of time on that patio. I remember us wearing those yellow oilskins; I can recall our dad giving them to us.

One year we got snowed in for nine days and it was a two or three-mile trudge to the nearest shop. It was just as well my mother had so much food in the freezer as she had her catering business on the go back then.

The house was sold a few years ago, but I feel I still have an emotional attachment to the place. I have some very happy memories of growing up there. **W**

The last episode of *Super Garden*, with Tim Austen as a judge, is on Wednesday, 8pm, on RTE1. He is also at this weekend's Bloom Festival in the Phoenix Park

Richie Taylor

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