

COUNTRY LIFE[®]

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EVERY THURSDAY £3



LONDON

The survival
guide for bewildered
countrymen

PLUS Ravishing new rooms at the Ritz,
talented artists hidden in a gasworks
and an interview with Zara Phillips





Marcus Barnett and Philip Nixon moved from their respective careers in the Army and banking into very successful gardening businesses

**Marcus Barnett and Philip Nixon—
garden designers**

It is typical of the eclectic Gas Works to find a garden-design partnership that pairs a former bond salesman for UBS Bank and a former captain in the Scots Guards. After cutting his ties with the City, Philip Nixon (now 41) set out on an entirely different path by enrolling in a master's degree course in garden design at the Inchbald School—it was here he met fellow student Marcus Barnett (36), fresh from the Army and a spell in management consultancy.

Even before graduating in 2004, the two were collaborating on their first major project, a garden in the chic section of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show called 'The Gallery Outside', where they showcased works by Lord Lichfield in a garden embellished with boundary walls of corrugated aluminium. Bingo! They won a gold medal and best in show. Their sponsor, Savills, backed the pair again this year, but asked them to create a major show garden on the main avenue. The resulting design again won gold.

'Many going into garden design just want to dabble, but I wanted to do it seriously and make a business,' explains Philip, accounting for the pair's starburst rise in the gardening world.

Marcus and Philip continue to collaborate on show gardens

'Even before graduating, the two were collaborating on their first project, a garden at the Chelsea Flower Show'

—their entry for next year's event is already being planned—although they actually run two independent practices from the studio they share. Philip's work currently ranges from a £500,000 project in Suffolk to transforming a London garden for a budget of £15,000. He describes his work as contemporary, but not gratuitously so, adding: 'Modernism is far too restrictive. But nor am I going to do a reconstruction of an Italianate garden'. Marcus, who works in a similar idiom, says: 'There is always geometry in one of my gardens, but it will be softened by planting, so that a traditional gardener could stand in it and still find it pleasing'. He is engaged on a town garden in Battersea for £50,000, at the same time as landscaping a 150-acre site in Surrey, and potentially creating a new garden on the island of Mikonos.

You can telephone Marcus on 020-7736 9761 or visit www.marcusbarnettdesign.com, and Philip on 020-7371 0066 or visit www.philipnixondesign.com

Photographs: Tino Tedaldi.