

w&h LEARNING CURVE

'My garden design course showed how to transform dull into magical'

DELITH WRINGE, 53, tells Emma Pritchard how her study set her on a new career path.

Delith, who is married and has two children, aged 22 and 16, lives in Datchworth, Herts.

"What I love most about garden design is the transformation. You can take a dull, ordinary space, and make it magical and exciting.

I'd always wanted to learn how to do it myself, but it wasn't until I turned 50 and my children were more independent that I thought, 'Let's do something for me'.

I went online and liked the look of the courses offered by KLC School of Garden Design at Hampton Court Palace. I signed up to do the Diploma in Garden Design.

The course cost £7,300, which I paid for with savings and a career development loan from the bank. I was teaching in a school for visually impaired children, and took the plunge and handed in my notice. My family were supportive, and we were able to get by on my husband's salary.

I started in January 2009. It was two days a week, but there was homework plus work experience placements on the other days.

Over 12 months we learnt how to present our ideas visually by sketching them and using computer design programmes. We studied

garden history, plant science and horticulture. We covered how to set up a business, and had sessions in hard landscaping – laying paving, building walls and planting. With the unique learning resource of the 20th Century Garden, seeing borders go from nothing to being full of plants, and knowing I'd had a part in it, was so satisfying.

There were 15 in my group, ranging in age from 23 to 60, but we all had the common desire to pursue a career in garden design. Some days we'd view a garden then come back to create our own designs and planting plans for the space, which we'd present to the

class. I found that terrifying, but no one was there to laugh, and as time went by, I became more confident, which I'm proud of.

All our projects were assessed, with marks counting towards our final grade. We had

written exams and practical assessments – presenting the plans and theory rather than actually carrying it out. The exams were a challenge but I was over the moon when I graduated in December.

We also had work experience placements. I spent time at *Gardens Illustrated* magazine and Great Dixter Gardens in East Sussex. I also worked at Pioneer Nurseries in Herts – I helped out there throughout the diploma, and they now employ me four days a week to help run the retail side of the business.

I was also able to design a garden for a local competition winner. It was incredible to see my idea go from a sketch to a real garden, and it has given me confidence in my capabilities, and shown me that garden design is what I really want to do. I'm now looking for my next project, and in the meantime I'm digging up my own garden. There's lots of exciting stuff out there that I can put in it – I'm creating an oasis to enjoy and admire from my kitchen!" **w&h** *The KLC School of Design runs part-time and full-time diplomas in garden design. See klc.co.uk.*

I turned my passion into a new career that I love

Try our one-day course

+ w&h and KLC School of Design are holding an exclusive one-day reader event on 3 June in the grounds of Hampton Court Palace, showing you how to create the garden of your dreams.

+ It will be led by award-winning designer and vice chair of the Society of Garden Designers, Juliet Sargeant, who'll show how to make the most of the space you have, to landscape and develop areas of interest, and to combine plants to create stunning borders. You'll be able to put your ideas on paper – and will leave with a fab w&h goodie bag!

+ Tickets cost £110, which includes lunch. Call (020) 7376 3377 or go to klc.co.uk/womanhomegarden.

