



# A tropical paradise getting ready for warmer times

By Ruth Anders

It's not often you walk through a house in East Finchley to find yourself in the tropics. In a T-shaped garden in Lauradale Road belonging to David Gilbert, a generous and more conventional first section leads down to a larger area full of curving pathways and hardy exotics.



Paths of glory: Walkways criss-cross David Gilbert's stunning garden of exotic plants. Photo Mike Coles

Still in its infancy, and created as a Paradise Garden with the aid of a designer friend, this segment suggests exciting Middle Eastern influences, with winding stone paths dividing the area into four quadrants radiating out from a central raised stone pond.

David's priorities of shape and colour are admirably demonstrated by spikey pines, banana palms, aloes and agaves, while feathery tree ferns, lavender and pittosporum provide a softer contrast. His own striking sculptures peep out at regular intervals from among the grasses, cycads and succulents. Form, texture and colour abound, dazzling the eye.

## Looking south to the sun

"The garden was a blessing during lockdown," David told *The Archer*. "Its south facing aspect provides the perfect environment to grow plants more often associated with warmer climates." Restios, yuccas, aloes and eucalyptus sit alongside fruit trees bearing peaches, apricots and quince, while the mature greenery of neighbouring gardens provides an extended landscape. The bones of the new plot were provided by David's own more established trees and shrubs including cherries, bamboos, traychcarpus and cordylines.

## Life and work abroad

This extraordinary plot gives a clue to the character and history of the gardener. David was brought up in Hampstead and East Finchley, until he moved to Rusinga Island on Kenya's Lake Victoria as a Voluntary Service Overseas cadet.

"That was a big experience for an 18-year old," said David. "We had no water or electricity and couldn't swim in the lake because of bilharzia." Back in

England, David studied experimental psychology, African politics and curriculum theory amongst other subjects.

He has lived and worked as a teacher in this country, and as a teacher and farmer overseas. His many different working lives have included conch diving and teaching two classes back to back in Belize, and battling drought

(NGS), welcoming 185 guests and raising £820 for charities.

Now a frontline academic, David's wide-ranging skills and interests reflect an awe-inspiring spectrum of disciplines. The broad takeaway is of a man whose appetites embrace science, art and horticulture with equal passion.

## Future-proof gardening

David proudly pointed out



Form and colour: David is surrounded by beds where heat-loving specimens are becoming established. Photo Mike Coles

and hippos while growing vegetables in Kenya. He admits that his extensive foreign experiences have shaped his choice of gardening style.

David returned home to East Finchley in 1991. *Archer* readers who support East Finchley Open Artists will be familiar with his name via his sculptures. Visitors to Stephens House and Garden will have admired his timber sculpture, reflecting his year as Artist in Residence there in 2017.

If you are a fan of open swimming, you may know David as Chair of Highgate Men's Pond Association. And his own garden hosted an open day in September as part of the National Garden Scheme

his modern take on a rockery, built on a slope and re-purposing a heap of builders' rubble. "It provides perfect drainage," he said, "critical for the desert-loving plants we've sited here." He believes that climate change and water shortages point the way to more interest in this style of gardening, and who can argue with him?

This inspiring polymath looks forward to watching his garden develop and mature and to experimenting with propagation in his magnificent new greenhouse. *Archer* readers should make a note to look out for the NGS opportunity to gain inspiration from this exciting garden next summer. See [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

# Live concerts pay off... and nobody was pinged!

By David Melsome

Organisers of the Proms at St Jude's music and literature festival in Hampstead Garden Suburb took a gamble by running the event back in June... but it paid off. Despite smaller audiences due to Covid rules, the festival was well supported and has been able to donate an amazing £60,000 to its chosen charities Toynbee Hall and the North London Hospice. As an added bonus, not a single person was pinged by NHS England after attending.

The Proms were one of the first live festivals in the UK in 2021, coming just weeks after tight pandemic restrictions were partially lifted in May. The line-up featured top class musicians and bestselling authors in a mix of live and online events over eight days.

Proms Chair Richard Clegg said: "Its success, both in terms of performer and audience

"The generosity of the Proms family never ceases to amaze us," said Robin Langrishe, Director of Fundraising at North London Hospice. "Every penny donated goes towards supporting 3,500 people reaching the end of their lives, and their families, in our community each year. The last 18 months have been extremely difficult, so it was wonderful to



On stage: The Jess Gillan Ensemble at the Proms

feedback and the remarkable financial outcome is in no small part due to the immense generosity of our partners, sponsors, advertisers, supporters, Friends and audiences. It is also a tribute to 12 months of dedicated work by the Proms Board and Committee members – I thank them all."

be back at St Jude's Church in the summer for this very special event."

## Forward planning

The next Proms festival will be held at St Jude's Church and The Henrietta Barnett School from Saturday 25 June to Sunday 3 July 2022.

# Don't look down!

The Nemeth family, of Summerlee Avenue, N2, donated a tightrope to Tetherdown Primary School's silent auction last term and here they watch as 12-year-old Isabelle, daughter of the successful bidder, tries it out in Cherry Tree Wood. Steady as she goes!



## East Finchley Baptist Church

We meet each Sunday for worship at 10.30 am. If you would like to join us please go to our website for further details. All welcome.

For more information please contact the Church Office  
Email: [office@eastfinchleybc.org.uk](mailto:office@eastfinchleybc.org.uk)  
[www.eastfinchleybc.org.uk](http://www.eastfinchleybc.org.uk)