



Ruth Pavey

From Florida to your room on a moped

From humble beginnings to indoor plant guru, Ed Wolf talks to us about plants and ceramics

MOST people find an office with well kept plants a more congenial place than one with miserable specimens or none at all. But plants do not naturally grow indoors. To choose the right ones and keep them healthy requires more knowledge and care than is often available, hence the existence of specialist firms.

Early in the morning from its base in Highgate, Indoor Garden Design staff beetle out in plant-brimming vans to enhance the premises of major companies and institutions in the City and West End.

When Ed Wolf started the firm 25 years ago he had a moped, two watering cans and a

greenhouse at the back of the kitchen. But he also knew a lot about horticulture, had a good eye and the capacity to do things properly. With 45 people now working for it, Ed describes Indoor Garden Design as a smallish family firm, proud still to be serving a good number of its original clients.

Ed and Brita Wolf live in Hampstead. Their front and back gardens have the double appeal of looking good while



- THINGS TO DO IN FEBRUARY**
- ☐ Weather permitting, this is the time to do hard landscaping jobs, laying paths, putting up trellis, etc.
 - ☐ Sow sweet peas, if you have anywhere light enough to bring them on indoors.
 - ☐ Citrus trees in need of repotting should be seen to now, as they start growing again. If you don't want them in bigger pots for reasons of space, at least give them a top-dressing of fresh compost.
 - ☐ Keep feeding the birds. If we get more frost, remember they need water, not ice.
 - ☐ "My Garden in Early Spring", the title echoing that of one of the books of the legendary "crocus king" E.A. Bowles, is the name of the delightful walk put on at his former home, Myddelton House, Bulls Cross, Enfield, each February. More snowdrops than crocuses, but a real treat. Saturday, February 14, 1pm. Cost is £3.90 and £2.40 (concs). Booking essential. Phone 01992 702 200.

Ed Wolf.
Picture by Nigel Sutton

requiring little maintenance. Since both of them work with plants (Brita runs Galton Flowers, the shop her mother, Hilda Galton, opened in Golders Green in 1948), they want to be able to sit out and enjoy the garden rather than labour in it. There is herringbone paving made of 17th century bricks from Ed's native Holland, sitting places in both shade and sun to avoid having to drag furniture about, 24 window boxes in which wallflowers are followed by geraniums, the trees of neighbours' gardens, a capacious yet inconspicuous shed built to fit the tapering plot, and an efficient self-watering system.

It is a glowing example of the virtues of good detailing and

simplicity. Many of the plants used by Indoor Garden Design are brought from Holland. To walk into its Highgate premises is to receive an odd mix of impressions; although plants are on trolleys and in rows, it being a warehouse, there is an amazing ebullience of greenery, as in a conservatory.

But instead of the expected planty smells, there is a strong whiff of something like glue. This turns out to be fibreglass, the material from which many of the pots and containers are made, both for versatility and lightness. Among the many plants I saw were ficus benamina with intricate plaited stems, huge spathiphyllum, a dewy looking crassula, swollen stemmed beaucarnea, birdlike

strelitzia and various indoor grasses.

I asked Ed about changes, about which sorts of plants, containers or arrangements are now deemed desirable, as opposed to when he started. The answer is that fashion does play a part, with things eventually coming full circle. "One didn't use Swiss Cheese or Mother-in-law's Tongue for years, now we do," the latter being good because a "hedge" effect is currently popular.

He says the key to new plants is Florida, "the greenhouse for the world", which imports plants from Central and South America and tries them out under netting. If Indoor Garden Design wants to go shopping in Florida a buyer goes to choose,

then the plants are sent to Holland for between six and nine months to get used to the lower light levels. After that they are brought over as and when needed.

Once one is past the plant store and into the reception and office areas, the most striking feature is not plants but the wealth of other things to look at: photographs of staff receiving BALI (British Association of Landscape Industries) awards, a collection of the wonderfully decorated envelopes in which the artist and gardener, Peter Niczewski, sends invoices, and, most obvious of all, a whole wall of pots by Alison Britton. Ed says that the connection

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between his work with plants and his love of ceramics is simple.

In Holland where he grew up and studied horticulture, ceramic pots were everywhere. It was a British Council exhibition in 1953 which introduced him to English

potters, notably Bernard Leach. Then in 1979 he saw the poster (which he still has) for a show of Alison Britton's, went to see it and decided "there was more to life than Bernard Leach". As to why, comes an elliptical answer; he has long been fond of the paintings of Braque, but who can afford them? In Alison's pots he finds some

affinity with Braque, he likes them, he feels comfortable with them.

If this last paragraph has wandered away from plants, do not be surprised. Gardening is an art as well as a practical activity, deserving to be spoken of in the same breath as other arts. Conversation with Ed Wolf just brings out that facet.