

Cultivating a wealthy clientele

by CHARLOTTE BRADSHAW

GONE are the days when your gardener wore a tweed cap and lounged on a broken deck chair in the potting shed, smoking. For £12 you can now buy yourself an hour with the trendiest gardener in London.

Jason Evers, 33, nephew of Sir Terence Conran, is Britain's trendiest gardener. He started his business seven years ago and now wields his trowel among the shrubberies of the Chelsea smart set. With his portable phone and Filofax, he visits the homes of Jade Jagger, Tom Conran, Darius Guppy and the Sultan of Brunei.

The son of David Evers, an underwriter at Lloyds, and stuntwoman Sally Herbert, he was down for Eton. Failing to pass common entrance, he went to Cokethorpe school in Oxfordshire. After a sojourn in Australia, he began a career in landscape gardening after qualifying at the Welsh College of Horticulture.

He started his green-fingered life at the fashionable Chelsea Gardener, where he dressed window boxes for Chanel and Joseph, but it was not long before the advantage of being related to a Conran and brushing shoulders with members of Green Street, then a trendy London hangout, brought the connections he needed to start on his own.

One of his first jobs was for Rosemary Cheetham, wife of publisher Anthony Cheetham. However, Evers concluded that gardening for the wealthy has its drawbacks.

"She asked me to stripe her lawn, but it was an odd shape, not at all grand enough to look good with stripes. She used to give me her Flymo and expect miracles. Gardening for the ritzy set means that you end up spending ages pandering to the whims of bored housewives who have nothing better to do than plan their social diary."

Another drawback is the upper-class obsession with money. "They are



always complaining. Most of my clients are from wealthy families with houses in the country. They can never understand why gardeners in London cost so much more."

Evers says money is no guarantee of taste. "What usually spoils a really nice garden is an object put in as a joke, such as a gnome or a concrete duck."

Mick Jagger's daughter, Jade, 25, is more down-to-earth than most. "She has a really good gardening taste and has loosely planned her garden around an East meets West feel."

In the two years that Evers has tended her Notting Hill garden, he has transformed it from a concrete jungle to a functional space in which her children

can play. "She was keen not to be precious. She decided to tear up the patio and get rid of the flowering beds. We turfed the whole area and put in a few plants like jasmine as features. Jade has a very clear idea of what she wants."

Evers has clear notions of his own: "There should be a flow between the house and the garden, a balance. As you walk through the house into the garden you should feel a symmetry and a balance between the hard and soft structures, and a variety of complementary colours and textures."

Actor Alan Bates modelled his garden on the Sissinghurst theme. "It has single columns of elegant white flowers. It looks nice, but not very original. It is

funny, the more money you have the less likely you are to use your garden. It becomes more of a status symbol.

"My uncle Terence's chateau in Paradou has been decorated very tastefully, but the garden was too formal; it looked quite English, not at all in keeping with the surroundings."

Evers believes gardens should be a sensual experience. There is something attractive about a man who shows tender care towards his plants and he seems to be a hit amongst his mainly female clientele.

"Jason's great, he shows me what to do," says Jade Jagger. "I like the fact that we can work together. He is not just a gardener, he is a friend."



PICTURE: GRAHAM BARCLAY