

It took Kim Murray a while to discover her passion for plants but now her gardens, home and hotel in Dunblane are filled with flowers, she tells **Rosie Morton**

PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT PERRY



# GREEN



# FINGERS



**E**verywhere I looked at Cromlix Hotel, Kim Murray had made her distinctly green-fingered mark.

Freshly cut flowers perched delicately on tables; pink petals stretched from the stairwell to the reception; botanical wallpaper lined the bar; and overflowing vases of purples, lemons and greens bloomed in the Glasshouse restaurant. By the door, umbrellas and wellies awaited guests, all of whom were encouraged to explore the grounds and even pick a few flowers from the kitchen garden for their bedrooms.

This is Kim's passion project, and has been since she and her husband, British tennis star Sir Andy Murray, took over the Dunblane-based mansion in 2013. Her love for seasonal flowers began with sweetpeas, which her grandmother used to grow, but it was when she and Andy were creating their own family home that Kim truly caught the gardening bug.

'Andy loves tulips, but he does not know what's going on in most gardens at any one time,' Kim laughed, as we took shelter in the study from the biblical rain outside. 'He often says, "Why are there so many flowers in our house, can you just chill out?" Because I'll fill sinks with them and I'll be cutting them all the time. He's not as green-fingered, but there's always room to grow – pun intended.'

Kim is, of course, best known for her game face on the side of a tennis court. Through the whirlwind of Andy's professional tennis career we have seen her stand alongside him through Wimbledon titles, Grand Slam wins, challenging injuries, a knighthood and an emotional, well-earned retirement. Four children later, the sporting power couple are far from taking life in the slow lane, but it is a rather gentler pace that Kim revels in when she has time of her own. As well as being responsible for creating a beautiful garden at their Surrey home for their



**PREVIOUS:** Kim arranging flowers from the garden at Cromlix to display in the hotel. **LEFT:** The gardens at Cromlix are filled with flowers, as well as produce to serve up to guests.

**ABOVE:** Andy and Kim Murray at Cromlix.



children Sophia, Edie, Teddy and Lola (and, most recently, their flat-coated retriever Bonnie) to romp around in, she has breathed new life into Cromlix's beautiful 34-acre grounds.

But for Kim, it's not all about whimsical, freeform flower arrangements being strewn throughout the hotel. Both Kim and Andy also realise that they're custodians of an historical green space.

'Being outside brings me such joy, particularly in Scotland, and so I want to protect that and be able to pass that on to the next generation,' she said, adding that the hotel has long served as a go-to for Murray celebrations, including Andy's grandparents' silver wedding anniversary in 1982 and Andy and Kim's wedding reception in 2015.

'The hotel is such an important part

of the local community and because of that I feel we have a duty to operate the house and the gardens in a responsible way. For me that means living side by side with nature, minimising our impact where we can, reducing our energy usage, taking a more measured approach to change and trying to encourage a love of the great outdoors in other people.'



RIGHT: CROMLIX

**TOP:** Kim gets creative with fresh and dried cut flowers. **ABOVE:** From the upholstery to the fresh florals, from the artwork to the lettering on the menu, each detail has been carefully, personally, curated by Kim.

*'Kim visits as much as possible to pull weeds, check on the chickens or plan the next big gardening project'*

A large part of that focus has landed on the 'Gourmet Garden' which is used to grow produce for the hotel's kitchen. It is a place which showcases Kim's commitment to move from 'food miles' to 'food footsteps' at Cromlix. It's here that Kim, with help from the hotel's dedicated gardening team, has adopted permaculture principles which support soil structure, and improve soil and plant health.

Stroll around the kitchen garden and you'll see companion planting, mixed cropping, and the no-dig method in motion. 'Waste' materials like cardboard and sheep's wool are used underneath compost to enrich the soil and improve moisture

retention, branches and windfall from the estate are used as base materials for *hügelkultur* beds (which, upon decomposition, return water and nutrients to the soil) and 'hot bed' composting systems in the polytunnel give off heat, allowing seed trays to be sat on top for earlier germination. It's a well-oiled machine and Kim visits as much as possible, whether to pull weeds, check on the chickens or plan the next big gardening project:

'I'm here maybe once a month or once every two months. I don't like to leave my kids so it's normally up and down in a day, unless I'm really exhausted and I'll pull the excuse that "I have to stay because they need me for



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**

Nasturtiums and sweet peas brighten up raised beds; A host of golden daffodils at Cromlix in spring; The botanical influence continues in Kim's choice of wallpaper and soft furnishings.



It's an immersive thing as well – you need to be in it to enjoy it. I don't want a garden that you just observe. While it hurts me when my children are out there cutting things, it's a positive that they're interacting with it. I want them to engage with it, but it's a fine line,' she smiled.

'In the same way that in our home we've got the slightly more formal areas where I hope they don't go and put sticky fingerprints on everything, and the bits where I'm like, "You know what, you can trash that and it's fine", in the garden they've got the sandpit and I'll allow them to cut things, and then there are the areas that I hope they don't quite venture to and are a bit more formal. But at the end of the day, everyone wants something different from their garden, so as long as it's bringing you joy, that's brilliant.'

Kim may not have any formal training in floristry, gardening or interior design, but she has a keen, creative eye. That much was clear when we ventured through to Cromlix's billiards room, another cosy nook adorned with botanical-inspired wallpaper.

two days", and I'll spend the night here. Then we try to come up as a family around twice a year just as a break to see all the family.'

Kim was brought up in an outdoorsy family and she and her brother were given a lot of freedom to explore the countryside as youngsters. She went on to read English at the University of Sussex and mused that she once considered becoming a journalist, then a vet or an artist. But it's clear that in another life she might have been a florist.

'I'd say the garden is like another room – it's an extension of our home. Weather permitting, in our home I love the doors to be open, and I love the kids to be in and out.

*'It's clear that in another life she might have been a florist'*



'When I looked at how the hotel was before we put our own stamp on it, it felt quite closed when you stepped inside. They always used to laugh at me because I used to come in and be like, "Ahh, open the windows! It's so hot!" All of a sudden that became a metaphor during the whole design process – "let's open the windows and bring it in".

'I love gardening and I love the outside, so I just felt like we could use that a lot more, not only in terms of inspiration for the interiors but actually just for the guest journey. You want the whole thing to be like a semi-permeable membrane. It's not so easy to do that when it's pouring outside though!'

That said, we all know that there's no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes, so we pulled on our boots and headed for another of Kim's favourite spots – the porting shed.

Umbrellas in hand, I asked her what she loved most about her work.

'I think the fact that I'm a mum and I've got this as a passion project at the same time. I've taken my time to find it and I love it because I can pour as much of myself into it that I have available at any moment. It's the creative outlet that I was always looking for. To be able to do that here, in a place that we genuinely have such a connection to, is a huge privilege.'

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### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Kim in the 'Gourmet Garden' at Cromlix; Tubs filled with Andy Murray's favourite tulips brighten the garden in springtime; Wellies of all shapes and sizes encourage guests at Cromlix to enjoy the garden whatever the weather.