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Set in 40 acres of rolling countryside, the gardens of Foxwood Farm in Wiltshire seamlessly complement their surroundings, thanks to expert planting and a clear design vision

TEXT JODIE JONES | PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS



A cantilevered deck appears to float above a gravel path surrounding the house. This is bordered by beds of mixed perennials and ornamental grasses, punctuated by a group of domed *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Nana', which hovers above the ephemeral planting





ABOVE *Stipa gigantea* and other perennials and grasses anchor the north-west corner of the deck. BELOW A curved sculpture made by William Peers can be seen through a bed of more *Stipa gigantea*, *Salvia nemorosa* 'Amethyst' and sanguisorbas





Simon Green chose to plant swathes of red fescue to chime with the neighbouring fields. The columns of yew that drift into this meadow were designed to echo the fractured shape of an adjoining hedge, which borders another part of the garden

‘To appreciate this garden, you must come inside,’ says Simon Green, throwing open the door of his Wiltshire home. From the polished concrete floor to the Douglas fir beams, it is a stunning example of modernism with heart and soul.

Under Simon’s direction, two derelict farm buildings have been linked with new wings to create a long, low house around a central courtyard. The interior is light, the furniture is chosen with meticulous good taste, and there are windows on every side framing views of great beauty and carefully considered effect.

The house is set in 40 acres of its own land, of which some five acres are actively managed as part of the garden. Consequently, the planting is on a grand scale, in an interpretation of the New Perennial style that settles comfortably into its English country setting. There are waving masses of meadow grass through which mown paths sweep. Yew hedges have been carved into undulations that echo the rolling meadows beyond, and crisply rectilinear blocks of beech are positioned with sculptural precision as pleasing objects in their own right.

The trees are grouped, as most gardeners would group perennials, in a herbaceous border, in generous sweeps of five, seven or even more. So there is a glade of catalpas and a copse of white-stemmed birches, a hedge of multi-stemmed *Amelanchier lamarckii* and, glimpsed

in the distance, a stand of *Acer griseum*. The acers, with their rust-coloured peeling bark, echo the rich burnt orange of Corten steel used widely around the garden, from lawn edging to fences and plant supports. To the north of the house, low beds of *Hakonechloa macra* and towering beds of *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* ‘Karl Foerster’ sway in the breeze. These are studded with alliums – ‘Purple Sensation’ and *A. christophii* – which remain as sculptural forms after their purple flowers have faded.

The only flower beds in any conventional sense run away to the south, below a cantilevered deck that seems to float above the ground. These two beds frame a sweep of manicured emerald lawn with clouds of purple and deep pink – alliums and astrantias, eupatoriums, iris and *Aster amellus* ‘Veilchenkönigin’ (formerly *Aster* ‘Violet Queen’). ‘It was all about getting the garden to talk to the house and the landscape beyond,’ says Simon. ‘It was important to consider and control every detail.’

A decade ago, he and his wife Helen left London for a gem of a Queen Anne house in a nearby village. ‘I thought it was perfect, until I gradually realised I wanted to change everything about it,’ Simon says. Four years later, he came across a ramshackle collection of out-houses set in what he describes as ‘an oasis of calm’, and knew he had found the blank canvas he was looking for.

Simon is a former director of television advertisements, and he now runs the architectural design practice Moholondon. He has an obsessive eye for detail



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A mirrored water feature in the central courtyard. *Hakonechloa macra* in a square bed. Frothy pink *Cotinus coggygria* 'Young Lady' amid long grasses. Yew hedges delineate a dining area and pool. An ancient *elaagnus* is enclosed by a bed filled with *muehlenbeckia*





Spherical metal sculptures commissioned from a local blacksmith sit in the shade of a stand of mature hornbeams, where they mark a ha-ha boundary between the main lawn and field beyond

and a residual instinct to frame a shot. When it came to reinventing the buildings, he knew what he wanted and how to achieve it – even if the reality was rather more expensive than he initially thought. ‘I was comfortable with the architecture, but the outside space was a different matter,’ says Simon. ‘I knew in broad terms how I wanted it to look, but didn’t have the tools to realise it, which is where Sean came in.’

Garden designer Sean Walter, of The Plant Specialist, vividly remembers the first time he visited the house five years ago. ‘Building work was in full swing, but Simon already had some ideas for the garden and we had an immediate meeting of minds. As a result, this has been a tremendously satisfying collaboration. Simon loved my drawings and I love the way he implemented the design.’ Their collaborative relationship continues to this day, and is evident wherever you look. When Sean suggested swathes of meadow grass leading to the west of the house, Simon determined they should be monocultures of red fescue, to match the fields around the boundaries. Sean then introduced a clump of *Cotinus coggygria* ‘Young Lady’ which, he says, ‘is pretty boring for most of the year, but in autumn, when the grasses need a lift, explodes in a foam of pink that looks amazing backlit by the sun’.

In the central courtyard, Simon envisaged a series of three large square beds, set around an ancient elaeagnus with gnarled branches that sprawl expansively in every

direction. He designed a stunning mirrored water feature, made of dished Marbelite, which bounces light around the southern end of the space. Then he enclosed the elaeagnus in a raised bed of Corten steel, mapped out the location of a third square bed at the north of the courtyard, and turned to Sean for help with the planting. Sean filled the raised bed with *muehlenbeckia*, a wiry plant with stems the exact colour of the steel. In the third bed, he chose a simple monoculture of *Hakonechloa macra*. ‘I like the simplicity of this planting,’ explains Sean. ‘Anything more would have been frou-frou.’

Around the courtyard walls, Sean suggested a series of planters filled with ferns. Simon couldn’t find containers he liked, so designed his own, complete with shadow gaps at the base to give the impression that they are hovering. ‘It is a classic example of Simon’s perfectionism,’ says Sean. ‘He will never settle for good enough, which makes him a dream client. We each had a vision – when combined, it took on a life of its own.’ Simon is equally delighted with what they have been able to achieve. ‘I have indulged myself, without a shadow of a doubt,’ he says. ‘But I love what we have created. It changes subtly every day and surprises me in ways I couldn’t have dreamed of’ □

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