

FORM AND FLOW

Frothy perennials, scented roses and curved hedging soften the lines of a strong, formal framework in this very English country garden

TEXT JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR | PHOTOGRAPHS RACHEL WARNE

Everdon Hall is one of those houses that should really only be approached on horseback. The soft fields and mature trees that occupy the surrounding parkland are extremely tempting even to those of us with neither skill nor enthusiasm when it comes to matters equestrian. When Charles and Caro Coaker moved here 16 years ago, the place was dominated by horses: the stables were full, the walled garden had been given over to a whopping great manège, and the gardens – as is often the way with horsey people – were not really a priority.

This soon changed when Caro started working with the talented designer Angel Collins. This was only Angel's second job as a designer, so she remembers the whole process with vivid fondness. 'We started the

garden before the house was finished because Caro knew the builders were going to be there for at least a couple of years and did not want to delay,' she says. They began in the walled garden, which housed a smart tennis court and swimming pool. Although Angel's first idea was, naturally, to restore some sort of vegetable garden, Caro declined, saying, 'My children only eat frozen peas so it seems a bit of a waste.' In their defence, they are now older and more adventurous, but it did mean that Angel had the space for some remarkable planting. 'I wanted to make it feel like a proper garden rather than just somewhere for tennis,' she explains. There is an informal walk lined with silver pears (*Pyrus salicifolia* 'Pendula') underplanted with flocks of alliums and ox-eye daisies, which leads round to a more formal gathering of plants, brick paths and box shapes. Through this sweeps an energetic curl of yew hedging ?punctuated by a series of magnificent *Malus transitoria* and ending in a



OPPOSITE A formal avenue of pleached limes leads the eye away from the house. THIS PAGE An informal wall of silver pears, underplanted with alliums and ox-eye daisies, flanks the main entrance to the walled garden



THIS PAGE FROM THIS PICTURE *Rosa 'Cooperi'* drapes itself abundantly over a doorway. A curved hedge of yew (both pictures) provides structure in the walled garden. OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In the walled garden, catmint and irises provide soft tones of blue in late spring. Clipped *Phillyrea* and other evergreens contrast with softer planting around the pool. Urns surrounded by clipped box squares frame a terrace on the edge of the garden. Borders of perennials contrast with the designer's trademark topiary architecture. *Nectaroscordum siculum*. *Rosa* ?????? (centre)



stand of catalpas planted to give shade by the pool. These curved shapes are a master stroke as they give energy and flow to a garden that otherwise would be a collection of rectangles – walls, pool and court.

The gardens at this time of year carry the froth of early summer: there are euphorbia, irises and catmint lapping at the feet of Angel's trademark topiary architecture. 'I love to use naturalistic planting alongside more formal shapes, in particular *Prunus lusitanica* 'standards,' she explains. And then, of course, there are roses: from an attractive *Rosa 'Cooperi'*, an almost evergreen species rose with striking white flowers and wonderful hips, draping itself around a doorway, to well-placed specimens by paths, terraces and in hidden corners, including *R. 'Yvonne Rabier'* and *R. 'Albéric Barbier'*. There is also a dedicated rose garden, its borders slightly raised above the path so that the flowers and their scent are at head height as you pass.

Outside the walled garden, the majority of the planting is close to the house, enclosing paths and terraces. Again it is a mixture of the orderly – perfect box squares containing terracotta urns – and the disorderly, with alliums, grasses and yet more roses. There are, however, also strong devices that lead the eye away from the confines of the house. A formal avenue of pleached limes ends at a fine armillary sphere and a paved path leads to a gate and a tantalising glimpse of retreating parkland beyond.

This is a house blessed by a pretty setting, but it still needed a special garden to connect it fully with the surrounding countryside. The designer has created a well-thought-out, imaginatively planted and sensitively executed garden. That, teamed with clients who are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and unafraid to make their own alterations and improvements, has resulted in a fabulous house getting the garden it deserves □

Angel Collins: ??

