

## CROSS POLLINATION

As a child, garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith learnt a love of gardening from his mother. Today, son and mother live and garden next door to each other in Hertfordshire. Jane Owen can see strong family likenesses in their choice of plants, if not in their styles of gardening. *Photographs by David Loftus*

**TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: GERANIUM 'PHILIPPE VAPELLE', LADY STUART-SMITH AND HER SON TOM OUTSIDE TOM'S HOUSE. POLEMONIUM 'GLEBE COTTAGE LILAC', MIDDLE ROW, FROM LEFT: HERBS IN A BED ENCLOSED BY BOX; TOM'S ORNATE GARDEN SEAT IS ACTUALLY MADE OF FIBREGLASS AND CAME FROM THE CHANEL GARDEN AT CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW. SALVIA X SYLVESTRIS 'BLAUHUGEL'. MIXED PLANTING AROUND GEOMETRICALLY CLIPPED BOX IN TOM'S GARDEN. BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT: ALLIUM CRISTOPHII AND SEDUM TELEPHIUM SUBSP. RUPRECHTII, LYCHNIS CORONARIA 'ALBA' WITH THE BRIGHT PINK FLOWERS OF GERANIUM PSILOSTEMON IN A SOFTLY PLANTED BORDER. THE EMERGING BUDS OF ERYNGIUM X OLIVERIANUM PROVIDE A SHARP CONTRAST WITH SOFTER SHAPES IN THE GARDEN.**



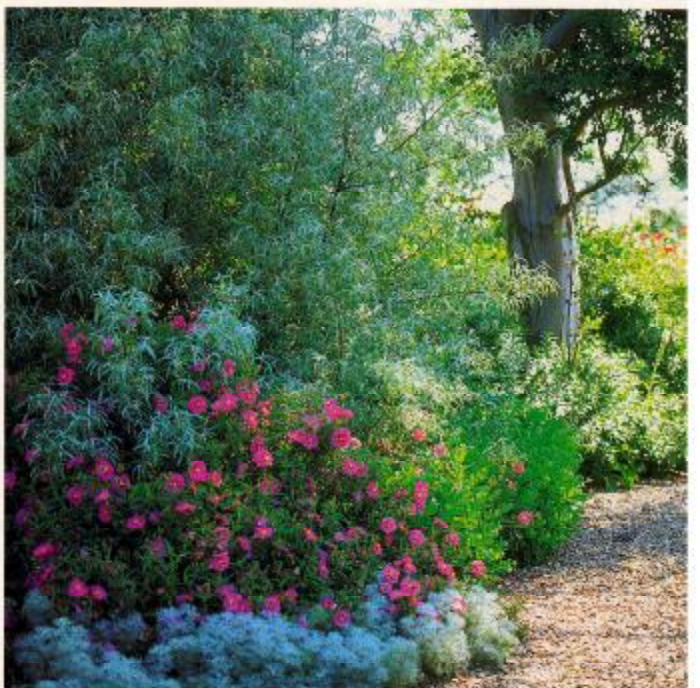
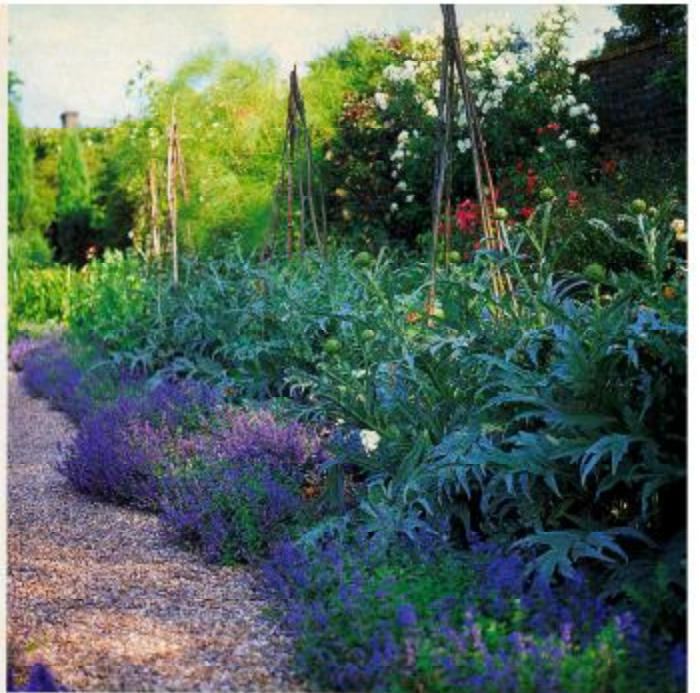
Years ago, when Lord Justice Sir Murray Stuart-Smith and his wife Joan had six young children and began a kitchen garden, they made their offspring put in an hour a week unpaid horticultural labour. Anything beyond the first hour's work won a small remuneration. It was an unpopular activity but, despite this, Number Four Child, Tom, has gone on to become one of this country's eminent garden designers with Chelsea Flower Show gold medals and landscape projects like the one-acre garden for the British embassy in central Paris to his credit.

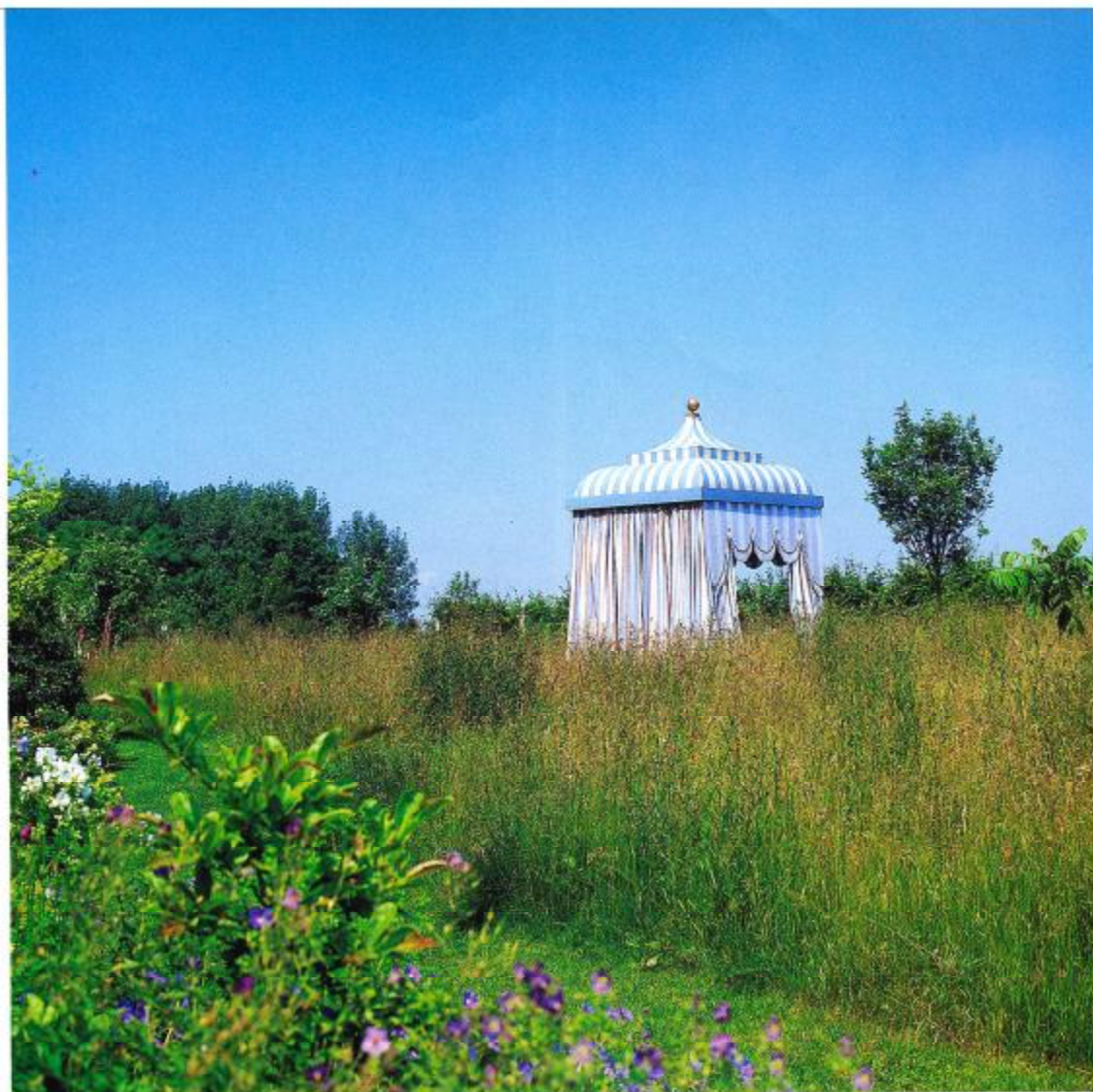
Today Tom, who is married with three children, and Lady Stuart-Smith live next door to each other in Hertfordshire and, using almost the same palette of plants – like the dark red scabious *Knautia macedonica*, *Cistus x aguilarii* 'Maculatus' and plenty of salvias like the

violet-blue *S. guaranitica* 'Purple Majesty' – they have developed contrasting garden styles. Hers is traditional English and his, created on a couple of acres only 11 years ago, is more naturalistic. And yet mother and son are symbiotic gardeners. "He goes off to all these places, brings back an interesting plant and I use my propagator to make lots of plants from it," says Lady Stuart-Smith, who has long since given up kitchen gardening.

The entrances to their respective gardens are instructive: at first glance there is no obvious path from the dirt lane to Tom's barn conversion, just a sea of voluptuous planting. Yew and box structures boil over with giant thistles, seedlings of *Echium pininana*, clematis such as *C.* 'Duchess of Albany', rustic wigwams, the white waving flowers of *Romneya coulteri* shooting to almost 3 metres in places, *Macleaya cordata*, white lychnis, roses,

ABOVE: A PROFUSION OF *ROSA* 'CERISE BOUQUET' AND *R. BANKSIÆ* 'LUTEA', PERFECT EXAMPLES OF TOM'S NATURALISTIC PLANTING STYLE.





allium, triumphant spires of verbascum and, in the distance on a brick veranda, a huge terracotta pot filled with blue agapanthus and smaller pots of eucomis, the pineapple lily. "I like this unruliness, although I think this weekend I will cut the yew," says Tom.

The rear entrance to Lady Stuart-Smith's house is more traditional, although here too the structure comes from box which outlines beds of pink roses like *Rosa* 'Gruss an Aachen.' "The layout of the rose garden is mine but the clipping isn't. I think it is rather 'Italian restaurant', says Tom disparagingly about the turrets which have appeared at the ends of some of the hedges. Lady Stuart-Smith, who is making lunch – home-grown peas, tomatoes, potatoes and carrots, with berries for pudding – is unmoved by her son's comments. Hedging is an area of disagreement. A gardener on a scaffolding

tower is inching around the 5-metre-high thuja hedges beside Lady Stuart-Smith's house making crisp edges which, like the box turrets, do not meet with Tom's approval. "They should be cut into a cumulous effect," he says. "Won't that be rather difficult?" asks his mother. "No, easier, because there won't be any straight edges," says Tom. Lady Stuart-Smith does a diplomatic vanishing act, murmuring something tactful about not wanting to offend the gardener.

Her stuccoed Regency villa, on top of a hill, faces south over a remarkable view framed with woodland. The swimming pool area melts into a hot garden with 2-metre-high orange *Kniphofia* 'Prince Igor', *Verbascum bombycifenum* 'Polarsommer' and *eremurus* hybrids.

Beyond, in the walled garden glasshouse, is Lady Stuart-Smith's mist propagator, spawning plant material

ABOVE: AN ORNATE STRIPED TENT, SALVAGED FROM ONE OF TOM'S CHELSEA GARDENS, NOW SITS IN A WILD FLOWER MEADOW.



as it has for the last 30 years, and the old kitchen garden irrigation system which throws rainbows over lettuces, carrots, spinach, berries of every kind, celeriac, leeks, rhubarb and parsnips. Around the edge, *Clematis* 'Prince Charles' scrambles through a 3-metre-high hoheria, shimmering its cymes of white scented flowers. "I've never seen such a big one outside Devon," says Tom. "Really? Oh good," says Lady Stuart-Smith.

At the bottom of the vegetable garden is a large blue-green gazebo designed by Tom and made by a local blacksmith. Tom had discovered that his mother was on the point of ordering a ready-made gazebo which, in his opinion, would never have had the sturdiness, merit and, above all, stature necessary for her garden.

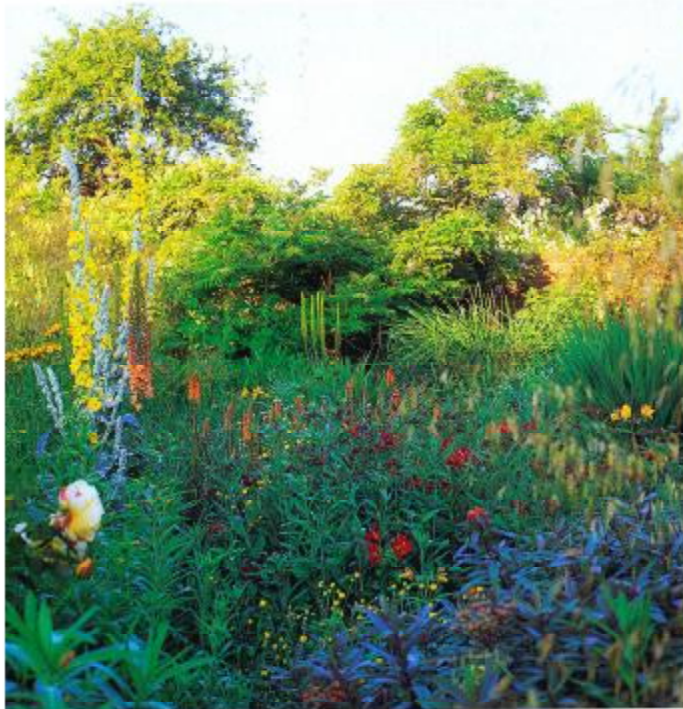
Stature is a theme in Tom's garden as, he says, being 6ft 5", he gets fed up with having to bend double to

look at plants. He likes plants to look you in the face, he says, demonstrating this need by eyeballing a cardoon and some monster lilies from the Golden Clarion group. Scale is an important theme throughout his garden, which is designed around a central axis from the French doors of his drawing room up and out to wilderness with hedged rooms on either side.

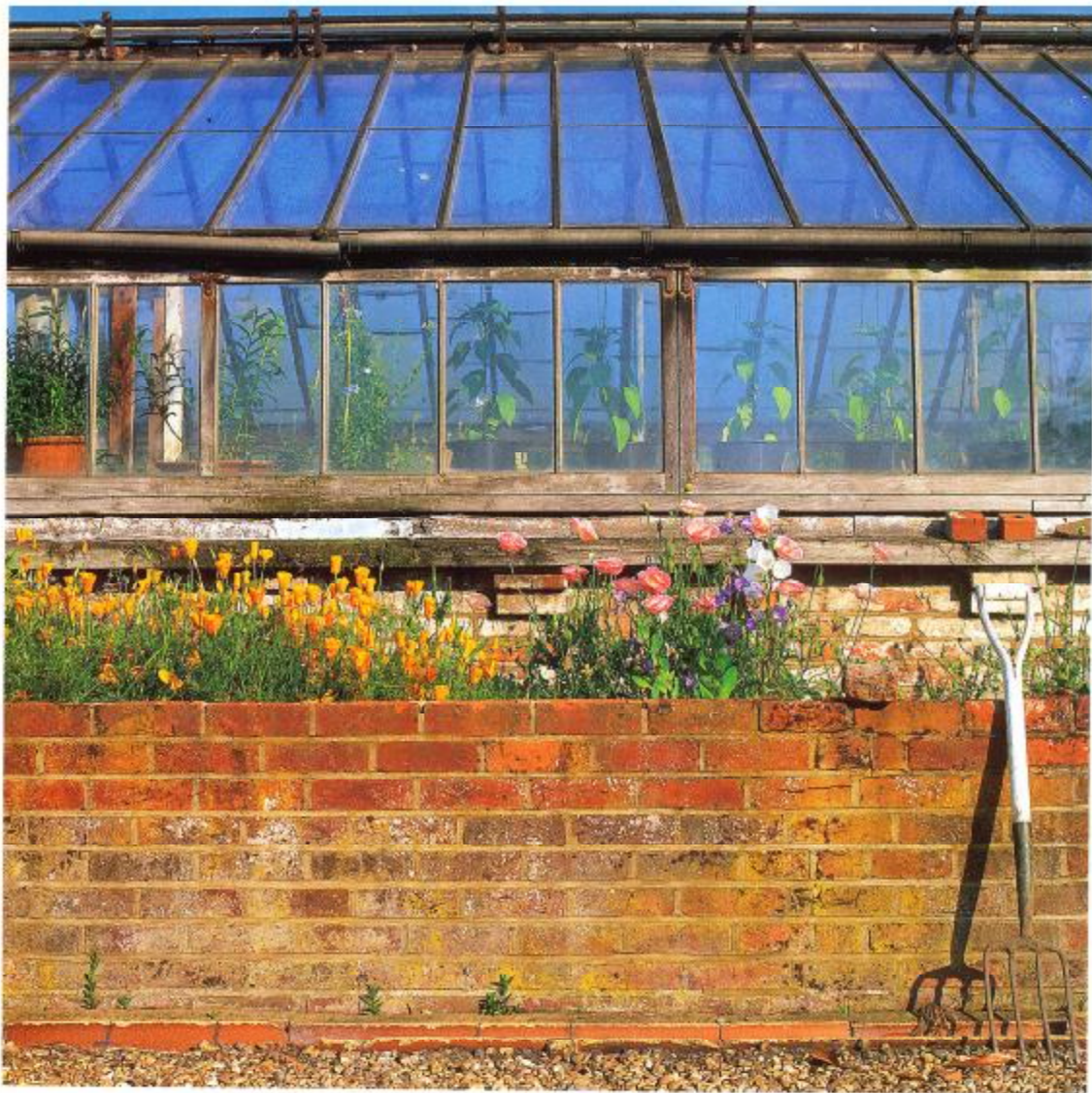
Immediately outside the French door, three absurdly tall bay pom-poms ('fell off the back of a lorry in the vicinity of the Chelsea Flower Show') punctuate a bed of *lychnis*, *buddleja*, *salvia* and the giant fennel *Ferula communis* which will in time throw up a fantastic 4.5-metre spire of a flower head and then vanish, overwhelmed by the effort of reproduction.

"I manipulate the heights of the planting here by adding manure to the back of the bed where I want

**ABOVE: CRAMBE CORDIFOLIA FILLS A BORDER IN LADY STUART-SMITH'S GARDEN, NEARBY HER PROPAGATING GLASSHOUSE.**



**TOP ROW, FROM LEFT:** *EUPHORBIA GRIFFITHII* 'DIXTER'. **A BOLD COMBINATION OF GLOBE ARTICHOQUES AND NEPETA.** *KNIPHOFIA* 'BEES' SUNSET', **IN LADY STUART-SMITH'S WALLED GARDEN,** *CESTRUM* 'NEWELLII' AND *ROSA X ODORATA* 'MUTABILIS' **PROVIDE HEIGHT AND COLOUR BEHIND THE ARTICHOQUES.** **MIDDLE ROW, FROM LEFT:** A *MALUS FLORIBUNDA* **SUPPORTS A SWING FOR TOM'S CHILDREN.** *EUPHORBIA GRIFFITHII* 'DIXTER'. **SPIRES OF SUNSET COLOURS INCLUDE** *EREMURUS*, *VERBASCUM BOMBYCIFERUM* 'POLARSOMMER' **AND** *KNIPHOFIA* 'BEES' SUNSET'. *STIPA GIGANTEA*. **BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT:** AN *EREMURUS* HYBRID. *ELAEAGNUS* *ANGUSTIFOLIA*, *CISTUS X PURPUREUS* 'BETTY TAUDEVIN' **AND** *ARTEMISIA* *CANESCENS* **THRIVE IN A BORDER IN LADY STUART-SMITH'S GARDEN.** *ESCHSCHOLZIA CALIFORNICA*.



height with plants like *Phlox paniculata* 'Mother of Pearl' and *Campanula lactiflora*, and adding nothing to the soil at the front of the bed so the sedums and salvias and so on stay compact. I will do the same with the planting around the striped tent to make a dish-like shape," says Tom about a jaunty blue-and-white tent (another Chelsea trophy) in a small meadow.

Nearby is what Tom calls his 'herbaceous meadow-style planting' – perennials are planted en masse and allowed to get on with it; some survive and thrive, others vanish completely. Teasels, alchemilla, verbascum, geraniums, red scabious, white willowherb and Miss Willmott's ghost, *Eryngium giganteum*, are proving to be the winners so far on this gravelly soil.

The odd thing is that, although mother and son both plant voluptuously using almost the same range of plants,

the atmosphere in the two gardens is quite different: bold and modern in Tom's and gentle and traditional in his mother's. Tom gives his mother credit for his horticultural skill and for always allowing him to make his own way and develop his own style. "You were very generous in allowing me to do things in your garden before I had my own. Some of them were frightful." ■

- Contact Tom Stuart-Smith at The Landscape Agency on 020 7631 3185.
- Tom has designed the Le Nôtre tercentenary garden for this year's Chelsea Flower Show on behalf of the Garden History Society, in association with the Historic Royal Palaces.
- Jane Owen writes on gardens for The Times.

ABOVE: ANNUALS GROWING OUTSIDE THE GLASSHOUSE INCLUDE *ESCHSCHOLZIA CALIFORNICA*, SHIRLEY POPPIES AND CAMPANULAS.