

Wall to Wall

Lavish planting creates an impression of enclosure without obstructing the view in this walled garden

TEXT: TANIA COMPTON PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREW LAWSON

The odds against finding a designer who is talented in each of the closely allied but quite different worlds of landscape architecture, garden design and plantsmanship are very high, but one name springs to mind: Tom Stuart-Smith. In Tom's case, inspiration from meeting two key characters in postwar landscape design, Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe and Lanning Roper, consolidated a childhood love of gardening, and after reading zoology at Cambridge, England, he went on to Manchester University to train as a landscape architect.

Tom's gardens have cerebral as well as visual appeal, embodying Tom the thinker and Tom the gardener, whose infancy was imbued with a strong horticultural bias stemming from his mother's passion for plants, which Tom shares. His children are the latest generation to grow up surrounded by the paraphernalia of seed packets and cuttings, the only difference being that Tom probably plants new varieties in groups of 30 or 50, rather than three or five.

Another string to Tom's bow is his reputation as a designer well versed in garden history. However, this garden refutes any misconception of Tom as a designer looking over his shoulder at history.

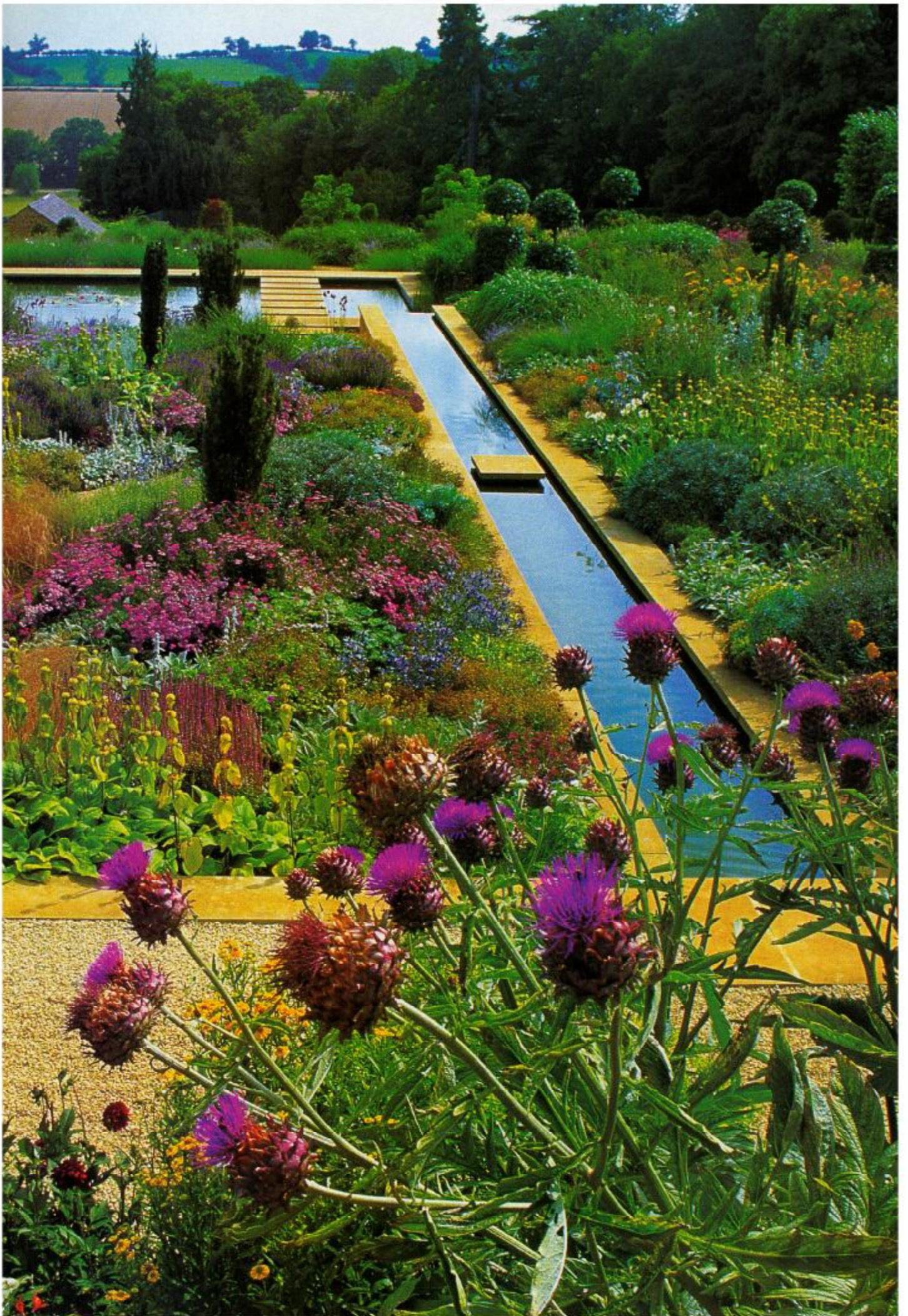
Only three years ago, this garden was an uncultivated sloping field with a brick wall at the south end. By pulling together his many talents, Tom has transformed a patch of muddy clay into a secret oasis. Most people try to find imaginative ways to rescue their old walled gardens – very few

build new ones. However, a walled garden is what Tom's clients asked for. They ended up getting a whole lot more. Instead of completely enclosing the allotted space and thereby blocking out wonderful views of rolling countryside, Tom agreed with his clients that the mature, surrounding trees already gave the site an intrinsic sense of enclosure which could be enhanced within the garden. Skillful terracing and planting have made sixty square metres feel like two hectares and, without sacrificing the view, envelop the visitor within the garden.

Tom worked with architect Ptolemy Dean, from Richard Griffiths Architecture, to design the walls, gates and garden buildings. Ptolemy's stepped cast wall appears up a steep slope from the house. Hornton, Bath and York stone, with magnificent buttresses reminiscent of the striped Renaissance pillars in Siena and Cordoba cathedrals, are kept purposely bare, as a contrast to the opulent planting behind the large oak doors. The garden can be entered through three doors, each opening on to one of the garden's terraces, but the overall view remains hidden from the first vantage point by a high enclosure of pleached limes underplanted with lavender. However, at eye level there is a tantalizing glimpse of an extraordinary tapestry of planting. In a traditional walled garden, most of the space is devoted to crop-bearing fruit trees, soft fruit and vegetables. Tom limited that produce planting to half of the top terrace and summer planting in the lower terrace ▶

RIGHT Irish yews rise out of the dense borders of the top terrace, which includes tapestry-like plantings of *Festuca amethystina* and *Phlomis russeliana*









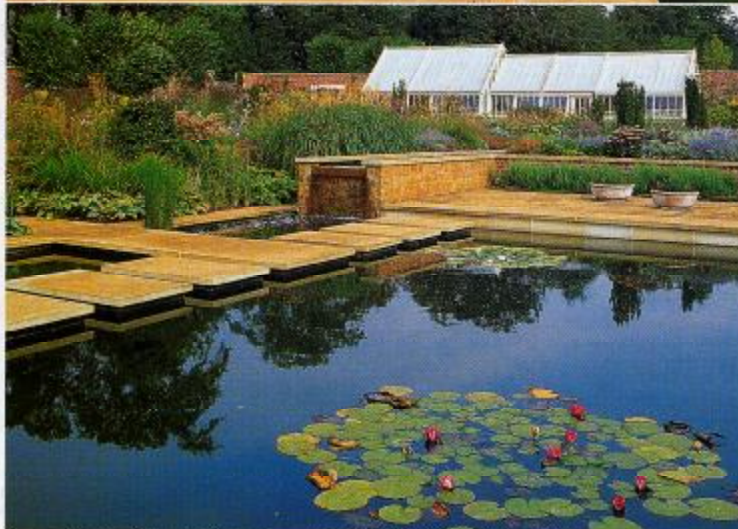
parterre. Here he has mixed asparagus, globe artichoke and strawberry beds among herbaceous planting. The asparagus beds give a clue to the soil's fecundity – trugloads of spears were picked in the second year. In this garden, I met head-on many plants that I would usually spurn. Giant poppies, *Macleaya cordata*, and ornamental cardoons take on gunnera-like proportions in this iron-rich soil which crucially lies on limestone bedrock. A perfect mix of water-retentive but free-draining soil, it is hard to work in winter but rewardingly punchy. Of the 20 000 perennials planted in spring 2001, there were very few losses and a phenomenal amount of growth.

Head gardener Iain Davies came to the garden in time for this planting extravaganza, and he is key to the garden's success. The glasshouses are full of beautifully tended plants that Iain previously grew outside on the island of Sark. Tom has laid down a blueprint of terraces, paths and planting. Evergreens and beeches set in random patterns and clipped into asymmetric, geometric shapes are surrounded by perennials that change in waves through the seasons. But space has been left for Iain to experiment with the tender plants which he nurtures into ebullient growth. The top terrace, where fruit and vegetable plantings are separated by an expanse of low plantings in gravel, descends to the middle terrace. A bold square pool with stepping stones is flanked by dense borders divided by grid-like paths, which become concealed as summer progresses. From this open space, carp can be seen darting through the water, and from the pool's edge there is a view of the garden's *pièce de résistance*.

For the lower terrace, still in its infancy, Tom gave the idea of a *parterre de broderie*, a 21st-century twist. A pattern of box replicates in three sections the pattern of the veins of leaves from the ashes, beeches and oaks that dominate the garden's boundary. Using a high-resolution scanner, Tom magnified by 60 000 the venation on a leaf from each, and created the box pattern within which tulips, including 'Generaal de Wet' and 'Gavota', are followed by annuals and vegetables. Last autumn, my mouth watered as the plans were discussed for this summer's bedding. Electric-orange species cosmos and *Tagetes* interspersed with dusky dahlias, chocolate cosmos and *Scabiosa atropurpurea* 'Chile Black'. The garden is a visual extravaganza, a canvas on which Tom has planned waves of planting like a magician pulling coloured handkerchiefs from a hat, but its point is lost on some. The garden was unveiled to a local horticultural club last summer, and a visitor was overheard muttering 'why?' The garden's grand scale and lavish planting had been a shock to his senses, but I certainly left with stronger sentiments than merely 'why not?' ▶

RIGHT FROM TOP A bold square pool with stepping stones dominates the middle terrace; uninterrupted view across the middle terrace towards the glasshouses; hard landscaping is softened by the use of ornamental grasses, including pennisetums and stipas; a view on the right of the *parterre de broderie*, planted for an explosion of colour in mid-summer

OPPOSITE As summer advances, paths are concealed by burgeoning plants and shrubs in mixed borders



TRADE SECRETS

To achieve the effect of this garden, it is essential that you take time to **plan all aspects**. The floor-level planning and hard landscaping are the backbone of the design, and the appropriate plants ensure that the mood and subtleties flow throughout the entire garden. Another factor to take into account is that this garden is protected from strong winds by high walls and hedging. The plants in this garden are unlikely to do as well in our hot South African climate, and we suggest a few alternatives:

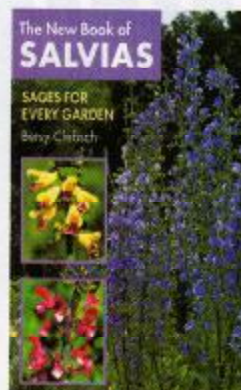
- **Silver plants** such as *Eryngium tripartitum*, *Stachys byzantina*, *Helichrysum petiolare*, *Lavandula angustifolia*.
- **Colour** in the garden can be achieved by using various species of the following plants: sedum, kalanchoe, helianthus, echinacea, salvia, coreopsis, dahlia, kniphofia, scabiosa.

- The use of **grasses** and **reeds** adds movement to the garden:

Chondropetalum tectorum, *Elegia capensis*, *Dianella tasmanica*, *Carex 'Autumn Glow'*, *Miscanthus sinensis*, *Festuca glauca*.

- To create **height**, try gaura, achillea, verbascum, lysimachia, phlomis, conifers and toparies using viburnum, ficus or myrtus.

Read up on **salvias** in *The New Book of Salvias: Sages for Every Garden* by Betsy Clebsch (Timber Press; \$20.97), available from www.amazon.com. ■



OPPOSITE 1 *Helenium 'Sonnenwunder'* **2** *Sedum telephium* subsp *maximum* 'Atropurpureum' **3** *Festuca amethystina* with *Lavandula angustifolia* in the foreground **4** *Gaura lindheimeri* **5** Landscaper Tom Stuart-Smith stands at one of architect Ptolemy Dean's custom-made gates **6** *Echinacea purpurea* in front of *Artemisia lactiflora* **7** *Cirsium rivulare* in front of tall grasses **8** *Achillea* 'Cerise Queen' mixed with *Eryngium tripartitum* **9** *Dahlia* 'David Howard' and 'Arabian Night' **BELOW** Illustration by Tom Stuart-Smith, of the three stepped terraces: *parterres de broderie* form the lower terrace, a pool dominates the middle terrace, and the top terrace is given over to lush, low plantings **BOTTOM RIGHT** The paved alfresco dining area on the middle terrace

