


# A garden to lose yourself in

The irresistibly pretty gardens of Asthall Manor are full  
of secluded places to while away a day in the sun

WORDS LIA LEENDERTZ PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW LAWSON



## In brief

NAME Asthall Manor.

WHAT Large private garden.

WHERE Windrush Valley, the Cotswolds.

SIZE Six acres.

SOIL Clay/loam mixture.

CONDITIONS Hard frosts, strong winds.

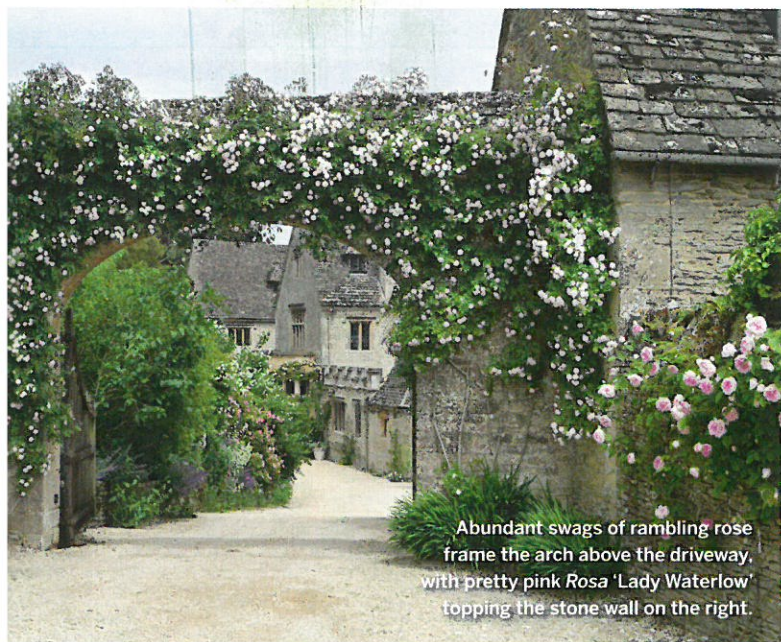
SPECIAL FEATURES Garden designed by

Isabel and Julian Bannerman in 1999.

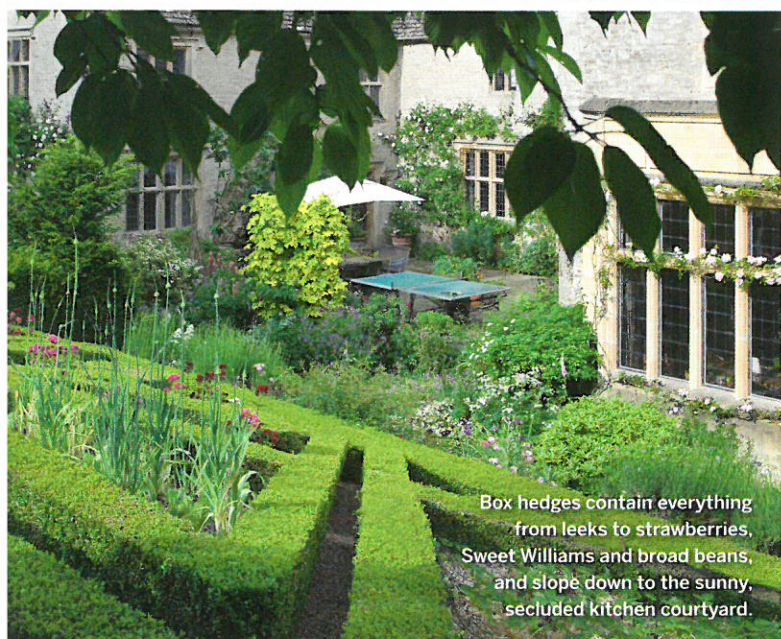
Formal and wild areas, sculpture and  
romantic cottage-garden planting

GARDEN PLAN See page 90.

Vigorous rambling rose 'Cécile Brunner' flowers all summer, softening the stone façade of the manor house, while beneath it *Geranium* 'Anne Folkard' blooms in rich magenta from June to August.



Abundant swags of rambling rose frame the arch above the driveway, with pretty pink *Rosa* 'Lady Waterlow' topping the stone wall on the right.



Box hedges contain everything from leeks to strawberries. Sweet Williams and broad beans, and slope down to the sunny, secluded kitchen courtyard.



Rosie bought these ornate wirework chairs from a junk shop in Chipping Norton.

Asthall Manor is grand. There's no denying it. A Jacobean house in the Cotswolds, it was once home and playground to the Mitford sisters, and sits in gabled glory in six acres of garden. But it's not the grandness of the garden that stays with you after you leave, but the intimacy within it. And that's the way owner Rosie Pearson would have it. She, her gardener Mark Edwards and garden designers Julian and Isabel Bannerman have filled this place with magical nooks and crannies.

The Bannermans' role was to create the framework within which this could happen. They were drafted in when Rosie first moved here from Jamaica in 1997, unsure where to start with the garden. "I found it overwhelming. I nearly sold up and went back. Then a friend put me in touch with the Bannermans, saying "They might inspire you." Together they produced a plan to open up and realign the garden, starting with the entrance to the house.

While the Mitford girls were socialites, their father wanted privacy here, and the southeast entrance was walled off to exclude prying eyes. The Bannermans opened it up again, putting in a drive around a huge, beautiful old lime tree. Along the front of the house – where grass had grown up to the walls – they made a gravel walkway and planted it up with cottage garden classics such as roses, scabious, *Alchemilla*, *Astrantia*, lavender and *Philadelphus*. "It's wonderfully fragrant," says Rosie. The imposed structure of walk and edging combined with this romantic overspilling abundance is typical of the approach the Bannermans have taken throughout the garden.

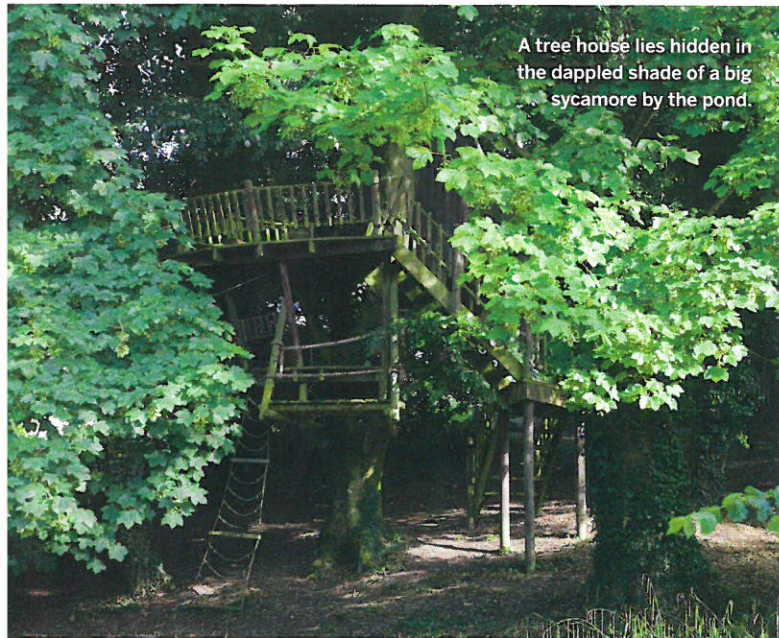
### Hidden nooks

It is at the end of this walkway that Rosie's personal touch comes into evidence. "This is my favourite spot in the garden," she says, leading me to a tiny clearing among the plants, where she has put a single chair and stone table. From the seat an unexpected view opens up across the nearby River Windrush and its surrounding willows and water meadows. "I love finding special, hidden places," says Rosie.

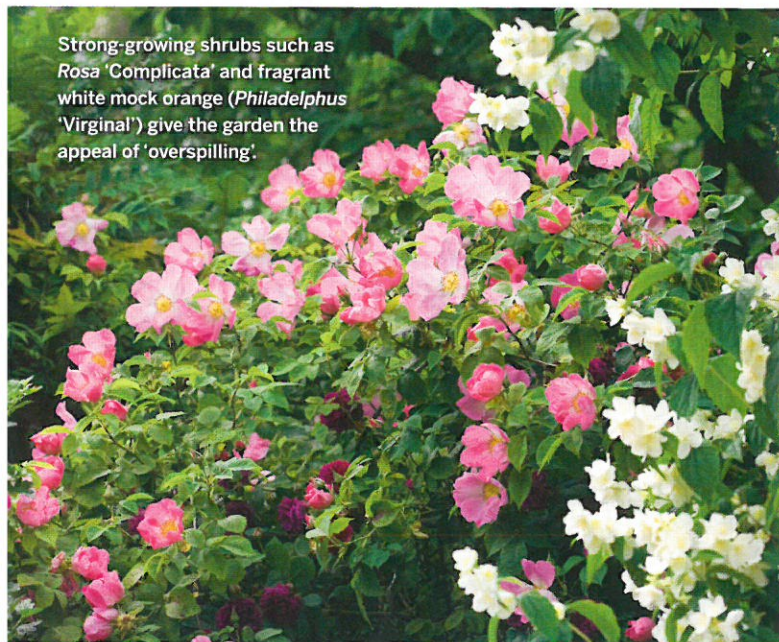
Around the corner of the house things turn grand again. The 'croquet lawn' was so named in the Mitfords' time, but now it is far more likely to play host to a children's play or part of Rosie's biennial sculpture exhibition. "I want the garden peaceful most of the time, ▷

### Creating intimacy

The garden at Asthall Manor is filled with intimate spaces, some of which were designed into the garden, while others have been created since. Rosie says: "**Scent** helps create a feeling of intimacy and the Bannermans filled the garden with roses and scented plants." Some of these spaces are defined by a **view** – for example, Rosie has hung a hammock between two trees, in a pretty spot overlooking the river. Other spaces are **enclosed** on several sides, such as the 'hermitage' in the woods, a small thatched building containing benches and a fire pit; "we go there and cook sausages sometimes," says Rosie. She suggests experimenting with **seating** in favourite spots, or even in those you wouldn't normally consider special: "There are little places to stop, sit and stare all over the garden. It can help you appreciate a forgotten spot more."



A tree house lies hidden in the dappled shade of a big sycamore by the pond.



Strong-growing shrubs such as *Rosa 'Complicata'* and fragrant white mock orange (*Philadelphus 'Virginal'*) give the garden the appeal of 'overspilling'.



A wide grass path leads from the edge of the croquet lawn, past the traditional gypsy caravan to a sloping wildflower meadow, stream and pond.

▷ but I also like to have lots of buzzy things going on.” Sculpture and art plays a huge role here, not only during exhibitions. Contemporary pieces are dotted around the garden, from the *Meeting Stones* on the lawn, by Anthony Turner, to a small land form sculpted by Asthall Manor’s full-time gardener, Mark Edwards, working from a Plasticine model made by Rosie. “Mark is a secret artist,” says Rosie. “I often discover little touches around the garden.” Mark shows me a bower, hidden in a thicket of growth at the end of the garden, where he has cleared branches and bound others to make a little dome. “No-one would know it was here, but the branches already here suggested this shape, so I gave it a go.” Working in the garden has brought out this artistic side. “Rosie has encouraged me, and now I look out for opportunities.” Mark is proudest of all of his beautiful grass steps.

Moving out of the woods and back towards the house, the hand of the Bannermans asserts itself more strongly again. The ground banks down steeply towards the kitchen, a problem the Bannermans were charged with solving. They pulled down a 1920s extension – making space for a south-facing, secluded courtyard filled with scented plants in summer – and planted the bank with a knot garden, which fills the view from the kitchen window with colour and pattern and can be seen at the perfect angle from the windows above.

Beyond this are the yew wedges: sharp, looming topiary beasts that encapsulate everything about this garden: designed by the Bannermans, highly artistic and sculptural, and maintained to edge-sharp perfection by artist-gardener Mark. The spaces between them create secret tunnels and hiding places. “It is like a secret garden in there,” says Rosie. “Magical.” □

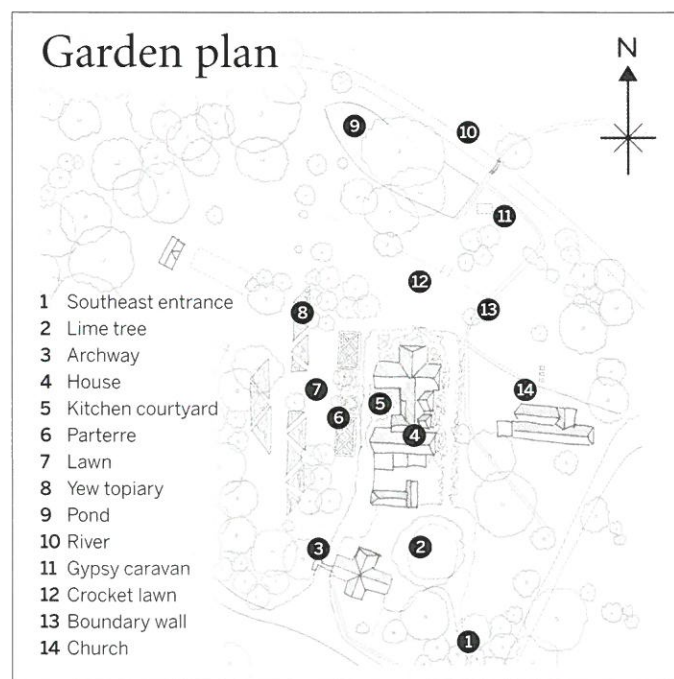
#### USEFUL INFORMATION

OPEN 12 June, 2pm to 6pm, under the National Gardens Scheme.

ADDRESS Asthall, near Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4HW.

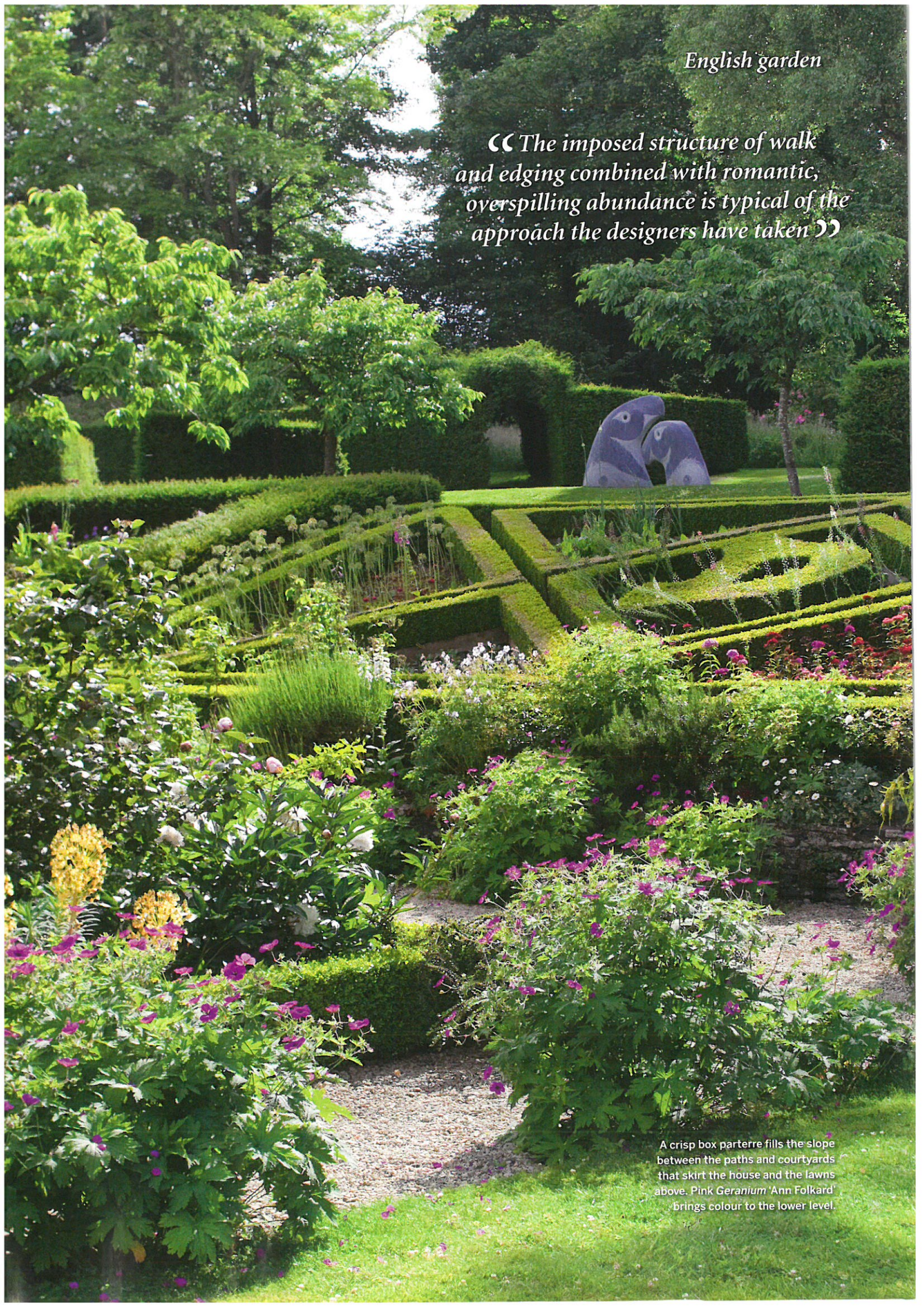
WEBSITE [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

EXHIBITION Every other year, in early summer, the garden hosts a contemporary sculpture exhibition. The next event is due to be held in 2012. See [www.onformsculpture.co.uk](http://www.onformsculpture.co.uk) for details.



*English garden*

« The imposed structure of walk and edging combined with romantic, overspilling abundance is typical of the approach the designers have taken »



A crisp box parterre fills the slope between the paths and courtyards that skirt the house and the lawns above. Pink Geranium 'Ann Folkard' brings colour to the lower level.