



# SEASONAL SHOWCASE

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## WINTER

The three-tier terraced garden, with a rectilinear pond on the middle tier (this picture), directs the eye towards the surrounding countryside

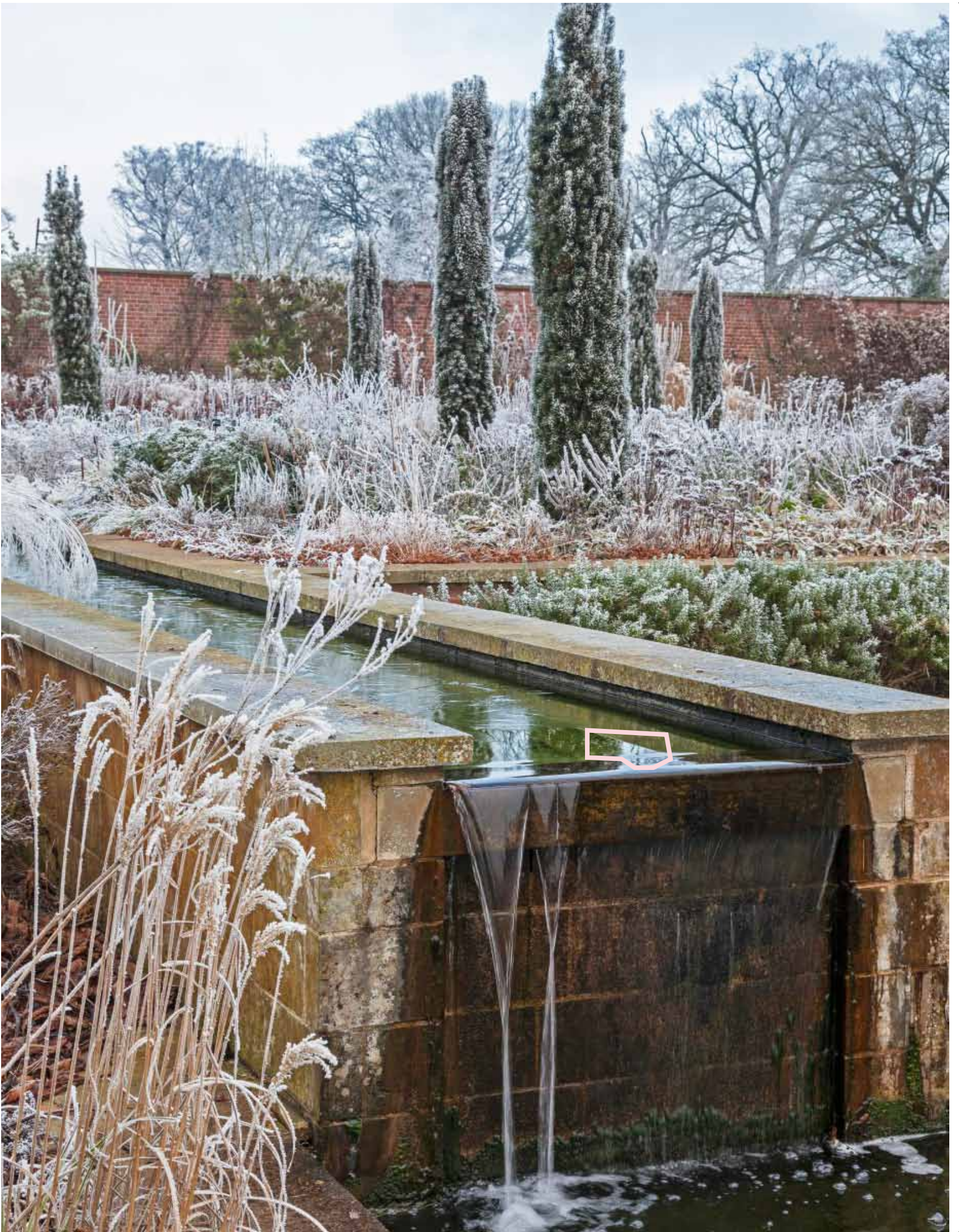
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*At Broughton Grange in Oxfordshire, Tom Stuart-Smith has developed the idea of a traditional walled garden, creating a space that connects with its surrounding landscape but is subtly divided from it by carefully considered planting, which is soft and abundant in summer and dramatically stark in winter*











The gardens at Broughton Grange in north Oxfordshire are large and impressive. Covering 25 acres, and with a further 80 acres given over to a nascent arboretum, they deserve attention, incorporating a pretty knot garden, spring walk, sunken garden, long borders and a stumpery. But the feature that has put Broughton on the map is an impressive terraced walled garden, designed by Tom Stuart-Smith in 2000. It is extraordinary for a number of reasons, not least of which is the noticeable absence of walls.

‘The owner conceived the idea of a walled garden in the traditional sense; he had been impressed by Villandry,’ says Tom. ‘I listened and then evolved the idea. I felt quite strongly that the garden should be open to views of the surrounding countryside, and I didn’t want its impact to depend on hard landscaping, but to come primarily from the planting.’

Of course, there are some things even Tom cannot achieve with plants. It took extensive earthworks to impose three vast terraces on the rough, sloping field he was commissioned to transform. Then there was the excavation required to form the large rectilinear pond, which fills much of the middle terrace and is

fed at one corner by a canal-like rill sluicing down from the top terrace.

‘The point of this was to set up a diagonal perspective leading the eye across the garden and out to the surrounding countryside,’ says Tom. ‘It interests me that planting can influence the wider landscape while also having a strong internal framework. I see it almost in psychological terms – like a person who has a private internal life and public social interactions.’

The division between these two states is provided by two sizeable tunnels of clipped beech running down the long, eastern side of the garden. Green and shady in summer, the rich rusty colour of Corten steel in winter, these living walls in part conceal and elsewhere frame a series of formal vistas. Beyond the lowest terrace, a lawn dotted with slightly drunken clipped yews serves as an even more informal boundary. The topiary is subtly, but intentionally, random, directing the eye to carefully considered views to the south.

To the west, an existing wall has been largely concealed by three squares of pleached lime that frame doorways into the garden, one on each terrace. The limes are hard-pruned every December – a process that keeps two gardeners busy for a week – to hasten the formation of gnarled knuckles, which make a striking winter feature.

In addition, the garden further connects with the wider landscape through a cerebral trope that is typical of this most intellectual of designers. The third and lowest terrace is dominated by a box parterre clipped into an undulating design. Apparently abstract, this is in fact a biologically accurate, though vastly enlarged, depiction of the cellular structure of three leaves – oak, ash and beech – which are native to the region.

In summer this parterre is bedded out with red kale, cosmos, nicotiana

## WINTER

OPPOSITE A rill on the top terrace feeds water into the pond below. THIS PAGE FROM TOP A tunnel of clipped beech runs down the eastern side of the garden. The lowest terrace has a box parterre depicting the cellular structures of oak, ash and beech leaves





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## SPRING

Throughout spring,  
tulips flower in the  
box parterre.  
Varieties include  
'Abu Hassan',  
'Ballerina', 'Prinses  
Irene' and 'Gavota'



JANUARY 2014 HOUSE & GARDEN 000









and the like, although Tom loves it in winter, when the pockets of reddish soil lie bare. Come the spring, tulips – including ‘Abu Hassan’, ‘Ballerina’, ‘Prinses Irene’ and ‘Gavota’ – spatter the earth in a pointillist riot of colour.

Here, and throughout the walled garden, the passing of the seasons is embraced and celebrated. ‘The intention was to create a garden that is abundant and soft in summer, and stark and hard in winter,’ says Tom.

In June, the swaying mass of plants on the middle terrace is almost overwhelming in its profusion. Billowing clouds of lime-green euphorbia, smouldering purple salvias and airy sky-blue amsonias interact to trigger visual reverberations like the hum of a tuning fork. Rising from the beds are 16 beeches neatly clipped into fat cylinders, each topped with a dome. The impression they give is of a scattered crowd of people, viewed from behind.

The top terrace also has a vertical note, this time from slender yews, which pierce beds of equally fulsome though more shrubby planting with a decidedly Mediterranean flavour. Clumps of buttery-yellow phlomis are a significant presence, along with rich purple salvia,

steely eryngiums and the occasional spire of verbascum.

The planting is classic Stuart-Smith – European prairie style with a decidedly English twist. Combinations include *Eryngium yabellii* and *Festuca amethystina*, asters growing with *Calamintha nepeta* and *Euphorbia nicaeensis* grouped with *Phlomis russeliana* and verbascums. They look fantastic in summer, but they really earn their place because of their ability to withstand the damp cold of an Oxfordshire January.

‘It is important not to use mushy plants – persicarias, geraniums and some euphorbias won’t last when temperatures drop,’ says Tom. ‘But agastache, cardoons, *Hydrangea quercifolia*, *Genista aetnensis* and *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Gracillimus’ look fantastic in a hoar frost.’

And then there are the grasses. As summer progresses, great plumes of them emerge, including the feathery panicles of *Stipa calamagrostis*, *Panicum virgatum* ‘Rehbraun’ and *Pennisetum alopecuroides* ‘Hameln’. These too have been chosen for their ability to stand well through the winter. Tom is not one to grab at desperate scraps of midwinter colour. Instead, he relies on plants that die well. Of his own garden, he has written, ‘I have always wanted the garden in winter to look like it is in the full grip of the cold and not in a state of seasonal denial.’

At Broughton, his philosophy is the same. At the turn of the year, the borders are rimed with frost and desiccated into sepia tones that glow in low shafts of winter sun. ‘This is not successional planting in the classic sense,’ he says. ‘Even in high summer, colour isn’t a primary consideration. Texture and form are in many ways so much more important’ □

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## SUMMER

**BOTH PAGES** *Taxus baccata* ‘Fastigiata’ (opposite) adds a vertical element to the top terrace. Here, the planting scheme is European prairie style with an English twist; combinations include purple salvia with *Eryngium yabellii* (above left) and *Eremurus robustus*, *Euphorbia nicaeensis* and verbascums (above right)