



IN THE FRAME

Tom Stuart-Smith's evergreen and beech topiary bones and hard landscaping choices give Broughton Grange fascinating seasonal edge and interest ►

PHOTOGRAPHS ABIGAIL REX **WORDS** CLAIRE MASSET

Garden Profile

PLACE Broughton Grange, Wykham Lane, Broughton OX15 5DS

DESIGN Developed by the present owners since 1992

SIZE 25-acre garden and 80-acre arboretum within a 350-acre estate

STYLE Mixture of formal and informal with Walled Garden by Tom Stuart-Smith acting as a centrepiece

OPEN For the NGS and for groups (see www.broughtongrange.com)

In her book *The English Garden*, Ursula Buchan describes Broughton Grange as 'one of the most imaginative and stimulating gardens made in England in the last 10 years'. At its hub lies the Walled Garden, a masterpiece of contemporary design and planting created by the great Tom Stuart-Smith in 2001.

Tom transformed a barren sloping field into a unique three-tiered terraced garden. On the Upper Terrace, narrow snaking paths invite you to 'enter' the wide borders. Prairie planting is counterbalanced by elegance and understated hard landscaping, which includes a rill and, further down, a pool with stepping stones. Evergreen spires, domes, hedges and tunnels add to the structure and create winter interest. The design is a subtle blend of permanent horizontal (hard landscaping) and vertical (evergreen) features and exuberant perennial planting that rises and falls with the seasons. Water, whether still in the pool or moving in the rill, offers visual 'breaks' between expanses of profuse planting.

Part of Tom's brief was to blend his design with landscape, something which he has elegantly achieved. The garden is framed by ancient ash, oak and beech trees, while in the central section the gaze is directed to the fields beyond. Some plants in the garden, such as beech, are echoed in the landscape, anchoring the design in the countryside.

Although known as the Walled Garden, it is only enclosed by two walls (designed, as was the rest of the hard landscaping, by architect Ptolemy Dean). This creates a dual sense of seclusion and openness, which is at once comforting and uplifting. The Upper Terrace is very much in the Dutch prairie style, with grasses and seedheads taking centre stage in autumn. The Middle Terrace features some taller perennials and

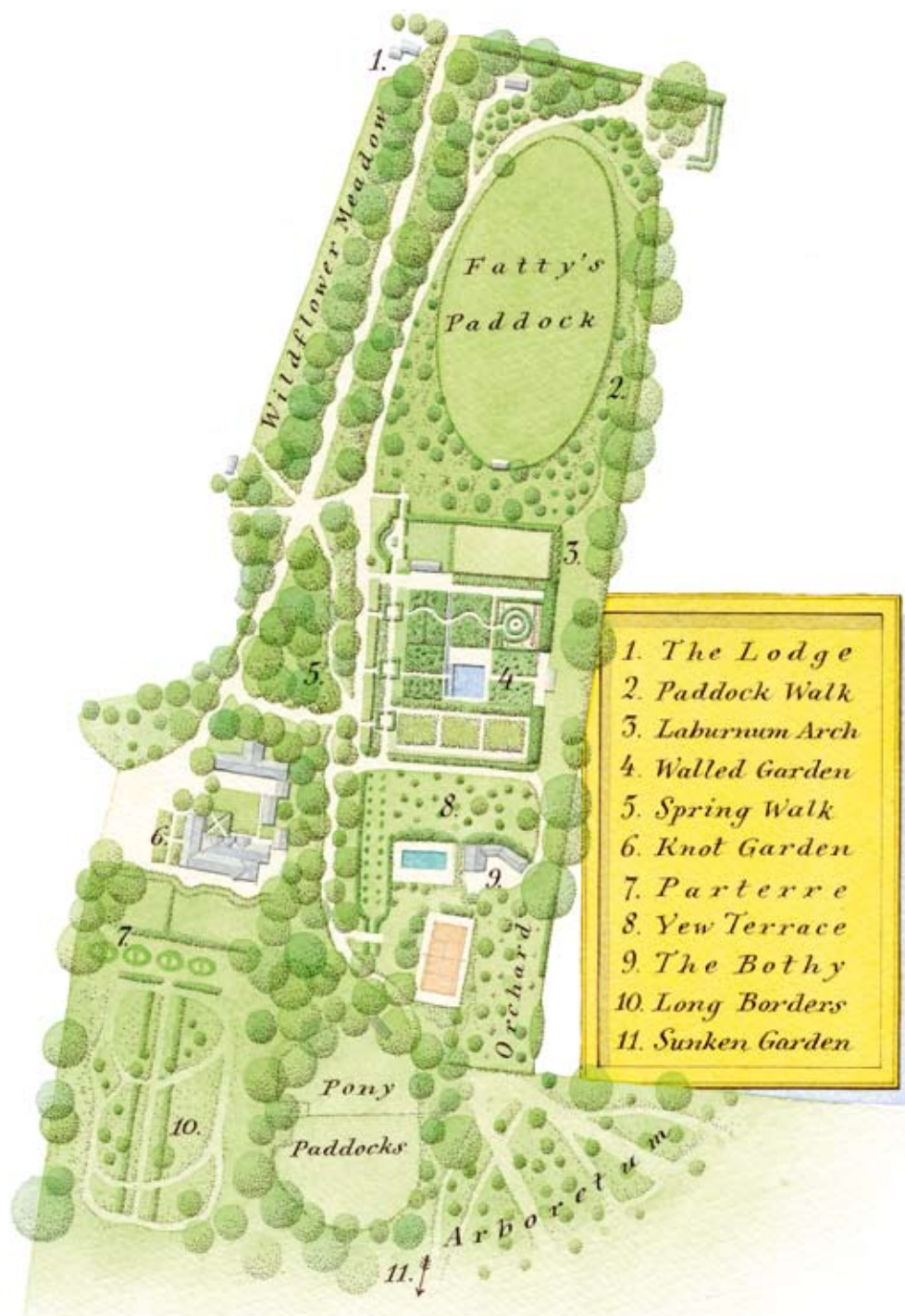
grasses, including *Persicaria alpina*, *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, *Rodgersia pinnata*, miscanthus and calamagrostis, punctuated by 16 topiary beeches. The Lower Terrace presents an unusual 'organic' parterre.

Although there is evidence of a farmhouse existing here in the 17th century, the gardens were established in the Victorian era, when the main house was built. But it is only since 1992, when the present owners bought the house and estate, that the garden has undergone a series of major developments.

Recent projects include an amazing 80-acre arboretum. Trees are also a feature of the smaller Paddock Walk. Planted in 2002, this

light woodland is planted with crab apples, salix, cornus and betulas, underplanted with shade-loving ground cover.

While parts of the garden are informal, wooded, almost wild, others are formal and, some might say, traditional, such as the Knot Garden to one side of the house, and, beyond it, the parterre of box. Further down are Long Borders and yet another partly wooded area, the Sunken Garden, home to a stumpery and a tropical bamboo garden. Finally, at the very bottom of the garden, there's a recently planted water meadow. And despite all this variety, one feels there is yet more to come from this garden that will surely go down in history.





The Knot Garden is neatly edged in York stone to create a clean, crisp look that highlights the box design, especially after a rain shower, when the stone almost glistens in the light

Evergreen features

The canny use of evergreens in various parts of the garden means that there is still much to draw the eye, even in the depths of winter

SURREAL YEW A number of clipped yew domes 'inhabit' the Yew Terrace and have been described as symbolic 'walkers'. Some are simply rounded cones while a handful are shaped, such as the one pictured here (*below*).



BOX BEAUTY The Parterre is made up of 16 compartments, delineated by low box hedging. Height is added by obelisks (*above*) on which the red tones of faded clematis stand out.

ETERNAL ART The Knot Garden (*above*) is one of two evergreen features, along with the Parterre, that can be seen from inside the house. The geometric pattern of straight lines and semi-circles dotted with topiary balls is mirrored either side of the front door.

POOL SIDE Near the pool house, box balls (*below*) are punctuation marks that echo the shapes of the domes in the Yew Terrace. The garden is full of such subtle visual links. ►



Tom Stuart-Smith

In 2001, Tom Stuart-Smith was commissioned to transform the six-acre sloping garden next to the main house. His design blends clean architectural lines with impeccable planting

SPLENDID SEEDHEADS In late autumn and early winter, the Top Terrace (*opposite page*) is a feast of seedheads, including *Phlomis italica*, and fading or silvery leaves, such as *Euphorbia cyparissias* 'Fens Ruby'. As Piet Oudolf famously said, there is a particular beauty in decay, and Tom has used this idea to its full advantage. Pencil yews (*Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata') punctuate the planting, adding height and drama. These have yet to reach their ultimate height, so it remains to be seen how far they will grow. Small snaking paths invite you to explore the plants, while a rill and single stepping stone tease you in even further. The pale York stone paving either side of the rill acts as a frame for the planting, adding a sense of order and structure, as do the beech columns in the background. Becoming rusty in the autumn, there are 16 such chessboard-like columns in the Middle Terrace.

REFLECTIVE POOL The central section of the Middle Terrace is home to a large pool with York stepping stones and edging. The crisp lines of

the stone contrast with the organic parterre on the Lower Terrace, glimpsed in the background of this photograph (*below*). The edging slabs are joined with a lime mix - not cement - as the colour is more natural and weathers to create an almost invisible join. The water in the pool appears almost black, and is a useful means of drawing the wider countryside (and sky) into the garden by means of reflections, as can be seen here in the reflected tree shapes. The three levels of terrace are marked by three blocks of pleached limes, *Tilia x europaea* 'Pallida' to one side (not shown on the picture). Each one frames a door into the Walled Garden. In winter, the limes are cut back to their nodes; the skeletal outlines appear as if 'hanging' in the air.

PARTICULAR PARTERRE The Lower Terrace is home to a modern interpretation of the traditional parterre. Designed to be viewed from above, it is best appreciated from the edge of Middle Terrace, where it spreads out before you. Divided into three sections, the design is based on the structure of leaves of trees found on the



estate: beech, oak and ash. In winter, the cells of the parterre are left bare, and the slightly reddish North Oxfordshire soil echoes the shades of the beech tunnel in the background. In spring, the parterre is ablaze with tulips, while in summer the cells are filled with purple kale, nicotiana, antirrhinums, heliotropes and cosmos. The bedding schemes, designed by Head Gardener Andrew Woodall, change slightly every year. ►







Tunnels, allées, parterres and topiary specimens are judiciously placed, directing the gaze towards various viewpoints

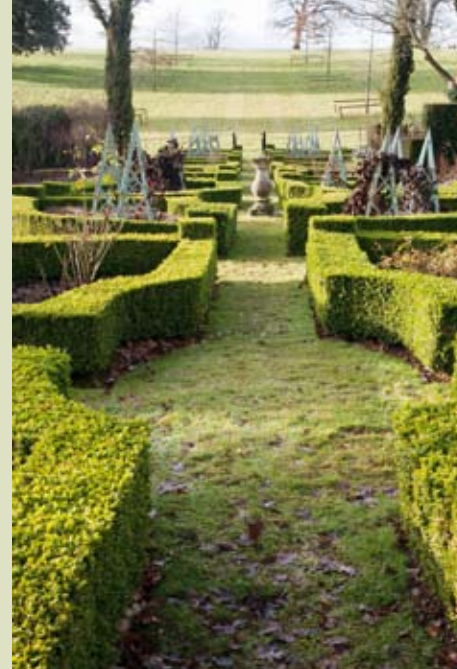
Framing views

Many structures in the garden are designed to channel the eye towards a specific viewpoint, whether it be the wider landscape or a small ornamental feature

ELEGANT AVENUE A neat allée of yew domes leads towards the lower end of the garden (below), where an urn is flanked by trees dating back to the Victorian era. The perspective creates a theatrical Versailles-like effect.



TOWERING YEWS In the Walled Garden, the fine pencil yews (right) draw the eye upwards and help to delineate the surrounding countryside, making the most of the garden's natural setting of undulating hills in the North Oxfordshire countryside. Seen from a different angle, the beech topiary on the Middle Terrace has a similar 'framing' effect.



SIGHT LINES The lines of the Parterre near the house (above) direct your vision to a sundial in the middle ground and then beyond to a sloping field, which has recently been planted with a row of pin oaks, *Quercus palustris*, that will eventually extend the view out even further.

TUNNEL VISION The beech tunnel (above left) to one side of the Walled Garden leads the eye towards wider landscape, where ancient oak, beech and ash trees are dotted among fields.



GARDENER PROFILE

Andrew Woodall has worked as Head Gardener at a number of private properties, including Pennington House in Hampshire, Fort Belvedere in Surrey, and Il Palagio in Tuscany, before coming to Broughton Grange five years ago. 'I am driven by perfection,' Andrew says, describing his gardening ethos. 'I set each year as a benchmark. The garden was better this year than last, and I want to make it even better next year. I love the challenge that gardening presents. It's about being one step ahead of the garden, but it's also about paying attention to detail. Detail can make all the difference.'