

The big skies and the extraordinary light of East Anglia make it unlike anywhere else in Britain, and offer the most amazing natural conditions in which to create gardens. The 22 gardens selected for *Secret Gardens of East Anglia*, some of which are shown on these pages, celebrate the culture, beauty and diversity of the region and include examples from Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex.

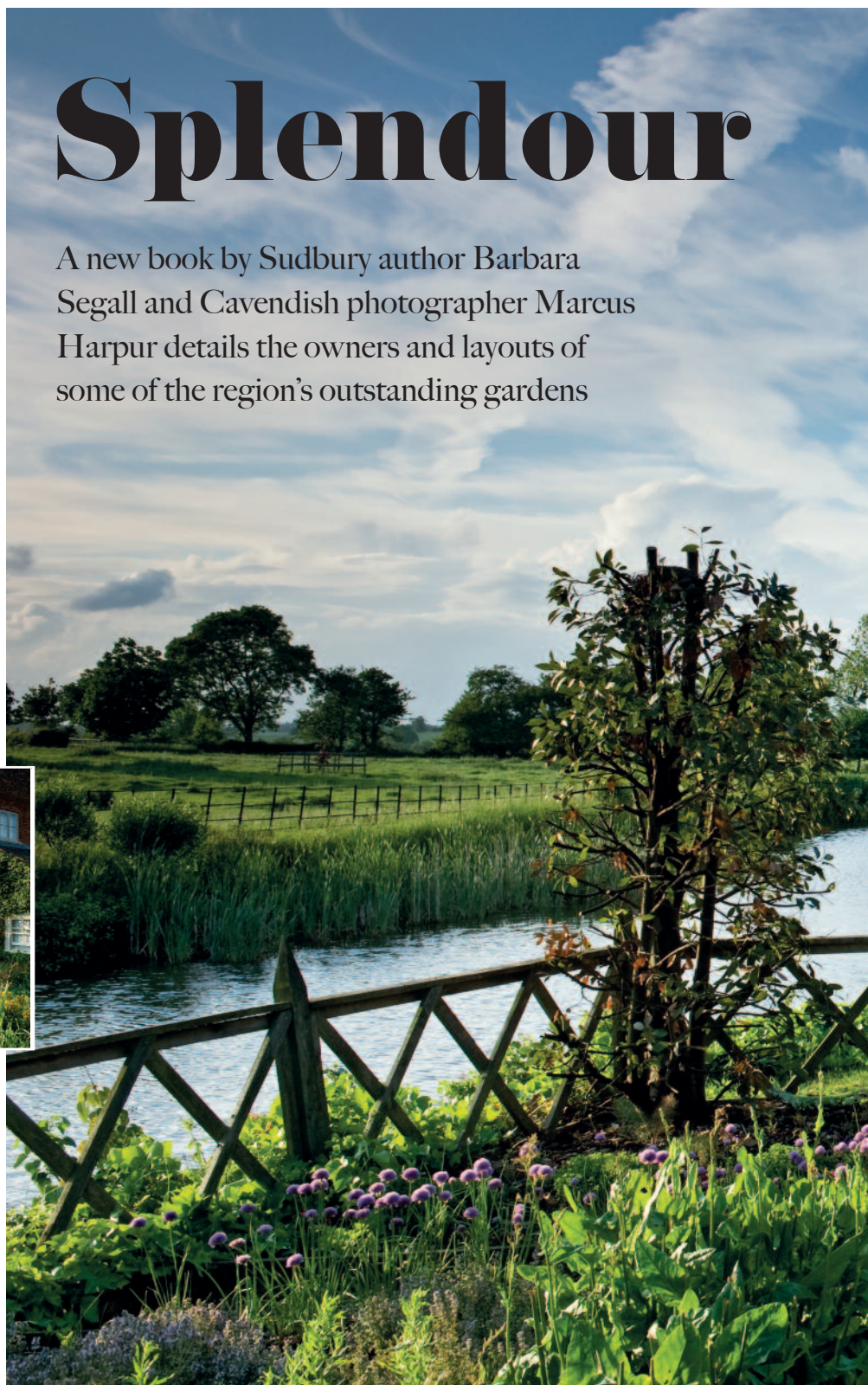
Introduced by eminent East Anglian plantswoman Beth Chatto, the gardens appearing on these pages are brought to life by the award-winning author and photographer team of Barbara Segall and Marcus Harpur. From each garden we learn about the creator's style, their talent and the specific challenges and rewards they have encountered.



Polstead Mill Polstead, Suffolk

Lucy Bartlett began her gardening life in mellow and moist South Wales. When newly settled in Suffolk, she thought she had moved to a desert. Now it feels like her terroir, but in the beginning it was a real journey of discovery. 'I learned that going east means you actually have to water plants,' she says. Lucy and her husband Richard found Polstead Mill in 2002. The house dates from 1785 and was incorporated with the adjacent mill. Up until then, this was a working mill, complete with a mill race, weir and pool leading off the River Box, which runs through the garden.

Features such as the swimming pool, built over the former mill race, and the terrace, path and steps in front of the house, were put in by their immediate predecessors. By the time the Bartletts arrived, however, there was plenty of scope for renewal and expansion. The garden at the Mill covers around 4.5 hectares/11 acres and now includes a tree fringed lawn and herbaceous borders near the house, and a kitchen garden, woodland and wildflower meadow reached by crossing either of the two bridges over the river.



Columbine Hall Stowupland, Suffolk

Columbine Hall and the stylish garden that envelops it often feature in magazine and newspaper articles. That house and garden appear to vie with each other in garnering column inches seems entirely appropriate, since owners Leslie Geddes-Brown and Hew Stevenson have hands covered – as it were – in printers' ink.

Leslie is a journalist and author, while Hew, also an author, is a newspaperman through and through. A scion of the Tyneside family who owned *The Shields Gazette*, Hew became managing director of *The Yorkshire Evening Press* and on his retirement in 1996 was chairman and chief executive of the Westminster Press Group. Leslie and Hew moved from Halifax to London in 1988, and then in 1993 discov-

in the grass (and the flowerbeds)



ered and bought Columbine Hall, a 14th century Grade II* listed gatehouse wing situated near Stowmarket. 'There are few fancy beams here: it is graded because a gatehouse wing is an unusual survival,' says Leslie. They did not have to do much structurally as the building was in sound condition, even if in need of a little restoration.

Judicious work and the understated colours of Farrow & Ball paint soon

transformed the interior. The garden, though, was another matter according to Leslie: 'I hadn't worked out how to read and organise the garden, or how to unify it with the house and landscape.' It also presented a particular challenge as the house is surrounded by a moat. The land surrounding Columbine Hall has more than fulfilled Hew and Leslie's expectations, yet continues to develop. At 18, Hew lived with a family in Belgium as

an exchange student. It was here that he first saw a garden with vistas and parklands, and it became his ambition to create a garden like the one held in his memory.

Now he enjoys walking with the dogs to the far extremity of their land, immersing himself in the 'wilderness' and looking back to the created garden, while Leslie loves the closer views of the seemingly floating and secretive garden that wraps itself around the hall.→

Parsonage House Helions Bumpstead, Essex

Annie Turner has gardened all her life. She finds it endlessly fascinating, especially the way it combines art and science. For her, though, the plants are paramount. She and her husband, the Hon. Nigel Turner, have been living at Parsonage House since 1990. Around their 15th-century Grade II* listed home they have created a quintessentially English garden, with mixed borders that hold low-growing sparkling jewels in spring, and tall, thrusting perennials that rise like an ever-flowing floral tide in high summer. Their kitchen garden, small



and productive, is close to the house, while the 1.2-hectare/3-acre field across the lane is the setting for an orchard of heritage apples.

Parsonage House is a timber-framed property dating from 1450, once owned by St Paul's Cathedral and later leased to Hatfield Priory. The

Turners feel fortunate that the new buildings they have added – a pool house, the garden-room extension, and the flat and potting shed – were all designed by their friend, architect Charles Morris, who is known for work in many gardens but notably for the Orchard Room at Highgrove House. For Annie, the move to Parsonage House, very near the Suffolk border, marked a return to the countryside where she had spent many happy childhood years: "I was born in my grandfather's house in Suffolk, and in my memory I see a lovely garden sweeping down to a large lake."



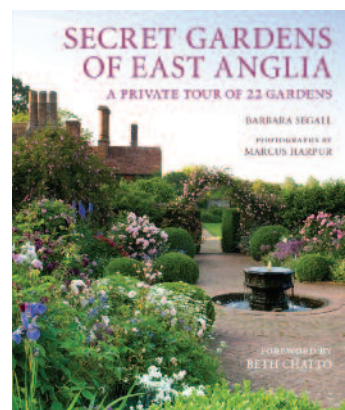
Wyken Hall Stanton, Suffolk

Carla Carlisle is forthright about her dislike of the way many beautiful old English houses are cluttered and obscured by driveways running right up to the entrance, where parked cars mar their lovely facade. It was a flaw she was determined to correct at Wyken Hall, her home since 1986. She sold the diamond brooch her husband Kenneth Carlisle had given her for her 40th birthday and used the proceeds to redesign the approach to the hall.

It was quite a transformation. The front door now opens on to a formal quincunx of five interlocking brick circles inset with a band of local flint, in a pattern that was inspired by a

Gertrude Jekyll design. Each brick ring surrounds a circular box-edged bed with tiered topiary, where forget-me-knots, tulips or salvias bloom in season. The central circle holds a blue ceramic fountain by potter Clive Davies.

This Tudor manor house in rural Suffolk has been in Kenneth's family since 1920. The distinctive red ochre limewash applied to the hall two decades ago resembles the 'Suffolk pink' of Elizabethan times. Kenneth's interest in the garden at Wyken dates from the late 1970s. He was fortunate, he says, to inherit a framework of flint walls and magnificent old trees. The couple have also planted a vineyard on a south-facing slope, which produces around 12,000 bottles a year.



These are extracts from *Secret Gardens of East Anglia* by Barbara Segall, £20, published by Frances Lincoln. Out September 7