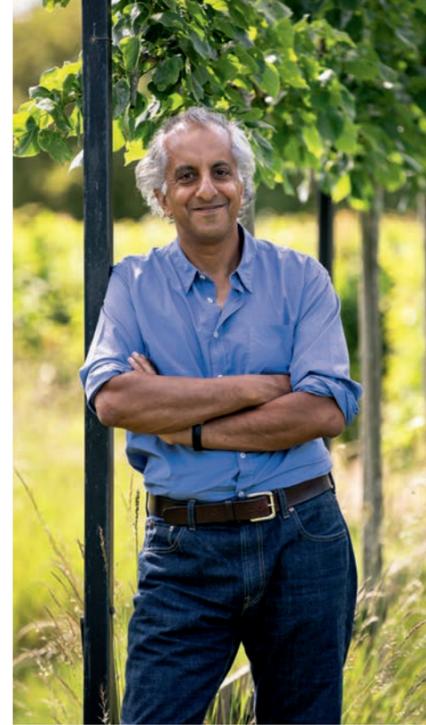


Breathing SPACE

Constrained by city living, Rajat Jindal longed for freedom. He found that at Church Cottage in Suffolk, where areas of tightly clipped formality now contrast with an expansive natural meadow

WORDS **BARBARA SEGALL** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD BLOOM**

A short avenue of pleached limes leads from the formal garden into the wildflower meadow beyond.



Above Former City lawyer Rajat Jindal bought his Suffolk cottage and garden in 2010 in an attempt to get away from it all.

Below The garden's inner hedges are so tall that the thatched cottage peeps out over the top.

An established boundary hedge of hawthorn, blackthorn, dogwood and spindle encompassed 2.8 acres of field and garden. "I hadn't intended to buy a property with so much land, so I didn't know what I would do in the field, which wraps around the inner garden and the cottage. I think my idea was to do as little as possible but, as time has gone on, I've found myself doing more and more."

The garden immediately around the cottage, set within a high hedge, was easy enough to tackle: it seemed fairly obvious that borders could back onto the hedge. Over the years, Rajat has deepened these borders, making them more generous (in places they are now over 12-feet deep) and opening up sightlines through the hedge into the field beyond. Divided into three sections, the Long Border provides colour from mid- to late-summer, while shade-loving plants, notably mahonia, thrive in the middle section, and the Pond Border, alongside the drainage pond, is full of fresh spring plants, including daffodils and snowdrops, with *Pachysandra terminalis* 'Green Carpet' making a dense groundcover.

These inner hedges are so high you can only just glimpse the cottage's upstairs windows peeping over them. The field and meadow beyond the hedges are revealed through gaps in the hedges Rajat has created. "I like that you can see out of the front door through these sightlines to another area. You don't

see all of it at once, and so you are impelled to move along to get to the next space. I think it is important to draw people into every part of the garden."

Rajat planned to keep the outlying field beyond the high inner hedges mainly as a natural grass meadow,

Here, Rajat could open the door, be outside and wouldn't feel, nor be, overlooked

but he also wanted to sow a flower meadow within it from scratch. So he brought out the lawnmower and carved out a huge oval with a sinuous line running through it, which he calls the 'line of beauty', as well as many pathways through the field.

Within the relaxed wildflower meadow sits a formal garden of curved shapes that echo the rose window of Rajat's neighbour's converted chapel home. "I love tight formality and clipped hedging," he explains. Within the formal garden's hedges is a parterre outlined by low clipped box, with echinacea, echinops, persicaria and campanulas filling its shapely quarters.

To balance the formality with the flowing, waving meadow and grass plantings, Rajat has turned any entry point from one part of the garden to another into a sort of formal decompression zone. For example, between the formal garden and the field and wildflower meadow beyond, he has planted a short avenue of pleached limes, all *Tilia x euchlora*.

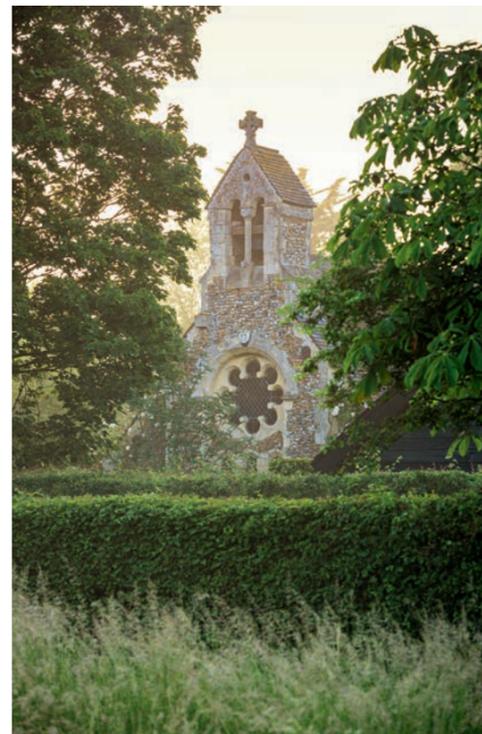
Above Rajat uses a lawnmower to create meandering paths and sinuous shapes in the wildflower meadow.

Right The rose window in the neighbouring converted chapel inspired the shape of the hedged formal garden.

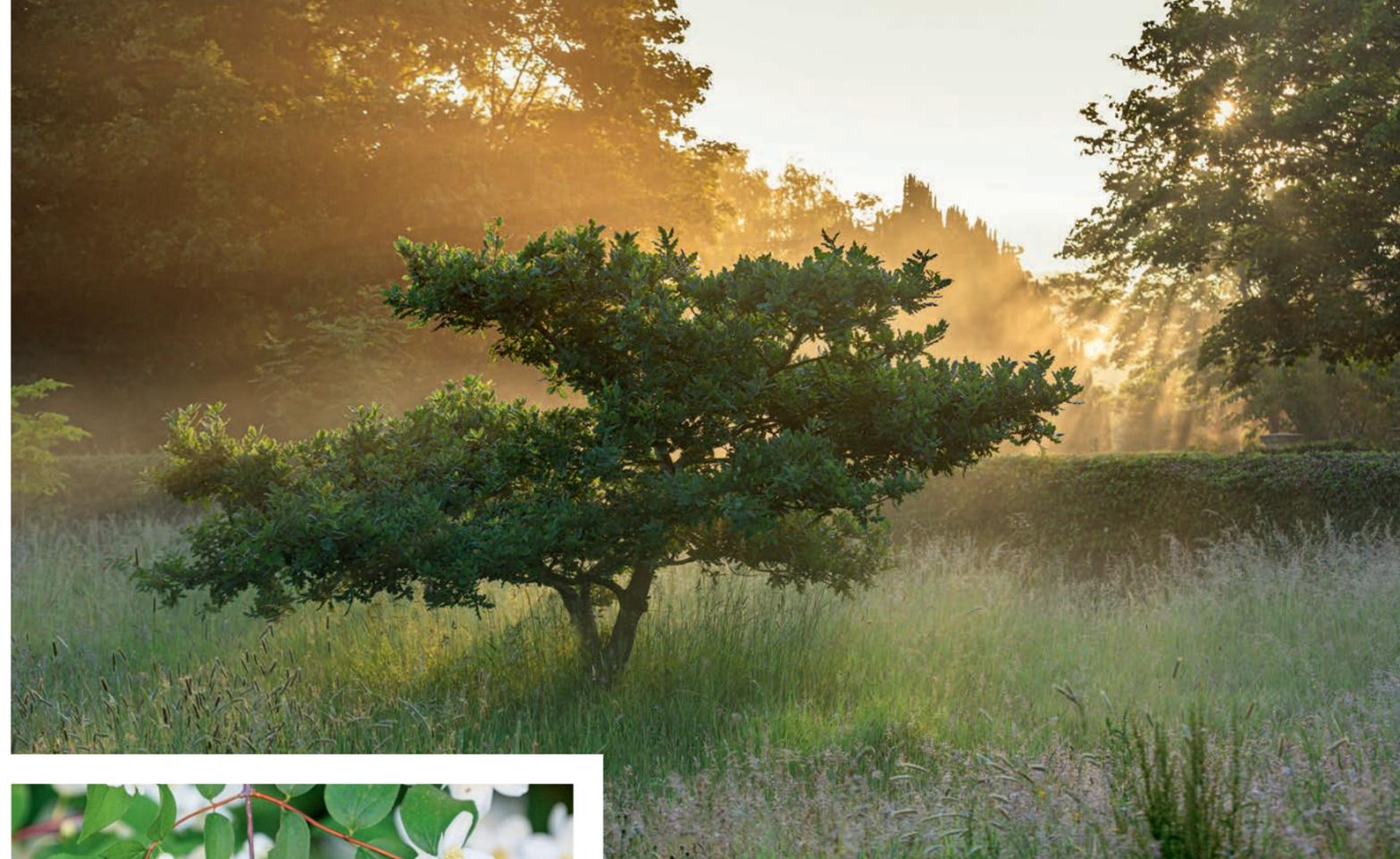
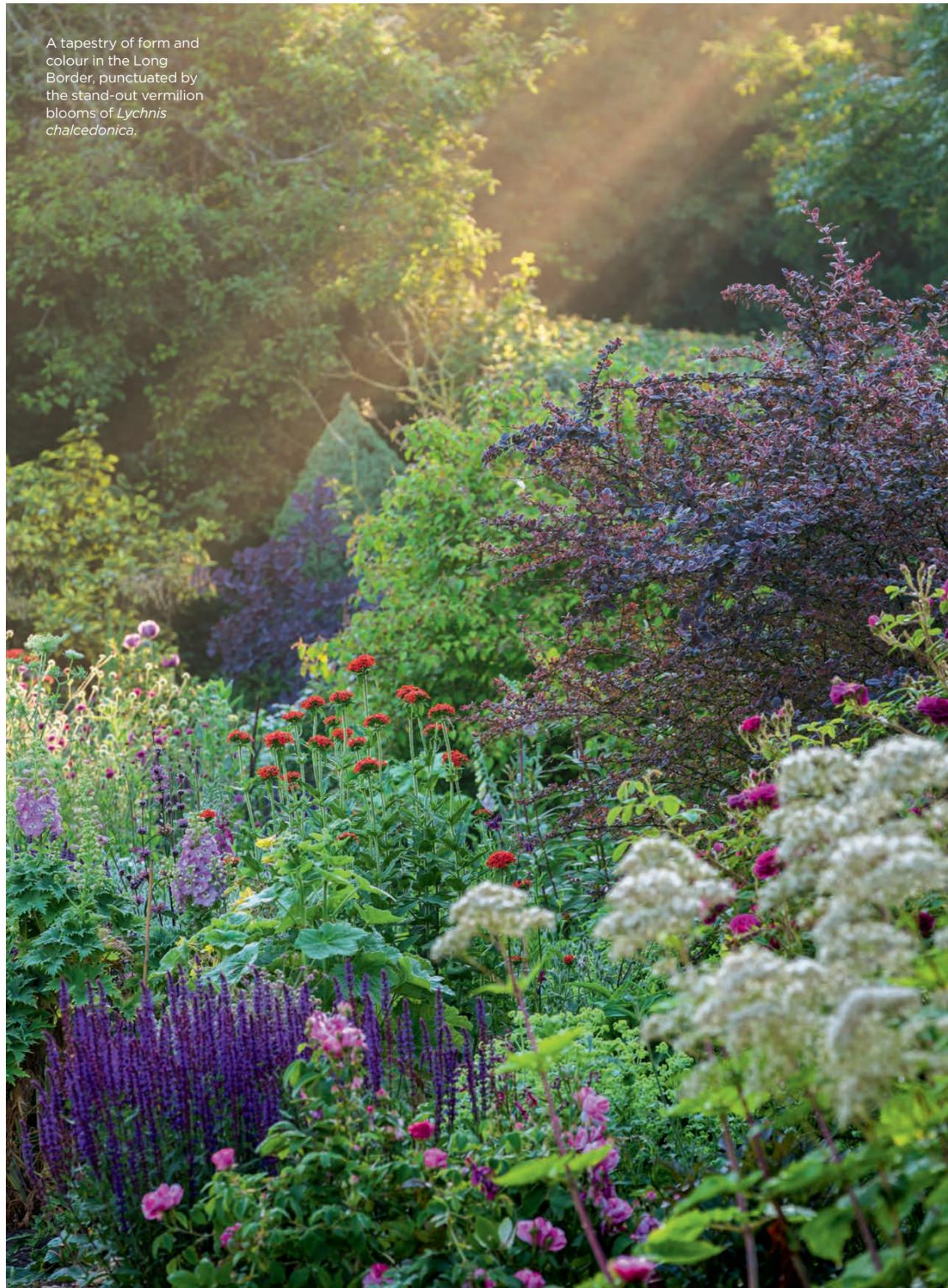
In 2010 Rajat Jindal was a City lawyer living in London with the sense that he was gardening in a side-by-side, straitjacketed urban setting, always overlooked and cramped. He knew he wanted to have a garden somewhere in the countryside.

"You know how it is: you have a list of what you want in a new property. Mine included high ceilings, a decent-sized kitchen, an ample living room, some outbuildings and a chance to make a garden. This property ticked only one box: there was space and scope for me to make a garden. None of the other attributes I had listed applied, and I didn't appear to notice they were missing!" he recalls.

Rajat first saw Church Cottage on a bright sunny June day and knew within five minutes that here was a place where the sense of the country was paramount. He could open the door, be outside and wouldn't feel, nor be, overlooked.



A tapestry of form and colour in the Long Border, punctuated by the stand-out vermillion blooms of *Lychnis chalcedonica*.



Above Rajat's 'bonsai' oak, one of many unusual specimen trees in the Arboretum.
Left Pure white, sweetly fragranced blooms of *Philadelphus* 'Belle Étoile'.
Below 'Charles de Mills', an old rose from the 18th century, makes a large shrub with rich, ruffled, magenta flowers.



A narrow double line of hornbeams marks the access route to the Arboretum

Once you step through that mini-avenue, swaying unmown grasses lap around the mown paths and up to the shapely cubes of hornbeam that offer a formal breathing space in front of the Bottom Copse.

On the other side of the cottage, a narrow double line of hornbeams marks the access route to the Arboretum, where liquidambar, *Acer rubrum* 'Autumn Glory' and *Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Robin Hill' offer strong autumn colour. Rajat has planted a number of specimen and special trees here, including the linden, *Tilia platyphyllos* 'Rubra', and the hawthorn, *Crataegus laevigata* 'Plena'.

More recently, a new wildlife pond was dug in the Arboretum. It is here that Rajat's partner, artist Jane Human, centred her attention during lockdown, creating paintings inspired by the garden as part of her solo show, Quiet Land, held at Gallery East in Woodbridge in 2021.

At the other end of the field is a circular bed split into four quadrants filled with grasses. "I wanted to have elements of a Piet Oudolf 'prairie-



Left Old rose 'Souvenir du Docteur Jamain' has an undeniable romance, with its deep maroon, heavily fragrant blooms.

Below Berry-red *Knautia macedonica* alongside the feathery plumes of grasses, beautifully catching the light.

Bottom In the Bottom Copse, cubes of hornbeam rise from the meadow grasses.



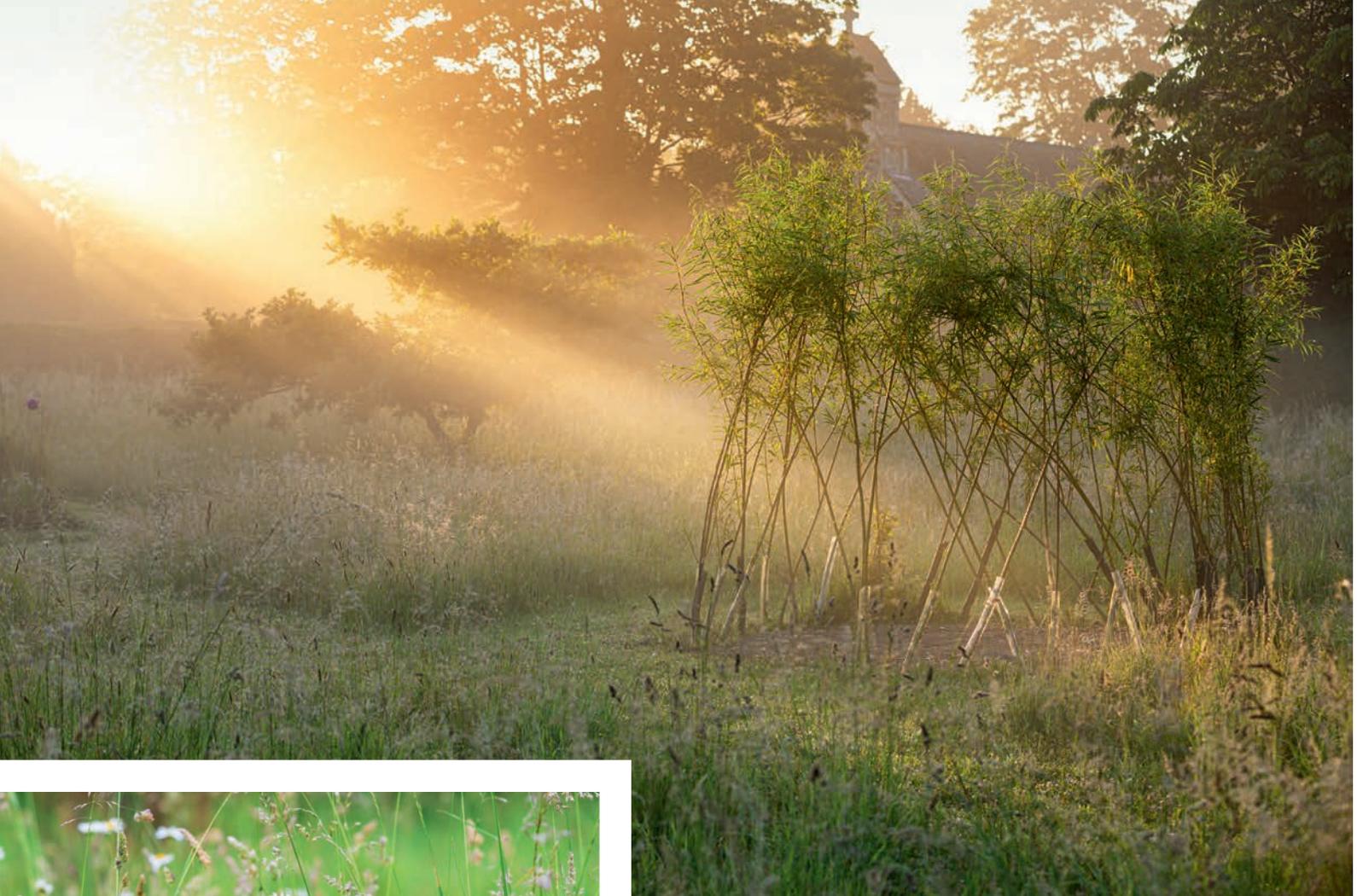
“I realised the irony of my actions. I was planting ornamental grasses into a grassland meadow”

style’ planting,” Rajat explains. In one quadrant there are over one hundred plants of *Molinia caerulea* ‘Windspiel’. *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* ‘Karl Foerster’ forms the backbone of two of the other quadrants, along with perennials such as eupatorium, *Knautia macedonica*, *Helianthus* ‘Lemon Queen’, sanguisorba and filipendula. The fourth quadrant is given over to a mixed planting of cornus for winter stems.

“While I was going for these large effects, I suddenly realised the irony of my actions. I was planting ornamental grasses into a grassland meadow and digging out wild bramble while planting a great stand of ornamental brambles, *Rubus cockburnianus* and *R. thibetanus*.”

Rajat acknowledges that there are many influences in the garden. “I am a complete fraud. I have no formal garden training. Whatever I know has been picked up from reading or going on garden visits





Above Morning sun illuminates an arbour of living willow.
Left Amid the long grass, classic meadow planting includes ribwort plantain, ox-eye daisies, and cheery yellow bird's foot trefoil.
Below A spiral design mown into the grass of the meadow.



to Sissinghurst and Great Dixter, among others, or from garden people I admire, including Fergus Garrett, Piet Oudolf and Tania Compton. My hornbeam cubes link back directly to those I saw in Tania's own garden."

Keeping the boundary and cottage garden hedges under control seems to be an endless task. "No sooner have I finished, then I need to go back to the start and begin again," says Rajat. "Flopping down in a chair is fatal, because the different perspective reveals bits of hedge I have failed to cut properly."

Establishing the wildflower meadow was the hardest part to achieve, as it takes time to get the balance right. Rajat used a meadow grass mix (EM4) for clay soils from Emorsgate, supplemented with bundles of Great Dixter clippings and yellow rattle. Eventually the yellow rattle out-competed the grasses, and now there are orchids as well as other wildflowers. Once it has finished flowering, the meadow is cut and the hay taken away.

"I enjoy the artistic and creative side of gardening, but I get so much from the physical tasks such as moving soil or weeding," says Rajat. "My earlier career was sedentary and the contrast couldn't be greater. The natural rhythm of gardening is soothing, and while I occasionally go into the garden in a bad mood, I never leave it in a bad mood." ■

Follow Rajat on Instagram [@indianinthegarden](https://www.instagram.com/indianinthegarden) and visit janehuman.co.uk