

The Garden



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Sun, shade, seclusion

Big design ideas in a small Suffolk courtyard

The view from the 'sitooterie' shows the large borders with *Bistorta amplexicaulis* 'Firetail' flowers following the path. At ground level, the bed is edged with New Zealand ground cover *Acaena novae-zelandiae*, splashes of bright red *Coleus scutellarioides* Campfire ('Uf12823') and *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb'. Beyond the Suffolk-made metal obelisk, designed by Janey, is *Eriobotrya japonica* (loquat)

"I've created my own little cloister"

Developing her small courtyard garden has set garden designer Janey Auchincloss free to experiment in a way she has not done before

Author: Barbara Segall, a garden writer, editor and blogger. Her latest book, *Secret Gardens of the South-East* will be published in September

Photographer: Richard Bloom

When Janey Auchincloss and her husband John moved into their characterful Lavenham cottage in 2016, their immediate focus was renovating the building. Within two years they were ready to make a start on the hard landscaping of their new garden. "I designed the garden and planted it from scratch", says Janey, a trained illustrator who decided to take up garden design in 1994 when her children were small. "My love of plants and gardening was fostered by my mother who was always 'bottom up in the air' in the garden."

The garden's layout was a joint effort. "Our new extension has a long wall of windows creating a cloister effect in the garden," she says. "The design had to be relatively practical: we wanted a sitting area, a place where we could eat outdoors, as well as a storage area. We each sketched out what we thought was important and what we have now is a fusion of our two plans."

The main structural planting, such as the loquat tree, went in early on. "Space was at a premium, but I do love grand-scale planting even in a small space. Here I chose plants to create a variety of foliage, flower impact and height. Everything had to look lush and fill its space," says Janey. Year round, the main structure of euphorbia, phormiums, pittosporums, tree ferns, tetrapanax, catalpa and loquat remain.

"I'm currently concentrating on changing the under-planting. Originally there were dahlias for their zingy flower and foliage colour in late summer. But our young English bull terrier Florence eats dahlias, so they are now out!"

Space for experimentation

From the side gate the view is of a cloister-like garden. The long, floor-to-ceiling glass walls of the extension are intrinsic to the design. "I wanted to create a garden that had a natural flow through, with plants shading and softening the glass," says Janey.

"It's probably the trickiest garden I've ever designed because I'm probably the trickiest client I'll ever have. This is the first time I haven't done a formal planting plan. I simply went shopping and tried things out. As a result I have had more fun in this garden than in any other. Experimentation allows you to easily replace the plants and effects that you may not like."

For Janey, the stand-out plants are the loquat tree, tree ferns and *Tetrapanax*, all of which bring shade to a garden that is essentially a hot spot. "I know I have taken risks with some of the plants. Really what I am doing is trying out plants to see what will or won't work. I can't experiment in a client's garden in the same way, so here I'm enjoying creating a style and look for this site specifically."

From indoors, through the glass of the extension wall, »

As well as offering the best garden view, the glass extension houses Janey's indoor succulent collection



the garden is visible all day, every day, so it needs to have year-round interest. In summer Janey fills it with tender perennials that she calls 'lookers' and 'fillers' – her lookers are plants such as *Coleus scutellarioides* Campfire ('Uf12823') with its neon-orange foliage and *Actaea simplex* (Atropurpurea Group) 'Brunette' AGM with purple foliage, white, feathery flower plumes and delightful vanilla scent.

"I want plants that are going to be a little bit unusual, especially the flowering plants," says Janey. This year she plans to add some glamorous salvias and there will be orange spotlights from Mexican sunflower *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Torch'. Janey has had success with other plants that she had not used in clients' gardens before, including *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum', *Euphorbia x pasteurii* 'John Phillips' AGM, *Euphorbia stygiana* and Japanese forest grass *Hakonechloa macra* AGM, which has worked well in various beds throughout the space.

Pockets of shelter

Although the emphasis is on plants that thrive in the full sun of the courtyard, Janey is pleased that she has a shade-loving border against the neighbour's boundary wall. Here she can grow trilliums, *Disporum longistylum* 'Night Heron' AGM, dog's tooth violets and epimediums. In time Janey knows that some of the plants, such as the loquat, phormiums, *Tetrapanax* and *Catalpa* will grow to make good blocks of shade over the garden, and she has also installed a shade sail that is latched to the house.

The garden as a whole is sheltered, but there is a little frost pocket and in a cold spell a few years ago some plants were damaged by the weight of snow. And of course if there is a blast of heat from the Sahara, plants such as the *Tetrapanax* can be defoliated. Another cooling element within the design is the Corten reflection tank that Janey uses regularly as a water source. "It started out as a reflection tank and, apart from being useful, is relaxing to look at. Now it holds some fish, too," she says.

The garden planting is in constant evolution here, fitting around the hard-landscaping framework that Janey and her husband created together. Although there are plants that stay, to offer the basic height and shape she requires, there is still an element of evolution that excites Janey.

And gardening with a young dog – Florence is nearly two years old – is part of that evolutionary process. "I have to keep her off the garden using more robust planting," says Janey. "In future my dahlias are going to be in pots. Lilies, too, which are poisonous for dogs, will have to be in planters that are Florence-proof." ◉ >>

A textural mix of leaf and flower shapes and colours contrast with the smooth dark pool of water. Bold green leaves of *Geum* 'Prinses Juliana', flowers of *Watsonia* and *Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora* 'George Davison' and deep purple-leaved *Actaea* all work together with ground-covering *Acaena novae-zelandiae*

The details

Size of garden: 17 x 7m

Age: three years old (planted in 2019)

Location: Lavenham, Suffolk

Maintenance: Janey keeps this deliberately low because of her work schedules, so in spring she cuts back, mulches and starts sowing annuals. In summer some watering (using water from the tank) is needed, including of the tree ferns. After the first frosts Janey strips out the annuals, then protects the tree ferns, *Tetrapanax* and banana with a fleece and straw through winter

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Flowering plants in hot sunny colours contrast well with purple-leaved *Actaea* and give the base of the tree ferns a bit of cover. Janey was disappointed that the orange-flowered *Watsonia* didn't survive this past winter. *Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora* 'George Davison' continues to give good colour



Euphorbia x pasteurii 'John Phillips' makes a strong edge to the border where *Actaea simplex* and fennel race skywards. The mossy Japanese lantern is one of the ornaments Janey brought from her previous garden. A Corten steel water tank serves as both a water feature and for water storage



Looking out from the extension, the shade provided by the loquat tree is easily appreciated. Janey hopes it will provide further cover as it matures

Janey's top five plants for exotic interest



1 *Euphorbia x pasteurii* 'John Phillips' AGM gives a dramatic jungle look and is a highly structural plant. A cross between large, leathery-leaved *E. stygiana* and smaller *E. mellifera*, from which it inherits its honey-scented flowerheads. A great bee and food source, evergreen with autumn interest. Reaches 1.5m in height and spread.

2 *Tetrapanax papyrifer* 'Rex' with huge deeply lobed leaves is a dramatic eye-catcher of a plant. It is hardy, but in winter leaves can be frost damaged. It starts life in spring as a large, leafless trunk. Height 4m and spreads up to 2.5m.

3 *Eriobotrya japonica* AGM or loquat tree, with large glossy leaves, has white flowers and produces small yellow fruits. It has grown fast in the microclimate of Grove Cottage, enjoying the hot sun and providing much-needed shade in summer. Ultimate height and spread is 4–8m.

4 *Dicksonia antarctica* AGM is a tree fern with dark trunks and arching lacy fronds growing from the top. The trunks will increase in height by about 2.5cm each year. Janey recommends feeding every month through the growing season. She waters regularly into the top of the crown and up and down the trunk through summer.

5 *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Torch' (Mexican sunflower) is an annual grown from seed that provides a high-octane shot of colour. It has a branching habit and grows to 1.2m tall. It thrives in full sun – the bright orange flowers sing from midsummer through to autumn.



Neptune looks across *Bistorta* 'Firetail' and one of many *Hakonechloa macra* planted in the garden, towards *Sedum* 'Bertram Anderson', a clipped *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb' and the fine feathery foliage of *Euphorbia cyparissias* 'Fens Ruby'