

Hidden Escapes

Gain a privileged peek inside a selection of South East England's finest privately owned gardens

Arundel Castle Arundel, West Sussex

Caught in the early morning mist, the windows and buttresses of Arundel Cathedral provide a dramatic borrowed backdrop to the annual allium extravaganza at Arundel Castle.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the walled gardens at Arundel Castle, caught between its battlements and turrets and the vaulted arches of the Victorian cathedral, might be superfluous to requirements. Thanks to the vision of the owners, the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk, and the fearlessness of head gardener and landscape designer Martin Duncan, the walled gardens compete well with the drama of the landscape, providing their own grandeur in the scale and depth of the planting.

Arundel Castle has been the seat of the Dukes of Norfolk since the 12th century, and its 40 acres have been changed and improved by successive generations. In the past 20 years the 18th Duke, Edward, and the Duchess, Georgina, have been key to the creation of new gardens and exciting plantings.

COURTYARDS, RILLS AND FOUNTAINS

In 2008, the year before Martin's arrival, the Collector Earl's Garden, conceived by the Duke and Duchess and designed by Isabel and Julian Bannerman with architect Russell Taylor, was formally opened by His Majesty The King (at that time HRH The Prince of Wales). It consists of three courtyards, two terraces, a rill, temples and fountains. This is the first garden visitors see, designed to pay homage to Thomas Howard, the 14th Earl (1585–1646), and to reimagine the Italianate garden of his London home (Arundel House).

Martin gardens the wider landscape of the grounds as naturally as possible, so that the link with the gardened area is retained. Massed plantings of narcissus, tulips, alliums and camassia, wild flower banks and a reduced mowing regime have helped increase the wildlife population.

"Working with the Duke and Duchess is paramount, gaining their trust offers me the freedom to suggest and then take on big challenges. I like looking at the whole range of the garden elements here. For me it is natural to walk from the inner gardens out into the wilder, less formal landscape." arundelcastle.org ▶



Balmoral Cottage BENENDEN, KENT

ABOVE Donald and Charlotte Molesworth have transformed Balmoral Cottage into a remarkable, formal yet quirky topiary garden softened by informal borders. **OPPOSITE ABOVE** Shown off in a vintage jug, Charlotte's grand display of hedgerow and garden finds is closely scrutinised by a topiary peahen. **OPPOSITE BELOW** Bird meets cat atop a hedge.

That moment when you meet your future down a little lane, see a gate and on opening it find the rest of time ahead of you...? Well, that is literally what happened when Charlotte and Donald Molesworth found and bought Balmoral Cottage in Benenden in 1983.

Donald, a professional gardener, had been working next door at The Grange, the former home of Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram (1880–1981), the plant hunter credited with returning endangered cherries to Japan to ensure the authenticity of the annual 'sakura' blossom festival.

For eight years Charlotte had been living in and teaching art at Benenden School, and on walks around the village often stepped along the rough track leading to this tiny house. Probably named Balmoral to celebrate a visit of Queen Victoria to Benenden, it was the gardener's cottage for The Grange.

They knew that they would need plenty of plants to make their garden and, being thrifty and resourceful they brought many plants from their parents' gardens.

ADDICTED TO TOPIARY

The plants that now define the 1.5-acre garden and established Charlotte as a topiarist were a mass of tiny evergreen cuttings and seedlings of box and yew given by Charlotte's mother, her Aunt Joyce and their friends in response to their wedding-gift request for unwanted yew seedlings.

Influenced by her mother's topiary, Charlotte's enthusiasm flourished, so much so that she and Donald were founding members of the European Boxwood and Topiary Society established in 1996 by *Buxus* specialist Elizabeth Braimbridge. Charlotte bought some species and clone-rooted cuttings at reasonable prices from Elizabeth's nursery, Langley Boxwood.

"I became addicted. Topiary is relatively labour-saving as yew only needs one cut per year in autumn or winter, and I cut box in alternate years. It looks good all year (bar a period in summer when it looks a little woolly) and is a way to establish the 'good bones' of height and structure in a garden." ngs.org.uk ▶



Clinton Lodge Gardens

FLETCHING, EAST SUSSEX

Lady Noel Collum has gardened the six acres of Clinton Lodge for over 50 years, arriving here in 1972 with her husband, the late Sir Hugh Collum, and their two children. Over the years, Noel has been fortunate to receive advice from her friend, garden designer Julian Treyer-Evans, who implemented many garden projects. She has also, in recent decades, appreciated the professionalism of head gardener Gavin Whitton and several others who have been with her for more than 16 years. "Everything happened gradually here, and of course, there have been many changes over the five decades. The 1987 hurricane helpfully cleared the way for the realisation of many of my ideas."

SIMPLICITY IS KEY

In the early years, she made few changes, but she had an instinct for what she wanted, and with her background in history, she researched early garden designers. "I read Russell Page's *The Education of a Gardener* at least five times, and through my work at Christie's, I was influenced and inspired by portraits which often included a pastiche or exaggerated depiction of a garden. I felt that my garden should reflect the various ages of the house."

Simplicity is paramount: to suit the late-Georgian architecture of Clinton Lodge, she wanted to set it off with a lawn lined with trees, linking the house to the distant view. A double row of hornbeams running at right angles from the house, parallel with each other, provided the framework. These were clipped into formal box shapes and eventually backed by a yew hedge. At their base, massed snowdrops were naturalised.

What satisfies her now is the tranquillity of the lawn, the hornbeams, the two white urns and the parkland rolling out below the ha-ha, suggesting that everything is under control without being regimented.

clintonlodgegardens.co.uk ▶

FAR LEFT Clinton Lodge Gardens, with its garden rooms, romantic walkways and parklands has been opening for the National Garden Scheme for the past 40 years.

ABOVE In 2010 Noel Collum asked sculptor William Pye to install a water feature in the existing Rose Garden which she renamed The Pye Garden. To accommodate the water feature he replaced the rose borders on either side of with lines of mop-head acacias

LEFT The late-Georgian architecture of Clinton Lodge.





Long Barn

SEVENOAKS, KENT

Taking on any garden is daunting enough but when the house and garden have impeccable historic form, as in the case of Long Barn, the first garden of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, the stress level might well ratchet up. But not so for Rebecca and Lars Lemonius.

Rebecca relates to the fact that Vita and Harold were experimenting in this garden. “At that moment they had no idea what they were doing. Just as it was for me when I arrived here! It was empowering when I realised that when Vita began here she was learning, experimenting and making mistakes. So it was with me, and here I am now, not doing any worse than she.”

ICONIC BACKSTORY

Rebecca and Lars moved to Long Barn in 2007. It was not on the market but they had heard it might be up for sale, and on impulse Rebecca put a note through the door asking the owners to let her know if they decided to sell. Not only did Sir Brandon and Lady Sarah Gough contact her, but they were patient, giving her and Lars the chance to be sure that this wayward Grade II* listed house with a Grade II garden, was right

for them. The Goughs, who had owned it for 20 years, moved next door, which was fortunate since Rebecca rushed there many times asking for plant identifications.

EARLY HISTORY

Rebecca and Lars have not changed anything structurally apart from the vegetable garden, where they have laid brick paths and added a useful propagation building. “Basically we are maintaining what is here in terms of structure and ringing the changes with the planting. The history of its early owners is integral to why we maintain it as we do.”

Rebecca keeps Vita’s style of full and exuberant borders going, letting plants self-sow, editing this lightly and introducing the plants that she favours. She is particularly focused on the textural contrasts of leaves, as well as of the form and structure of plants.

Although there is a feeling of enclosure and intimacy, Long Barn is not fully a series of discrete, enclosed garden rooms but has manageable, informal sections that make it relatable to visitors and offers small vignettes that you could easily transfer to other spaces.

longbarngardens.uk ▶

ABOVE The basic structure of the garden, with its line of stately yews and terraces that seem to float from the main lawn down to the lower garden, was devised by Harold Nicolson.

OPPOSITE ABOVE The barn wall provides a strong backdrop for Californian Glory. Together with the lime-green torches of euphorbia, it offers a counterpoint to the closely clipped hedging and lawns on the Main Lawn.

OPPOSITE BELOW The former tennis court became a rose garden.

Munstead Wood & The Quadrangle

GODALMING, SURREY

Gardens are fragile at the best of times, especially when ownership changes. When the garden of one of the most iconic gardeners of the 20th century is passed down to relatives, the fragility can be even more acute. So it was with Munstead Wood in Surrey, home and garden of Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932). Jekyll began creating her garden at Munstead Wood in the early 1880s and in 1895 work began on the Arts and Crafts house, designed by architect Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944). The house was built to fulfil a comprehensive list of specifications from Jekyll, and she moved in in 1897. In 1949, her nephew Francis divided it into five parcels and sold off four. He lived out his life on the proceeds in one of the buildings on the property, The Hut. It is fortunate that the adjacent parcels of Munstead Wood and The Quadrangle separated by that sale are once again ‘connected’, albeit loosely.

RESEARCH AND RESTORATION

Munstead Wood was rerieved in 1968 when the late Sir Robert Clark and Lady Clark bought the property. A second rerieve followed the storm of 1987 when 200 trees came down: the Clarks’ then-head gardener, Stephen King, suggested it would be a good time to pay proper attention to its past and restore the garden. Stephen uncovered the outlines and edges of the borders and reconstructed their original positions, creating planting which is now mature.

When Stephen moved on, Andrew Robinson became the new head gardener in the late 1990s. In 2002, Annabel Watts answered an advert for a ‘part-time gardener, no experience necessary’. When Andrew retired in 2013, Annabel became head gardener, maintaining the restored garden with part-time help. Annabel curates the garden at Munstead Wood following Jekyll’s concepts to the letter, where possible, given the constraints of time, budget and plant choices.

THE QUADRANGLE

Another gardening hand is at work just beyond the garden gate where neighbour Gail Naughton gardens in the spirit of Jekyll on one of the other relinquished parcels, The Quadrangle. “I was given Jekyll’s *Home and Garden* by my mother many years ago but never thought I would have the chance to recreate part of the garden at Jekyll’s former home. I have developed a garden at The Quadrangle as I think Jekyll would have done, using her writing and photographs to create a garden in her style, based on the plants she knew would flourish here.”

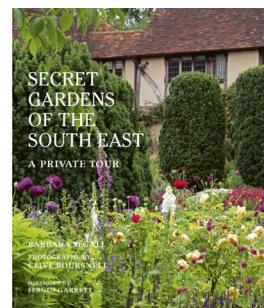
As long as Munstead Wood and The Quadrangle are worked by Annabel Watts and Gail Naughton, garden visitors (by appointment only) are assured of insights into the history of the site and its famous first occupant, as well as ways to garden in a historic setting.

munsteadwood.org.uk ■



TOP Roses and climbing hydrangea on Munstead Wood’s walls.

ABOVE Vibrant colours from tulips in The Quadrangle.



Discover more about these and other exquisite gardens in *Secret Gardens of the South East* by Barbara Segall, with photography by Clive Bournsell, published by Frances Lincoln, £22.