A photograph of a garden with a pond, a brick summerhouse, and various plants. The scene is set in a lush garden with a brick summerhouse in the background, a pond in the foreground, and a variety of plants and flowers. The sky is blue, and the overall atmosphere is serene and peaceful.

Pretty bistort and camassia jostle at the pond's edge, an open-sided summerhouse allowing a serene view out across the lawn.

The Secret GARDEN

The discovery of crumbling 19th-century walls at ten-acre Old Hall Farmhouse in Norfolk, inspired textile artist Jane-Ann Walton to weave a colour-filled garden along the lines of her favourite book by Frances Hodgson Burnett

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

A multi-layered view of this spectacular garden, showing the restored walls with their long, deep borders either side.



Plantswoman and textile artist Jane-Ann Walton has gardened at Old Hall Farmhouse in the village of Swanton Novers, Norfolk, for the past quarter of a century, but she has been enthralled by plants and the outdoors since childhood. Home-schooled for much of what she describes as “a solitary time”, Jane-Ann recalls how she would help the gardeners and enjoy lessons with her governess outdoors. “I’ve always loved mixing compost and potting up plants. My first plants were succulents and cacti – it was difficult to kill them off, so those early successes boosted my enthusiasm!” she notes.

Her ten-acre garden sweeps around the property, which is believed to have once been a medieval moated manor house. The garden then rolls down towards the plant-filled walled garden that Jane-Ann has created. “Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* was my favourite book, so finding that there were walls, even though some were crumbling, made me determined to create a garden within them.”

At first everywhere she tried to make a flowerbed turned out to be filled with the rubble of a collapsed structure, which had to be removed along with nettles and brambles. But once the walls were restored or rebuilt, on either side of them she was able to create long, deep borders that now are filled with flowing streams of flowers and shrubs.

Like many gardeners in East Anglia, Jane-Ann credits Beth Chatto for inspiration. “I went down to her nursery with a friend. I had never seen anything like it. She was so much ahead of her time. She had such unusual plants and grew them in a different, more naturalistic way, which chimed with me.”

Jane-Ann welcomes most wildlife into the garden, planting for pollinators and leaving spent forget-me-not flowers for the greenfinches. But muntjac deer, squirrels and badgers are less welcome. Being on the edge of the 400-acre Swanton Novers woodlands means that the garden is a regular wildlife dining space. Incidentally, forget-me-nots are among the plants the muntjac leave alone. They spread themselves around alongside other self-seeders including honesties *Lunaria annua* ‘Corfu Blue’, ‘Chedglow’, and perennial *L. rediviva*.

At the very heart of the walled garden sits a summerhouse with open sides and a soft grey lead roof. “It’s a copy of the summerhouse at Brinton Hall where I used to have lessons. It was tucked away into the corner of the walls, just as this one is,” Jane-Ann explains. This is one of the sites where some of Jane-Ann’s 500-700-strong auricula collection are out on display. All through the garden, on and against walls, are auricula theatres of varying sizes that house these astonishing plants when they’re in flower. Auriculas came into Jane-Ann’s life after she saw one of Brenda Hyatt’s amazing RHS Chelsea Flower Show exhibits, where these dainty, old-fashioned flowers were exhibited against a black background and sometimes framed in gold. “I fell for one in particular – ‘Prague’, with its green petals – and then the collecting instinct kicked in!”

At the lowest point of the walled garden Jane-Ann decided to install a pond. “It seemed to be the obvious place, but it was a mistake. I later read that in boggy wet areas the water level will rise during periods of prolonged rainfall, and if you have a liner, the water will push it upward, so it looks as if you have hidden hippos wallowing beneath it!”

Now fringed by *Bistorta officinalis* ‘Superba’ and *Iris x robusta* ‘Gerald Darby’, it is home to a ceramic fish made by Jane-Ann’s sister-in-law, Sarah Walton, a saltglaze potter in East Sussex. A neighbour made the plinth for the fish, and a stand of shuttlecock ferns, purple-leaved lysimachia and the large

foliage of skunk cabbage, *Lysichiton camtschaticensis*, provides a strong backdrop for it. Duckweed has found its way to the pond, though. “For 30 years we were unaffected by it. Just suddenly, last summer, it appeared:

it must have come in on the foot of a mallard. It seems to double in quantity every day,” sighs Jane-Ann.

Behind the farmhouse are still more treasures, including a mixed cut-flower and vegetable garden. Jane-Ann enjoys growing flowers such as cosmos and delphiniums from seed. She cuts the delphiniums down once they’ve flowered and they reward her with a second flush of blooms, albeit on shorter stems. “Flowers give me more joy than cabbages,” she confirms.

Beyond the walled garden, reached through a Gothic-looking doorway

Below Dedicated owner Jane-Ann Walton, who has been restoring and gardening at Old Hall Farmhouse in Norfolk for some 25 years now.

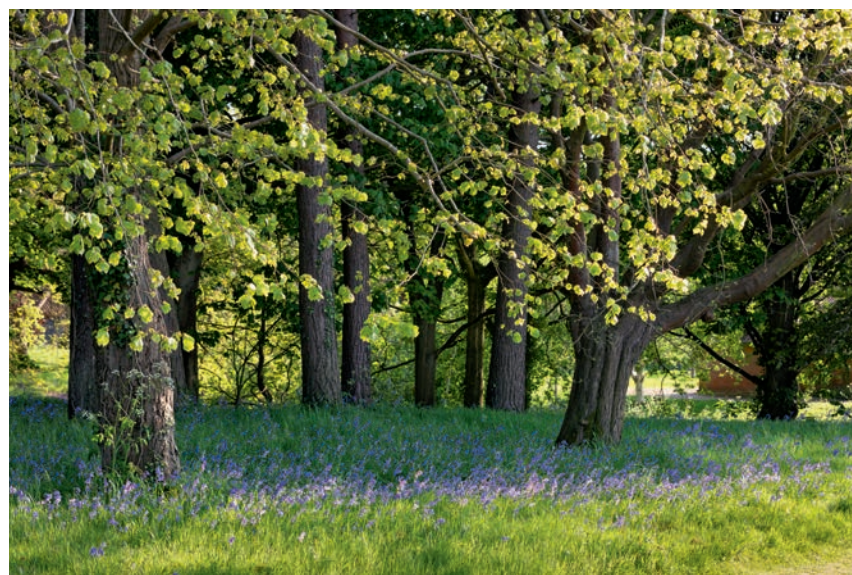


Auriculas are a passion of Jane-Ann's and auricula theatres to display them are set on and against walls across the garden.



Top Textured planting includes self-seeders such as forget-me-nots. **Above right** This ceramic fish was created by Jane-Ann's sister-in-law, Sarah Walton. **Above middle** A white, satin-petalled peony. **Left** A glimpse of the orchard beyond.

in the adjacent wall, is the orchard. The atmosphere changes from ornamental to productive with a planting of 15 apple trees, some laden with mistletoe, and a bed holding around 50 to 60 willows. The apples, which were planted in 2003, are heritage varieties from Crown Nurseries in Suffolk. Jane-Ann bought many of them because she was intrigued by names such as 'Peasgood Nonsuch' and 'Pitmaston Pineapple'. "They store well, although



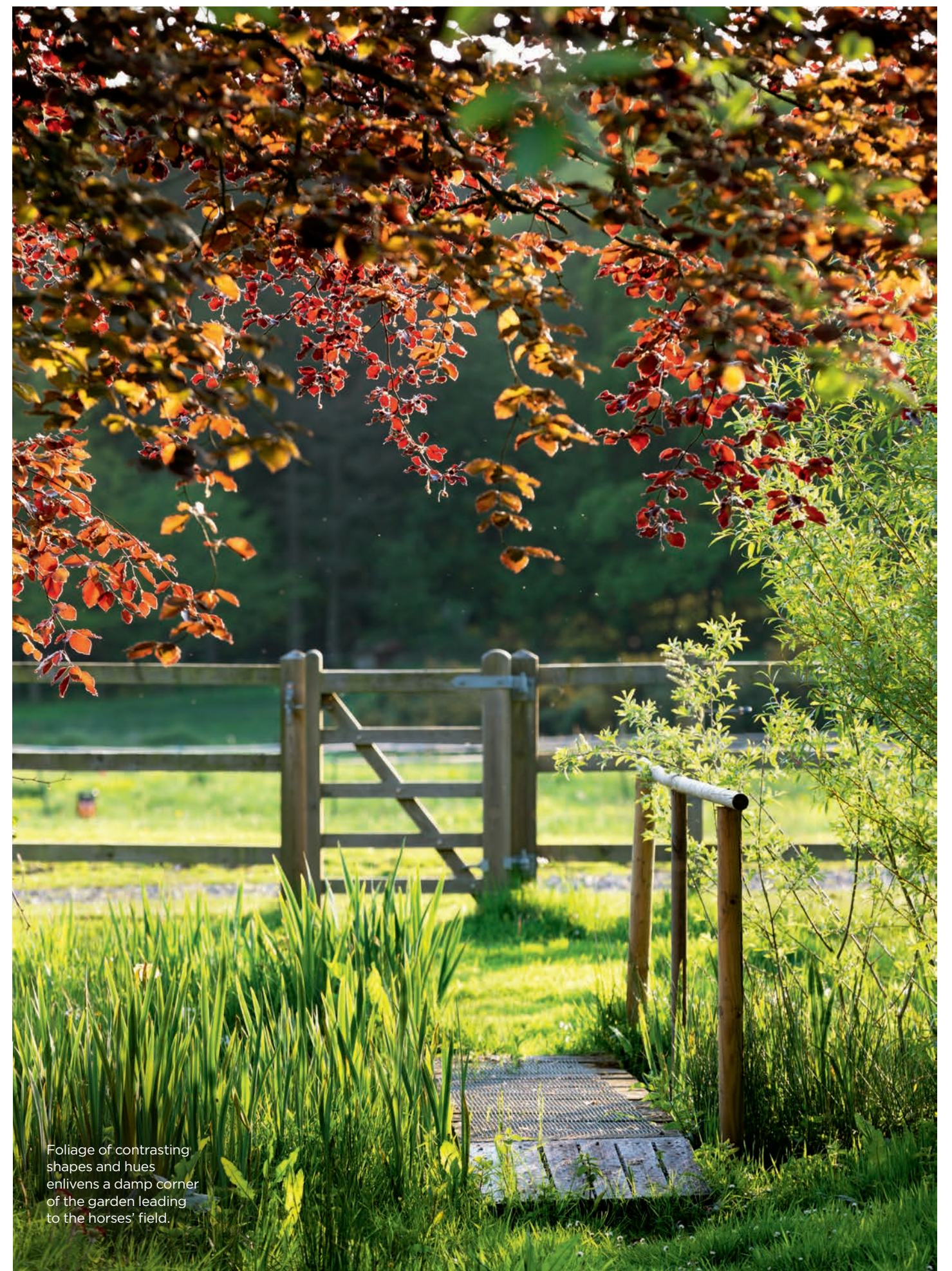
Top Billowing stands of the cottage-garden classic, honesty, are offset by the formality of topiary shapes.

Above Bluebells have naturalised beautifully in the long grass below small-leaved limes.

Right The inhabitants of the duck pond have their own smart house.

the horses eat their fair share of the surplus and fieldfares and redwings enjoy the windfalls in hard weather. And at night, when I'm out walking the dog, I will often see badgers running about with apples in their mouths."

The willows provide stems in a range of colours, from yellow through to dark purple-black, and are coppiced to the ground in January. The harvested whips are then laid out in colour-matched bundles against the orchard walls. Jane-Ann uses them for supports and hurdle-like fencing and also to weave natural ornaments for the garden.



Foliage of contrasting shapes and hues enlivens a damp corner of the garden leading to the horses' field.

Centre STAGE

Displayed in theatres across Old Hall Farmhouse are the garden's diminutive stars: auriculas



'KENTUCKY BLUES'

Luxurious double flowers on a purple-blue cultivar that reaches 15cm tall and falls in the Doubles group.



'CHERRY PICKER'

An Alpine auricula, 'Cherry Picker' can be grown in a well-drained border or rockery, or in pots and troughs.



'LAVENDER LADY'

One of Jane-Ann's favourites, this Border auricula with weather-resistant flowers can be grown out in the garden.



'HELEN RUANE'

A Border auricula with grey and yellow colouring and the mealy coating, or 'farina', that's typical of a Fancy type.



'BLUE YODELER'

Shades of mauve-blue on this Alpine auricula that has a clean white centre around its pin eye.



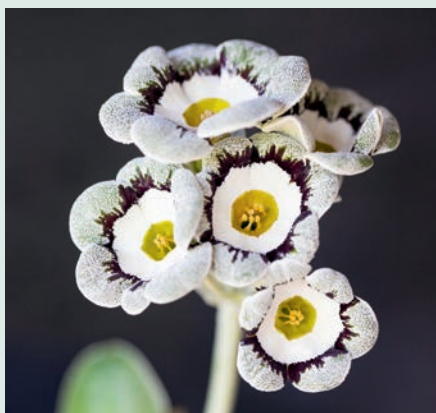
'PIGLET'

A tutu-like effect on this dusky pink double with many layered petals. Its flowers are held on 15cm stems.



'MIPSIE MIRANDA'

A Double auricula with ruffled flowers in creamy pale yellow, reminiscent of auriculas' relative, the primrose.



'BROOKFIELD'

Edged with grey-white and with powdery foliage, this Show auricula needs protection from the elements.



'ARGUS'

A very old Alpine auricula, bred in 1887, with deep maroon petals and a contrasting white centre.

Jane-Ann's guide to auricula growing

- When the auriculas are in flower I display them in colour groups in north-facing theatres or on old ladders and shelves. Auriculas prefer their roots to be cool. If you are thinking of constructing an auricula theatre allow at least 30cm between each shelf to accommodate the stake and flower height.

- I like the look of clay pots for these displays, but I use plastic pots inside the terracotta ones. Clay pots make the plants dry out too quickly and then they become more susceptible to damage from insect pests.

- There is no compost that you can just get straight out of a bag that suits auriculas. You need to increase or provide better drainage. I use a mixture of coarse grit and silver sand.

- I stake all the auriculas with kebab skewers that I paint sage-green, using paint left over from doing the conservatory. Each stick is cut down to the length of the flower stems.

- When watering I use a small can with a little spout and once they have finished flowering I use a bigger can. I check them in winter about every ten days to see if they need water and then just give them a little bit. I water them individually, avoiding wetting the leaves. It is best to water either late in the evening or very early in the morning in the summer months.

- When the plants are not on display they are stored in shaded stands on the north side of the garage. Key in winter is keeping them clean and taking off the leaves as they yellow and die. They need good airflow.

- I always replot in autumn so I know they're not going into the winter with vine weevil in the pots. Auriculas are plagued by many insect pests including red spider mite and thrips.

- Auriculas can be hard to find, but a good way to get going is to join the National Auricula and Primula Society at auriculaandprimula.org.uk



Top Purple flowers prevail in this border, with *Cercis siliquastrum*, alliums and honesty.

Above right An amethyst-flowered *Prostranthera rotundifolia* thrives on a sheltered terrace set next to the house.

Above left Two herons woven from willow whips grown in the orchard.

On the terrace next to the house there are various large shrubs such as mauve-flowered Australian mint bush, *Prostanthera rotundifolia*, *Mandevilla laxa* with scented white flowers and *Coronilla glauca*, with its grey foliage and fragrant yellow flowers. On a table that's sheltered by the doorway are displays of various collections of plants, including seasonal bulbs for additional colour. As is the case throughout the rest of the garden, Jane-Ann takes advantage of every situation for its plant growing opportunities. ■