



Above: Jean and Richard have worked hard on their garden since moving to Norney Wood in 2006

Gorgeous gardens

Opening for the National Gardens Scheme this month, enjoy the developing gardens at Norney Wood in Shackleford – home to a couple who have taken inspiration from the renowned Surrey garden designer of the past, Gertrude Jekyll, but with an added contemporary twist...

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: LEIGH CLAPP

When Richard and Jean Thompson bought Norney Wood in Shackleford in 2006, after searching for a property with a garden to develop, it was important to them that their new home would embrace the 21st century and be environmentally friendly, while also maintaining the original character of the Edwardian house and landscape.

Taking inspiration from the strong architectural lines of the 1903 house, and a backdrop of mature trees, they wanted

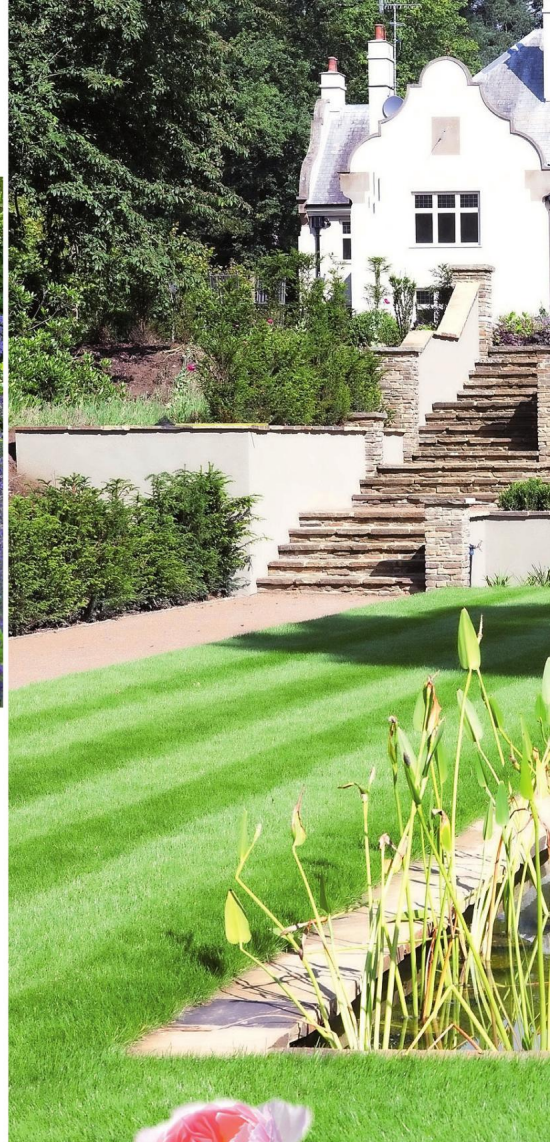
the garden itself to echo the linear shapes on an appropriate scale, blending period and modern features.

Both keen gardeners themselves, Richard's focus is on the hard landscaping while Jean enjoys the planting elements – and to help them achieve the result they wanted, they called in well-respected designers Ian Smith and Debbie Roberts of Acres Wild, known for their integrated, timeless designs.

"The brief we gave them was to incorporate classic Gertrude Jekyll-style elements with a contemporary twist,"

says Richard. "The renowned garden designer was a major influence in British gardens during the period of our house. She lived in Guildford and then latterly at Munstead Wood near Godalming and she is the inspiration for the garden at Norney Wood."

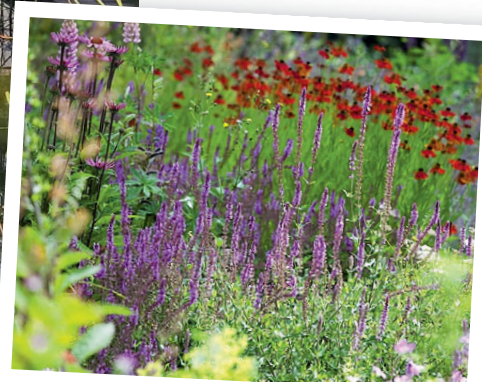
Landscaper Andy Hill, assisted by Richard Day, Dave Armour and Steve Hill, took on the project to turn Acres Wild's two-dimensional plan into the developing garden visitors see today. "And despite what they say, with very few changes from us," smiles Richard.



Above: Blooms of Rosa 'Gentle Hermione'



Left: The Gertrude Jekyll inspired garden is in keeping with the Edwardian house
Above: Symmetrical formality
Below: Colourful combinations break up the symmetrical lines



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The gardens are interlinked on descending levels with a strong, symmetrical structure – from a formal lawn terrace garden, along straight paths edged in lavender and nepeta, through avenues of pleached limes and on to a garden house and, most strikingly, a geometric pond and rill in the lower formal area. Augmenting the materials is a plentiful supply of ironstone that has been used in flooring, seating, the backdrop to the water feature and path edging.

“Ironstone was a great favourite of Gertrude Jekyll who used it to create intricate patterns to soften the hard landscaping,” says Richard. “We have even recreated parts of Jekyll’s ironstone designs in the floor of the covered seating area, which we call the ‘Thunder House’, as she liked to sit outside under cover to enjoy the full effect of thunderstorms.”

Maturing herbaceous borders and

edging plants, only in their third year, are gradually softening the precise angles of the hard landscaping. Over 250 roses have been planted, including appropriately Rosa ‘Gertrude Jekyll’ in the front garden. Unifying the planting is the palette of harmonious tones of soft mauves, purples and gentle pinks, with an occasional splash of brighter colours. “Some plants have romped away, while others are taking their time to get a foothold in our very sandy soil,” adds Jean.

New plans are constantly evolving – the latest include a natural pond, a kitchen garden and a wildflower meadow – and it is clear that Richard and Jean are thoroughly enjoying the whole process.

“I think it is such a pleasure walking through the garden and experiencing the different feelings of each part,” says Jean. “There’s the lovely formality of the top garden, and then to peep through and the

surprise of the tranquillity pond, and then wander off to the woodland beyond where it feels like you are in a light glade.”

Last year was the first time Jean and Richard opened the garden to the public through the National Gardens Scheme, with over 1,000 visitors on the day. “We had so many more than we expected!” says Richard. “The weather was perfect, it was very busy and people made lovely comments that they thought the garden looked older than it actually is. Having parts of the garden still under development hopefully adds interest, and we are looking forward to welcoming visitors again.” ■

NEED TO KNOW

Norney Wood, Shackleford GU8 6AY
 Open on Sunday July 8 (11am-5pm)
 For more details, see ngs.org.uk