

Just ten years old but inspired by the work of Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens, Norney Wood's garden looks older than its years.

FINE ARTS

Norney Wood, Jean and Richard Thompson's Arts & Crafts garden in the Surrey Hills, takes inspiration from plantswoman Gertrude Jekyll and her romantic style of planting

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Surrounded by mature woodland deep in the Surrey hills, the house and gardens at Norney Wood is enveloped in a tangle of leafy canopies. The shady driveway opens up to reveal an Edwardian house fringed with elegant topiary, hydrangeas and Japanese maple – a prelude to the hidden treasures that lie beyond.

The owners, Jean and Richard Thompson, bought the 20-acre property in 2006 with the idea of transforming the grounds into a garden that could be enjoyed both as a private space and an oasis for the local community to visit and share in their love of plants and nature. The task was not for the faint-hearted, however, since both house and garden needed extensive work. "There wasn't a single flowering plant when we arrived," explains Jean. "Our first call was to garden designers Acres Wild, who had designed the small, third-of-an-acre garden at our previous house and who we knew would help us create the garden we envisaged." The couple worked with them to plan a series of interconnected gardens that transition into the natural woodland while reflecting the heritage of the Edwardian house, with contemporary elements introducing a modern twist.

The blank canvas offered opportunities as well as challenges. The Thompsons wanted a low-emissions home, which they achieved by installing 2.4 kilometres of underground energy-collecting pipework, before the new garden was created. This system now provides all the heating and hot water for the house. "The garden looked like a bomb site while the pipes were being installed, but the end result was definitely worth it," says Richard. "We also took this opportunity to remove the chestnut trees that were too close to the house, along with some tall larches, as well as fencing and rabbit-proofing the entire garden. An irrigation system for the garden and pond was installed, too – it



Clockwise from above
An apt choice given the inspiration she has provided, *Rosa* 'Gertrude Jekyll' sits ahead of the nepeta lined path; Jean and Richard Thompson; the wild pond features flag and Siberian irises, gunnera and candelabra primula; an elegant raceme of perfumed *Syringa pubescens*.



captures rainwater from the house roofs in two large underground tanks and when these run dry, water is pumped up from an 80-metre-deep borehole.”

Jean's love of English country garden style and the work of plantswoman Gertrude Jekyll and architect Edwin Lutyens was what inspired her garden plans. Elements described in Jekyll's 1918 book, *Garden Ornament*, such as the canal, garden house, and loggias, are in evidence at Norney Wood, offering a rich source of ideas for visitors. “We also asked Acres Wild to create beautiful views from the main rooms of the house – most are double or triple aspect, so we had to get the sight lines right,” adds Jean. She says she's indebted to her late mother Anita, who not only instilled in her a passion for gardening, but also put hundreds of plants in the ground at Norney Wood, as well as helping to maintain the gardens.

A journey through the gardens begins in the courtyard garden to the west. Edged with

rhododendrons and featuring a small lily pool, it links the front and back gardens. From here, the Shade Walk and Pleached Lime Walk stretch before you, the former taking the visitor along a gravel path lined with leafy frills of *Hosta* 'Francee' and *Geranium x oxonianum*, together with clipped box. The Pleached Lime Walk, by contrast, offers a carpet of lawn underfoot, drawing you through trees on stilts, their canopies clipped at shoulder height into a block of foliage, with a froth of geraniums below.

A screen of blowsy pink *Rosa* 'Gentle Hermione' and 'Tea Clipper' separates the Pleached Lime Walk from the main event at the back of the house. Walking along the terrace, made from reclaimed stone and Bargate setts, light fills the garden, as shady, tree-lined spaces give way to an expansive view over a large lawn, flanked by roses, lavender and clouds of nepeta. A hedge and the Thunder House punctuate the end of this stunning space.

The Thunder House is a copy of a structure of the same name designed by Lutyens at Jekyll's home at Munstead Wood in Surrey, just a few miles from Norney Wood. It divides the upper and lower gardens here and offers a peek through into the Tranquility Garden below. Inside, Jean and Richard pay homage to Jekyll and the local geology with a floor motif inspired by a design in the Thunder House at Munstead Wood. “The green sand in this area dates back to the early Cretaceous period. It's an accumulation of marine deposits and, over time, it formed a black stone called 'ironstone' which Jekyll used in many of her paving and wall designs. Every shovelful of our soil brings up ironstone and, just as Gertrude did, we've laid it on its edge to create patterns through the garden,” says Richard.

Descending the wide steps from the Terrace Garden, birdsong is joined by the sound of water as it races over a blade waterfall into a reflective canal. Aptly named the Tranquility Garden, the still water in this area has a meditative effect, its glassy surface occasionally broken by a vibrant dragonfly. Japanese water iris (*Iris laevigata*), pontederia and other



Above In 2006 when the Thompsons moved in, the Edwardian house needed extensive work, while the garden was a completely blank canvas.

Pastel PALETTE

Choosing flowers in soft hues helps conjure an Edwardian Arts & Crafts atmosphere



IRIS 'VOLTIGEUR'

A 1930s variety introduced by Ferdinand Cayeux, this iris has rosy purple standards and deep maroon falls.



IRIS 'JANE PHILLIPS'

Ever popular for its scented, baby blue-lilac blooms, this bearded iris, with greyish foliage, is easy to find.



GERANIUM 'ROZANNE'

Let this lax, hardy geranium thread its way through borders to cover the ground.



ROSA 'GENTLE HERMIONE'

Myrrh scented flowers on a David Austin-bred shrub rose with arching stems.



ROSA 'GERTRUDE JEKYLL'

This absolute classic with its magenta-pink flowers is often one of the earliest to bloom.



ZANTEDESCHIA 'CROWBOROUGH'

Spathe of pure white and arrow-shaped leaves on this moisture-loving perennial.



aquatic marginals soften the edges of the canal, while triffid metal sculptures – bought from Fire and Iron gallery – add a contemporary note. A simple timber-framed loggia meanwhile, offers a resting place to contemplate the peaceful scene.

An opening in the hedge takes you through to the Herbaceous Walk, packed with perennials and small shrubs jostling for attention. Shade-loving astrantias and hostas shelter beneath flamboyant peonies and towering giant scabious (*Cephalaria gigantea*) before the mood changes, as the path leads into woodland.

Tucked away at the bottom of the garden is yet another surprise. The couple have cleared a space among the trees for a School Garden, used by pupils of St Mary's, the local infants school. The children go orienteering in the woods and a treehouse built around a magnificent oak tree provides a magical outdoor classroom, while the garden itself offers an area for them to grow their own food. The children also venture down to the pond to discover the hidden secrets of the aquatic world. One of the last areas to be completed, Jean and Richard love this wildlife sanctuary, and spend summer evenings here relaxing on the deck, watching the birds and insects visit the water and nectar-rich wildflowers.

Visitors can then take the route back up towards the house, which brings them into the East Loggia garden and courtyard. Looking out over the tennis court, which is cleverly masked from the house by a level change and a tall hedge, the planting in this area contrasts with the soft pastel colours found elsewhere in the garden. "We wanted a change of pace at this point,

Above Water recurs as a feature throughout the gardens, either splashing between ponds or offering calm tranquility.



Left Metal sculptures add a contemporary note to the Arts & Crafts style buildings in the Tranquility Garden.

Below Deep pink, starry flowers smother pretty shrub *Deutzia x hybrida* 'Strawberry Fields'.

with more tropical-style planting and fiery colours,” says Jean. Arranged around a circular bed, sizzling orange-red *Hemerocallis* ‘Chicago Fire’, spiky phormiums, arum lilies (*Zantedeschia aethiopica* ‘Crowborough’) and a chusan palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) lend an exotic look to this hidden space.

The penultimate stop on the tour takes you up a flight of steps bordered by *Geranium* ‘Rozanne’ and balls of hebe to the new courtyard, created in 2016 when the couple had an extension built and added a timber-framed loggia for outdoor entertaining. Jekyll and Lutyens were leading lights in the Arts & Crafts movement of the early 20th century, which revered traditional craftsmanship, and the Thompsons’ stylish loggia, with a roof hand-carved by Andy Hibberd featuring an inscription of Jekyll’s motto “The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies”, revives these skills for their 21st-century design. In June, the beds surrounding the loggia are a jewel box of colour, with Jean’s favourite bearded irises taking centre stage.

There is just one more area to see before visitors leave and that is the cutting garden to the east. Here, Jean grows dahlias in regimental rows, like crops, to provide flowers for the house and her friends. She leaves the dahlias in situ over winter, where the tubers are kept snug beneath a deep mulch.

Now in its tenth year, Jean says the garden has settled into the landscape and the couple open it to the public in June, when the roses are at their best. Although the Thompsons have some help in maintaining it with their gardener, Christian, they enjoy getting their hands dirty, and the garden is very much a labour of love. ■

Norney Wood, Shackleford, Surrey GU8 6AY.
Opens for the National Garden Scheme and the local school on 7 June 2020 from 10.30am to 5pm.
Tel: 01483 425633; norneywood.co.uk



Good HOUSEKEEPING

Gardening tips from Jean Thompson on keeping roses, water features and borders looking smart

To prevent aphids attacking roses and dahlias without using chemicals, check plants every day or two and, if you aren’t too squeamish, run your fingers over the stems (you could wear rubber gloves) to squash them.

Blanket weed in the formal ponds can be unsightly. The best treatment we have found is ‘Clover Leaf Blanket Answer’

(blanketanswer.com) which is completely safe for plants and wildlife. It works by turning the water milky, thereby reducing the light level in the pond, which kills the blanket weed. The water clears and the dead blanket weed sinks to the bottom.

Our mantra for weeds is ‘weed before they seed’ – dig their roots out and hoe annuals regularly.