

# Garden OF THE WEEK



**Gardener** Kym and Olivier, with part-time gardener, Simon

**Location** Near Sevenoaks, in Kent

**Size** A formal garden of two acres, within a five-acre site

**Aspect** A gentle east-facing slope

**Soil** Mixed but largely acid and sandy

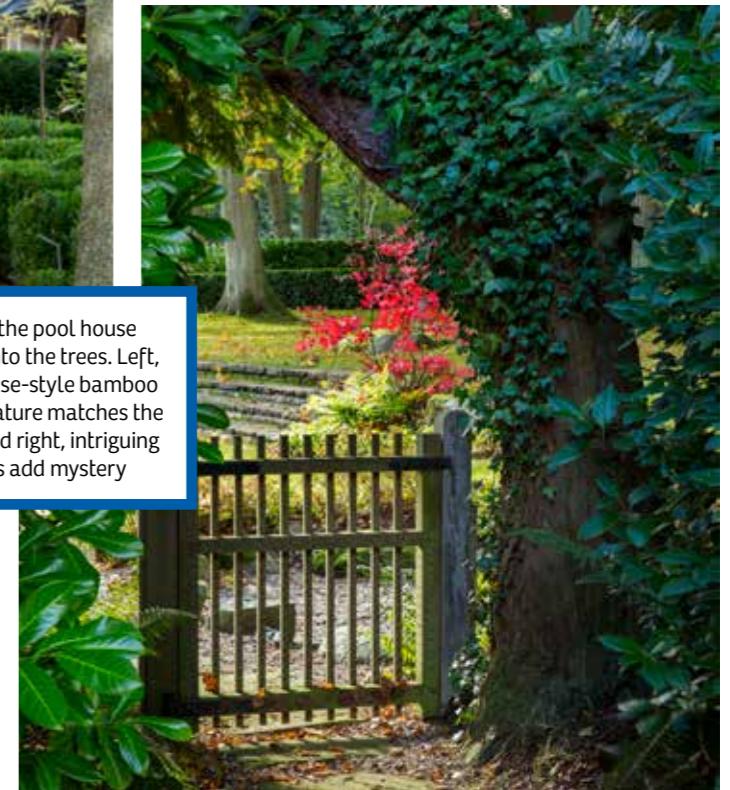
**Been in garden:** 17 years



The orderly design was created taking into account the existing mature trees, including a mighty horse chestnut and Wellingtonia. Below left, *Rhus typhina* has startling autumn colour



Top left, the pool house blends into the trees. Left, a Japanese-style bamboo water feature matches the acers, and right, intriguing gateways add mystery



Reduced in height, the hedges no longer dominate and it's possible to see right through the garden to the pool house at the top of the slope. Below, lavender-filled box beds match the formality of the pleaching behind

# A meeting of cultures

**This stunning garden may be in Kent but it draws inspiration from all around the world**

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**W**hen people are considering their living space, they rarely view the house and the garden as a single, flowing, intercommunicating unit, but when Kym and Olivier



moved to their new home, that's exactly what they did. The house was pleasant but not perfect; the kitchen was north facing, but they wanted the sun and a view. The garden, meanwhile, had lots of lovely mature trees, but there was an odd, cottagey, inner-garden space surrounded by tall hedges that didn't somehow work.

"We didn't necessarily feel that there was a great expanse of garden," says Kym. "There was a lot of space but it felt small, and although we like perennials, that's very different to an English cottage garden." So, when Olivier spotted Horsham-based garden designers Acres Wild in a magazine in 2005, they were invited round for a consultation.

"It was incredible. What Ian and Debbie brought to the table was what we couldn't see. They sat in the garden and walked around, then they came back with an idea - they just got it," enthuses Kym. "The new design gave us a sense of what we had. It pushed the hedge back and reduced its height considerably so we can now see to the end of the

garden. It's completely changed the way we use the space." The soil is light, sandy and acid, while mature trees cast a lot of shade. As a result, Ian and his partner, Debbie Roberts, needed to work with a natural series of mossy corners and dappled glades and marry it with Kym and Olivier's distinct and striking horticultural influences.

"When I was 21 I went to Japan on business and a friend invited me to Kyoto for the weekend. I was utterly mesmerised by the gardens there. I knew nothing about gardening but I was fascinated; there was so much texture and depth of aspect using just shades of green," remembers Kym. "It blew me away. I'd grown up in the UK where the gardens are all about flowers and colour - it was like nothing I'd ever seen before!"

In contrast, Olivier comes from Belgium, where the gardening tradition incorporates a lot of

structure. On his wish list, therefore, was a formal garden and a rose garden, inspired by the time the family had spent in Provence.

In the end, the garden transformation was phased over three years, but the fact that the architect and the garden designers were aware of each other's plans from the outset has worked to achieve the desired seamless result.

Moved to the new extension, the

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## Kym and Olivier's four favourite plants



### 'Iceberg' roses

**Beautiful, pure white, open flowers, perfect for a shrub or rose border, and great for pollinators.**



### Japanese acers

**These lovely, delicate, compact but hardy trees grow well in pots and like sheltered, shady spots.**



### Azaleas

**Evergreen shrubs in a huge range of colours that like shady or woodland gardens. Great in pots.**



### Hydrangea 'Annabelle'

**Large, spectacular white balls as flowers, up to 30cm across. Moist, well-drained soil in sun or part shade.**

PHOTOS: ALAMY/SHUTTERSTOCK



Japanese-style formality from acers, artefacts and cloud-pruned trees meets autumnal English naturalism

kitchen now has a leafy view that takes in an ancient magnolia tree and a fine *Daviddia involucrata*, while Kym's study also looks out onto a changing tapestry of green and gold.

The box hedging near the house recalls France, as does an avenue of pleached limes. A pool reflects the sky and Lutyens-style benches offer rest and repose. Changes in height are managed by elegant steps, creating clean, architectural lines in the landscape. The dappled shade only enhances the restrained and calming Japanese garden, filled with moss, evergreens and more acers. Colour is used sparingly here, but when it does appear, it is intense.

"The garden has been designed to be as un-labour-intensive as possible, and we wanted the rustic feeling of the house to extend outwards," says Kym. "The connection works, so you get the feeling of sitting in the garden even though you're sitting in the house. The light is just lovely; there are sweet spots in the day when it's just right."

The space has become sophisticated, and care has been taken to provide both structure, geometry and framing, along with a sense of the natural and organic. Yet it's entirely habitable, with overflow opportunities for outside dining and places for the children to play.

"It lends itself to walking around in, with places you can pause, sit and contemplate and then move on," says Kym.

And though she doesn't consider herself an expert gardener, there's a growing sense of appreciation of the value of nature and the enchanting way that the light changes hour by hour and day by day.

"Each area has a different feel and I just wish I had more time to appreciate it," adds Kym. "There are lots of benches and there's one I particularly like, which is made out of a fallen tree. It catches the last rays of the sun and you can retreat there with a glass of wine and just look."

## Kym's tips

**1** Spending time in the garden is something that really appeals. Being in it, walking around at different times of day and in different lights; it's so wonderful to sit and contemplate the changing view.

**2** Keep experimenting with new things. When Simon started gardening here, he started using the compost bins that our designer Ian Smith at Acres Wild had specified, but that the previous gardener hadn't bothered with. We've been using the results to feed the soil around the roses and it's made a huge difference to how healthy they are.

**3** We try and do as much on site as possible as that's the environmentally-friendly way – not bringing things in and not taking them away. We have lots of trees and we collect the leaves and put them under the hedges as a mulch. It's great for encouraging wildlife.