



## Medieval Masterpiece

Historic garden specialist Marian Boswall has transformed the garden around a Grade II\* listed home

WORDS **VERONICA PEERLESS**  
PHOTOGRAPHS **MARIANNE MAJERUS**

**M**any old houses have a fascinating history but not all can lay claim to standing on a site that has been visited by royalty. The 15th-century Manor House in Hampshire, home to Melanie Shaw, her husband and three children in their late teens and early twenties, is Grade II\* listed. The site is described as being of archaeological interest in dating back to 1292 and in having been visited by King Edward I and other royalty. “It’s hidden away behind a church but you can imagine the king stopping off here – it was a really important place back in the day,” explains landscape architect Marian Boswall (above). Marian specialises in historic gardens and helped bring the Hampshire garden back to its former glory.

When Marian first visited, there wasn’t much garden to speak of, apart from some sloping lawns, a line of mature lime trees, an ancient walnut and a swimming pool. “It was tired and dark around the back, and undeveloped at the front,” she explains. “There were some tricky levels and it was all quite higgledy-piggledy.” Melanie wanted, quite simply, a beautiful garden. She is very interested in gardening, although she jokes that “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing”, but beyond a few stipulations

about plants – she is not keen on yellow flowers, or grasses – she was happy to leave Marian to it. “I knew that Marian is very good at the bigger picture, seeing beyond the current garden to what it could look like in the future. I put my trust in her.”

Marian set about enhancing the garden and grounds to complement the house and reflect its history. Due to the Grade II\* status of the house, she liaised with English Heritage about the changes she wanted to make. “If a house is Grade I listed, you can’t change the plants. If it’s Grade II\* listed, the setting of the house is considered to be very important,” she explains. “English Heritage doesn’t get involved in planting, but can get involved in the layout, especially when you’re changing levels or digging – it’s digging that they really mind about.” Old maps showed that the gardens had previously continued to the east, so Marian proposed reclaiming some of the orchard to extend the garden in proportion to the house. She also wanted to enlarge the courtyard at the side of the house, used by the family for access, and to move the parking area further away. “We were able to convince English Heritage and the council planners that the changes were right for the house,” says Marian.

A superb double border now provides the impact when approaching the house, with two hornbeam sentinels set in gravel on either side of the Arts and Crafts-style porch by way of welcome. The mixed planting, which Marian describes as “classic English meets prairie”, is designed to look good from April to

**Right** Perennials create a billowing romantic feel without obscuring views across the lawns.  
**Below** Hornbeam sentinels flank the Arts and Crafts-style porch.



## FACT FILE

- **Garden design** by Marian Boswall. Tel: 020 7305 7153; marianboswall.com
- **Built** by Garden Link. Tel: 01737 243224; gardenlink.co.uk
- **Wild flower border** turf from Wildflower Turf. Tel: 01256 771222; wildflowerturf.co.uk
- **Lighting** by Owl Lighting. Tel: 01962 738689; owl-lighting.co.uk
- **Edging** by Everedge. Tel: 01453 731717; everedge.co.uk



October. “It’s romantic and billowy, to really get the essence of the old English garden.” Grasses are key, and there are some yellow plants but Melanie is more than happy with them: “They do work,” she admits.

The courtyard to the west side of the house was transformed from a cramped, slippery and uneven spot into a spacious family entrance, relaid with a new brick and flint design. “We think the area used to be a piggery, as it has a fig tree, which is very typical,” says Marian. “We dug it up and replanted it.” The north-facing terrace at the back of the house was turned into a parterre with shade-loving planting. The lawn beyond it was drained and flattened so the family could use it year round. It is surrounded by meadow planting – not unlike a medieval flowery mead. The pool area was particularly tricky to access and was not very inviting, with blocks of austere grey stone and no plants. So Marian changed the levels, added some Lutyens-style steps flanked by soft planting and created a secluded area for dining in the sun.



Melanie was keen to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers, so Marian created a kitchen garden on a south-facing slope to the west of the house, complete with raised beds. It is surrounded by a stilted hornbeam hedge – a nod to a medieval church cloister – which is underplanted with hydrangeas. A hazel walk along the north boundary was added and the orchard embellished with new fruit trees.

The garden is now perfectly tailored to the family’s needs. Melanie adores it. “It’s just a massive improvement – I can’t think now what it was like before,” she says. “It’s wonderful when you can bring a garden back to life and reference how it used to be,” adds Marian. “It’s a really pretty house and before the garden felt a little untended. Now the garden sets the house properly in its setting. We’ve given it back its status – as well as its beauty.”

**Above** A new design in brick and flint in the courtyard on the west side of the house.  
**Left** Shade-tolerant planting in the new parterre to the north.

## Design Details

### Double borders

The densely planted double border along the front of the house has a “classic English meets prairie” look. “We used 9cm or one-litre pots so the plants established quickly,” says Marian. Key plants include roses, such as ‘St Swithun’, ‘Madame Alfred Carrière’, ‘The Pilgrim’ and ‘Gertrude Jekyll’; peonies including *P. lactiflora* ‘Sarah Bernhardt’ and ‘Karl Rosenfield’; and grasses including *Stipa tenuissima* and *Molinia* ‘Transparent’. Perennials that provide a succession of colour from summer to autumn include *Geranium* ‘Mrs Kendall Clark’, *Veronicastrum virginicum* ‘Fascination’, *Nepeta racemosa* ‘Walker’s Low’, *Helenium* ‘Moerheim Beauty’ and *Anemone hupehensis* ‘September Charm’. Standard yews and obelisks for sweet peas punctuate the borders and give height.

### Parterre

The parterre uses plants that thrive in shade. It kicks off in spring with *Helleborus argutifolius*, *Helleborus orientalis*, *Epimedium x rubrum*, and *Pulmonaria* ‘Sissinghurst White’, plus ‘Queen of Night’ tulips, camassias and *Allium cristophii*. Summer sees *Anthriscus sylvestris* ‘Ravenswing’, *Geranium* ‘Mrs Kendall Clark’, *Aconitum* ‘Ivoryine’ and *Astrantia* ‘Star of Billion’. “For scent we used *Phlox* ‘Clouds of Perfume’, which spills over the edge very nicely,” says Marian. Evergreen ground cover comes from *Asarum europaeum* and *Hakonechloa macra*, while *Ilex crenata* ‘Dark Green’ provides structure. The latter was used as an alternative to box: “We wanted to avoid the risk of box blight.”



### Wild flowers

The wild flower bank around the lawn was created using wild flower border turf. It is a mix of annuals and perennials, including bladder campion, cowslip, ragged robin, musk mallow, wild carrot, ox-eye daisy and yarrow. “If you seed a bank, the seeds tend to wash away in heavy rain,” explains Marian. “It established very well and has already attracted some wonderful wildlife – it is near chalk downland so there are some unusual butterflies in the area.” Another large area of the garden, beyond the tennis court, has very poor soil, so was seeded with wild flowers that thrive in those conditions. Both meadows are strimmed in September, once all the seed heads have dropped their seeds; the cut grass and stems are left lying for three days and then raked off.

### Hard landscaping

Wherever possible, local or reclaimed materials were used to complement the house and broader setting. The driveway and main entrance path is Breedon gravel, edged with brick for a neat look; opposite the front porch there is a semi-circular entrance threshold. Wide gravel paths lead the way around the garden, allowing water to permeate the water table. The steps leading up to the swimming pool are in the Lutyens style, created with York stone and reclaimed brick. The new wall near the family entrance is reclaimed brick of the same colour, size and bond as the house. Traditionally, the builder’s initials are carved in the wall.

### Garden lighting

In the evenings, the garden is lit with low-voltage LEDs by Hunza. The trees are uplit, with twig lighting in the herbaceous borders and subtle spot lighting. “It’s very discreet. You never want to notice the lighting,” says Marian. ■



**Top** Wild flower banks around the lawn were created using turf.

**Above** Materials sympathetic to the vernacular were used where possible.

**Left** Shade-tolerant planting in the north-facing parterre includes *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*.