

Reighton Wood garden features clipped evergreens, ornamental grasses and structural elements including oak pergolas and pleached trees, all of which look magical with a dusting of frost

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PHOTOGRAPHS: Jason Ingram

WINTER WONDER

Marian Boswall MSGD designed this modern country garden with structure and interest for the colder months



This allée of *Malus x robusta* 'Red Sentinel' is underplanted with *Spiraea* 'Arguta' and has a focal point of an Alison Crowther bench, which offers views out over the valley



Marian Boswall
MSGD

Marian Boswall MSGD read French and Italian at Oxford before studying for a Masters in Landscape Architecture. She taught Historic Garden Conservation at Greenwich University and is gardens advisor to a number of important gardens, estates and trusts, and is a Board Director of BALI. She established her design practice in 2004. www.marianboswall.com

When designing a garden, and pitching a proposal to clients, it is tempting to focus on its projected high summer glory. But in a climate where, most years, summer makes a brief and not so deep impression, a well-designed garden gives far greater value if it works hard through the winter months too.

Marian Boswall MSGD's design for Robyn Reeves and her husband Mark at Reighton Wood garden in Kent – shortlisted for the SGD Awards 2019 – certainly doesn't stint on abundance, flower impact and lounging opportunities in summer. Underpinning all that lushness, however, is a rigorously thought-through framework, which really emerges when deciduous trees and shrubs are bare and flower colour has faded to sepia.

Originally, Boswall explains, the circa two-acre garden was "a completely blank canvas, with heavy Gault clay soil. It had great potential, though, being secluded at the end of its narrow lane, with wonderful views of the woodland to the north, and out onto rolling farmland to the east. But the house faced away from the countryside, with the biggest views to the lane-side hedge, and the garden felt exposed.

Missing link

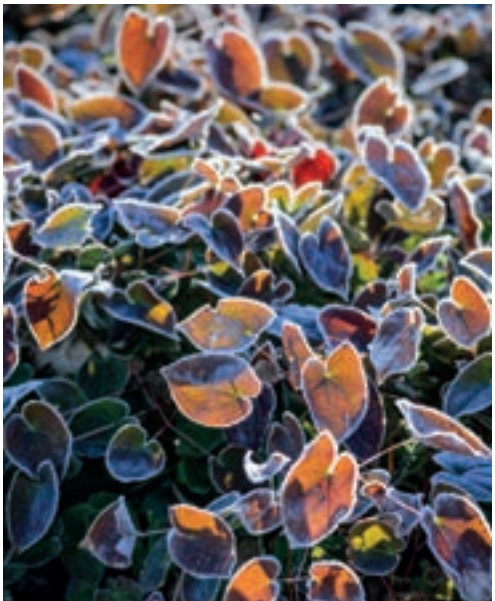
"Robyn and Mark wanted to bring the elements of the house and garden together," she explains, "and to link the garden with the woodland and countryside. It was really important to make the most of the views from the house, improve the drainage, plant for pollinators and grow vegetables. We wanted to provide a setting to ground the house in the

landscape, as it felt awkward and as though it had been dropped from on high without a link to the earth."

The designer worked alongside architect Derek Rankin, who was remodelling the property and adding a timber-clad extension to turn the house outwards, towards the valley. To capture the spirit of the place, Boswall spent about five days on site, walking the further reaches of the land and sketching to capture impressions and atmosphere. This is a key part of her process; a tutor comes to her studio once a month to give lessons to Boswall and her colleagues, so they can sketch confidently to record their ideas and communicate them to clients.

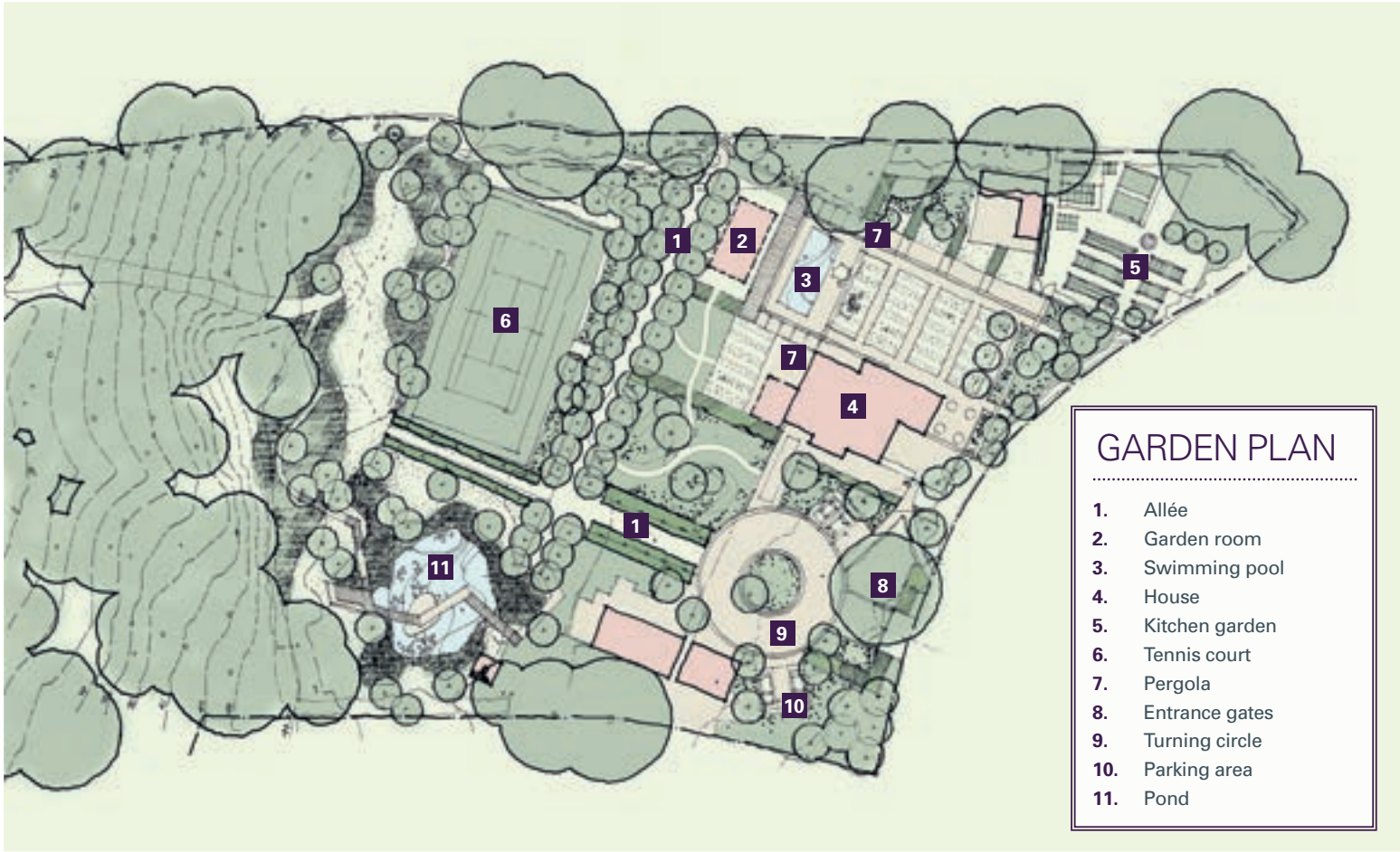
Her design sets the remodelled house entrance in deep planting beds. Paths from here lead in different directions: outwards through an allée to the pond with its boardwalk edging, or around the back of the house to a calm, open space with a swimming pool, pergola and garden room, and beyond to a separate kitchen garden. Oak is the signature timber, including benches by Alison Crowther, with local clay pavements and Breedon gravel at ground level.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Domes of *Thuja occidentalis* 'Danica', an evergreen conifer and one of the best dwarf globe forms available, with the late winter blooms of *Helleborus foetidus*; herbaceous perennials such as sedums are left up overwinter; *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae*, a woodland plant that is also happy in the sun, and the shrub *Viburnum cinnamomifolium*, a strong evergreen structural plant; hornbeam has been pleached into cuboids as well as classic flat rectangles; *Epimedium x rubrum*, a very useful evergreen groundcover; these multi-stem *Prunus serrula* have vibrant winter bark; *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* is an excellent structural plant that stays green all winter; mature trees including *Quercus robur* surround the property



The elements that give the garden winter impact are the two axial allées, which divide up the garden and send the eye out to the surrounding woods and fieldscape. One is lined with a geometric run of pleached *Carpinus betulus*, which shift from cuboid to rectangular. Counterpoints to this formality come in the underplanting, which includes the arching stems of *Philadelphus* 'Belle Étoile' for the lollipops and the loose, rounded silhouettes of *Hydrangea quercifolia* for the pleached trees. The second allée transects the first, with a run of slender-stemmed, open-structured *Malus x robusta* 'Red Sentinel' underplanted with *Spiraea* 'Arguta'. In winter, its stems line the path with frosted froth.

More year-round interest can be found to one side of the front door, where, inspired by Boswall's visit to a postmodernism exhibition, *Taxus* rectangles and *Buxus* cubes underpin a sea of grassy herbaceous planting. In summer, the topiary is almost engulfed by a sea of flower and foliage, but in winter, the evergreen forms are the most powerful elements of the bed, their solidity intensified by the stems and seedheads of grasses, *Sedum* and umbellifers.

Threaded through the other beds to the front and side of the house are runs of *Thuja occidentalis* 'Danica' – a "complete hunch" on Boswall's part, which has turned out to be hugely successful, knitting into ribbons and drifts of low, loose, slightly spiralling domes. These are echoed across a path by more clipped *Taxus*, similar in size and shape, but deeper in colour and denser in texture. The winter skeletons of herbaceous plants and grasses provide a subtler second layer to these beds and contrast airiness and movement with the solidity of the evergreens.

A vital function of the ornamental grasses and herbaceous seedheads in winter is to catch the light. *Pennisetum* and *Miscanthus* are positioned so they are illuminated by low winter sun through a break in the perimeter trees. Boswall mounded some of the planting beds at the front and side of the house, partly to conceal details of the wider garden so that it is revealed gradually as the visitor arrives and then walks through the site, and also to lift up those winter stems and seedheads to catch the light.

Winter perfume

Another important element, winter scent, is cleverly localised in the form of a cluster of *Mahonia*, planted at head height on an embankment around the car parking area, so in cold months the flower perfume is captured ready to be appreciated when arriving and leaving.

As the garden matures, Boswall visits regularly to review progress with the owner. The studio offers a head gardener mentoring service, and Boswall's colleague Caroline Jackson works alongside Robyn and her gardener once a month. This enables continuing review of areas like the pond, whose lining had to be rethought, and the woodland borders, which are planted for the shade that will eventually be cast by the canopy, but where the groundcover plants had to be carefully nurtured through the recent hot summer. The fact that no plants were lost this summer, or in the long, cold, wet winter that preceded it, is testament to the quality of the site preparation, plant choices and maintenance. ○

TOP RIGHT The oak pergola by the house runs past the swimming pool to the garden room, which looks out on beds of grasses such as *Miscanthus* and *Pennisetum* **RIGHT** A boardwalk runs down to and across the pond, where a bench offers the perfect wildlife watching spot and views of the pleached hornbeam allée



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