

BLENDING IN

Using her knowledge of the local vernacular, designer Marian Boswall has created a garden for Reighton Wood that integrates beautifully with its surroundings

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IN BRIEF

Name Reighton Wood.
What A contemporary house and garden that connects with and responds to the surrounding landscape.
Where Tenterden, Kent.
Size Four acres.
Soil Heavy clay, improved with organic matter.
Climate Exposed on a hill but sheltered from the prevailing southwesterlies by woodland. As garden develops it is creating more microclimates.
Hardiness zone USDA 8.

At the front of the house, designer Marian Boswall has chosen a bold mix of plants that offer a succession of colour and texture throughout the year. In late summer the rich oranges of *Crocosmia* x *crocosmiiflora* 'Emily McKenzie' and *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty', and tall, yellow *Kniphofia* 'Bees' Lemon' come to the fore.

Tucked away behind high hawthorn hedges in a verdant, curvaceous valley is Reighton Wood, home of Robyn and Mark Reeves and their three children. Surrounded by fields of cows lazily grazing, the flower-studded garden sits on the edge of the market town of Tenterden in the Weald of Kent. The narrow lanes hedged with sweet briar and fragrant honeysuckle that thread through the lush countryside reveal nothing of the hotbed of gardening quietly taking place here.

“Understanding the setting is important,” says landscape architect Marian Boswall, whose practice MBLA is only a few miles away from Reighton Wood. She and Robyn first met when Robyn enrolled on one of Marian’s design courses, and this intimate garden stuffed to the gunnels with trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs is the result of the friendship between the two women. “Robyn is a botanist and wanted a garden with episodes, areas, movement and abundant planting for pollinators and people,” says Marian. “She is very artistic and intuitive, so we had the most lovely time discussing ideas for the garden, and she has embraced every suggestion and really made the garden her own.”

For Robyn and Mark the garden is all about the wonderful setting, something Marian felt it needed to embrace more fully. “The house faced away from the countryside, with the biggest views to the lane-side hedge,” she says. “We worked with the architect Derek Rankin to refocus the house on to the valley; he designed a contemporary extension, which really helped turn the house around to make the most of the view and fill the house with light.” The planting that extends from the house, not only celebrates the architecture, but also in turn cleverly conceals and then reveals the view that the Reeves so love. From this hillside position views extend to the south, over a rural idyll of fields, dotted at intervals with grand old oaks. An inspired piece of planting in the garden teams the magnificent Chinese crab apple, *Malus hupehensis* underplanted with white spirea and *Ornithogalum nutans*. This is echoed in the folds of the fields beyond with great clouds of blossom from native hawthorn and a haze of cow parsley beneath.

From the house long, tree-lined allées provide the prospect of leading you further into the garden and woodland beyond. The land drops briskly away, the vertiginous banks are swathed in our native fern and carpeted with broad brushstrokes of bluebells. In spring wood anemones spill down the valley sides heralding the awakening season. “The garden builds up gradually through the spring to become a riot of colour shape and form in midsummer, and is an immersive sensual journey of scents and movement as the plants end up encroaching on the paths and towering above the visitor,” explains Marian.

Foliage underpins any planting; it acts as a prelude to the flowers that come later, but for me it is the use of colour that sets the planting at Reighton Wood apart. The green *Hakonechloa macra* swirls around the trunks of *Prunus serrula*, in contrast the dark-foliaged cow parsley, *Anthriscus sylvestris* ‘Ravenswing’, froths waist-high. Elsewhere swathes of perennials, including geraniums, astrantias, persicarias and euphorbias, are confidently combined in a maelstrom of form, texture and colour. Knitting this Rousseauesque planting together is the light and airy *Knautia macedonica*. The wine-coloured flowers punctuate the air. Together with bronze fennel, *Foeniculum vulgare* ‘Purpureum’, which hangs over the lower-storey planting, their repeated presence unifies the discord perfectly. Shrouded in wisteria, a beautifully designed pergola stretches the entire length of the south side of the house and provides welcome shade in the heat of the day. Festooned in early summer with fragrant white blooms.

Reighton Wood is a garden that is subtle yet striking in design, a garden muscular yet free flowing and dreamy, a garden with an unerring sense of proportion and detail, a garden stuffed with interesting plants but uncluttered by an awareness of fashion or competition and, a garden that feels like it has grown as a response to its surroundings. It feels familiar and comforting strolling the many paths and exploring the hidden corners. Robyn and Mark feel strongly that this is their place and have a sense of duty to leave something special after they have gone. I think they might succeed. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Marian’s work at marianboswall.com

CHOOSING MATERIALS

Materials were chosen to be very soft and to fit as part of the landscape. Local Kent clay pavements were laid in a herringbone pattern on the paths and jointed with sand to allow water through and self-seeders to colonise the cracks. The paths are Breedon gravel, both in its

classic fine form and also as a larger angular gravel to vary the texture and create some spatial hierarchy to lead the way through the garden. The avenue trees are field grown from Hilliers in Hampshire. Oak is used throughout to weather and last, and to complement

the larch cladding on the new extension. The oak pieces by artist Alison Crowther look very comfortable in the setting and form part of the spirit of woodland and water that Robyn wanted to bring back to the neglected site she stumbled upon all those years ago.



Above Marian has planted generous groupings of the slow-growing, dark-green *Thuja occidentalis* ‘Danica’ throughout the garden. Here it echoes the texture of pleached hornbeam allée opposite and the soft curve of the facing berm where vibrant-orange *Crococsmia x crocosmiiflora* ‘Emily McKenzie’ rises like flames.

Below The contemporary larch-clad extension has helped turn the house around to make the most of the view. Facing its doorway a meandering gravel path leads you out through *Hakonechloa macra* and *Viola cornuta* Lilacina Group growing under a multi-stemmed *Amelanchier x lamarkii* to the garden beyond.





Above Panels of lawn and a path of Breedon gravel provide breathing space in front of the house's contemporary conservatory and are in perfect juxtaposition to Marian's dynamic planting opposite where a row of multi-stem *Prunus serrula* rise from a sea of *Hakonechloa macra* and *Allium 'Globemaster'*.
Below The two hand-carved oak benches in the pergola are a sculptural piece, *Rip-Tide*, by Alison Crowther, which was originally designed for Arne Maynard's 2012 Chelsea garden. Along with the oak beams and gate they help connect the house to its setting and the history of the working woodland.

Above Close to the woodland's edge Marian has designed a curved boardwalk across an enlarged lily pond that leads to an oak bench and frame surrounded by wildflowers. It's an elegant link to the simple beauty of the woodland beyond, and a beautiful space to enjoy the impressive chorus of birdsong.
Below A neat path of Breedon gravel and Crosland Hill sandstone separates the extension from the lawn. To the side, low-growing plants such as *Euphorbia epithymoides* and *Anemanthele lessoniana* growing in the gravel mulch add a softness and spontaneity in contrast to the formality of the lawn.

