



**ABOVE** A soft green-and-white scheme was created for this arrival courtyard beside the house and driveway

# COOL & CALM

Taking an in-depth look at an established real-world planting scheme, we discover a recent entrance garden by **Marian Boswall MSGD**

**T**he main garden that Marian Boswall created for an art collector client in East Sussex was bold and colourful to reflect the art within the house. But, in contrast, the entrance courtyard was always going to be a place of elegant arrival. “We knew that the colours needed to provide a quiet welcome,” she says.

The planting would not only screen parked cars and soften the front of the house; it would also offset the new sculptures that would soon arrive, including a 3m-high Marc Quinn statue of Kate Moss.

## The design

The predominantly green and white scheme of the main border – 30m x 3m with a split in the

middle – is planted according to permaculture principles. It has four layers: groundcover, emergents (perennials), shrubs and trees. Many of the plants have been selected to provide forage for bees and other wildlife, and the scheme has been designed with soil health in mind. “When we do a planting plan, we try to have the ground covered all the time, to lock up carbon, protect the soil and to have good root structure underground.”

## The preparation

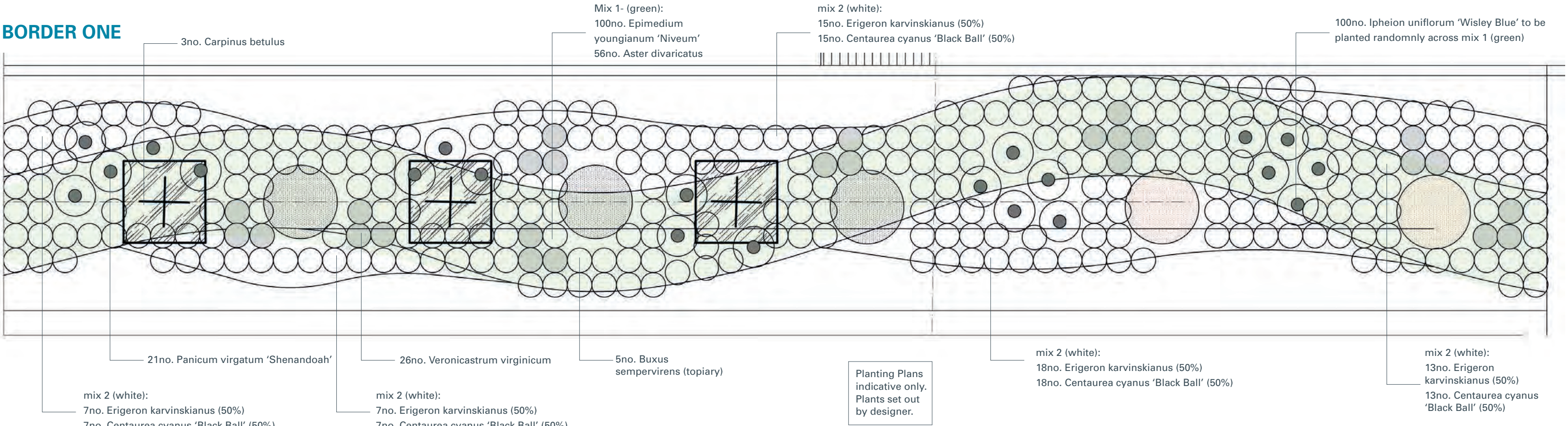
The thin clay soil on the site – previously a driveway and lawn – was mixed with a garden compost mix from Gardenscape to improve structure and fertility, and covered with a Mypex membrane. The groundcovers and emergents were planted

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BORDER ONE



into six inches of gravel, the bases of the root balls just touching the 6in layer of newly improved soil underneath. "A lot of our local projects, like this one, are on Wealden clay. Planting like this means that the plants get their roots into the ground but don't sit in the wet. The gravel also protects the soil from the rain."

The plants

Boswall always uses plants in 9cm pots. "The plants are transported in less soil and plastic and the plants get away very quickly." *Epimedium x youngianum* 'Niveum' and *Erigeron karvinskianus* form the groundcover layer, along with the gravel that they are planted in. "If we hadn't used gravel, we would have planted more thickly." The emergent layer of perennials provides a long season of interest, starting with a mass of *Ipheion uniflorum* 'Wisley Blue' in spring, followed by swathes of *Eurybia* (*Aster divaricatus*) – a favourite of Boswall's, as it has a long season and is trouble free. "It adds froth, and by chance also preserves

Kate's modesty." *Centaurea cyanus* 'Black Ball' provides a striking contrast to the white, while *Veronicastrum virginicum* provides height and interest before it is even in flower. *Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah' brings movement and autumn colour. All of the plants are left standing over winter, to provide interest but also forage for birds.

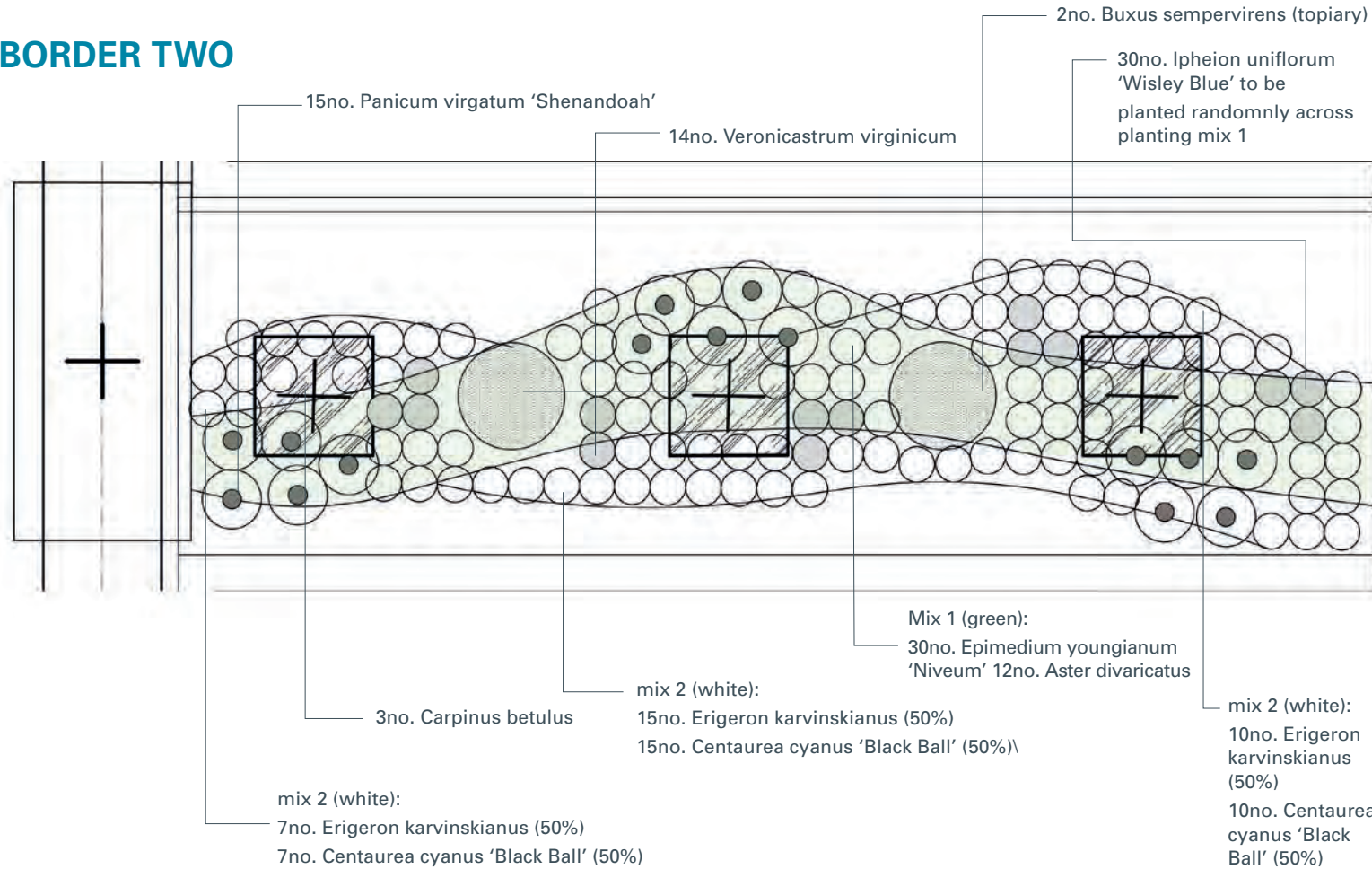
Troubleshooting

Cubed topiary hornbeams and yew columns provide structure, along with large balls of box, which Boswall still uses despite the threat of box blight and box tree caterpillar. "I haven't found another plant that works as well. We spray with whey, a by-product of the organic cheese industry that contains a micro-organism that helps to avoid blight, and cut in the colder months when blight isn't active." Some box tree caterpillars were spotted after one season, and were swiftly picked off; she was interested to see that they had also migrated to the hornbeams. Now, pheromone traps are used to catch the male box tree

THE PROCESS

Boswall and her team work up a planting palette in the studio, before showing it to the client to make sure they like the feel of it. "Of course, we know that the colours and textures translate into year-round interest, forage for bees and so on, but for the client it's more about the mood," she says. "We work in flows and mixes. In this scheme, there are two mixes, each with some groundcover, emergents and structure. Once the mixes are agreed, we sketch out the flow by hand. This is then put into Vectorworks and laid out as a 'bubble chart' on the border plan – from this we can create a spreadsheet which shows how many plants we need. The bubble chart looks very 'hard' with everything in rows, but contractors find it easy to follow. "We then go to site, check everything and mess it all up a bit, jumping one plant from one mix to another so that it feels more naturalistic."

BORDER TWO



"THE MAIN GARDEN WAS BOLD AND COLOURFUL. BUT THE ENTRANCE COURTYARD WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE A PLACE OF ELEGANT ARRIVAL"





Cube-topped hornbeams, box balls and yew columns give background evergreen structure

caterpillar moths in spring, breaking the reproductive cycle. If moths are spotted, they are sprayed with *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a biological control.

### Aftercare

Contractor The Outdoor Room was responsible for buying the trees and shrubs from Boswall's chosen suppliers, Deepdale Trees and Palmstead. "It means that the contractors charge for sourcing and maintenance, and shoulder the risk. On this scheme there was an agreement that they would look after the trees for two years and the shrubs

**"ALL OF THE PLANTS ARE LEFT STANDING OVER THE WINTER, TO PROVIDE INTEREST BUT ALSO FORAGE FOR BIRDS"**

for 18 months. If you have a good relationship with a contractor, they can do more towards the planting and maintenance than they often get credit for."

The entire garden is maintained by a head gardener who is mentored by Caroline Jackson, Boswall's roving head gardener's mentor, once a month. "She gardens alongside him. The client wins because their garden is being looked after, and there's a constant conversation with us about the garden. The head gardener loves it because an RHS Wisley examiner is teaching him everything she knows."

If a plant isn't faring well, Jackson will discuss it with Boswall, but in the case of this scheme, everything went according to plan. The only thing that Boswall would change is the use of the Mypex membrane beneath the gravel. "I don't think it's necessary. Also, it has plastic in it, and we're always trying to be as sustainable as possible." ○

## PLANTING CPD

In order to aid Pre-Registered Members through adjudication, the SGD is running a series of Core CPD sessions via Zoom through 2021, including Planting Plans and Plant Schedules, which will cover planting plans and presentation, plant schedule, suitable plant palette, plant procurement and biosecurity, and management considerations. For more details see [www.sgd.org.uk](http://www.sgd.org.uk). Numbers for the April course are limited but there will be more dates later in the year.