

Art of the garden

In East Sussex, designer Marian Boswall has created a thoughtful landscape to accommodate a growing collection of contemporary sculpture

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IN BRIEF

What Private garden with views over family estate.

Where East Sussex.

Soil Heavy clay, naturally irrigated with underground springs.

Size 12 acres.

Climate Temperate, typical of the south of England.

Hardiness zone USDA 9.

In this part of the garden, an animated parterre of hardy perennials and grasses was designed by Marian Boswall Landscape Architects, to create a setting for a new orangery with a crenelated balcony above. *Helianthus salicifolius* jostles with *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Kleine Silberspinne' and adds mystery to the sculpture layout in summer.

When designing an art collector's garden, it is only a matter of time before the sculptures begin to arrive. Landscape gardener Marian Boswall knew that "something bold was coming" when she took on a property in Sussex and began to reconfigure a traditional parterre. Enclosed within extant hedges of thuja, the new, perennial-based layout was designed for walking through, and also for the enjoyment of those looking out from the new orangery. Possibly the best view is from its crenelated balcony, where the owner practises yoga. From this perspective, the eye is drawn over the tall, high-spirited planting to a clearing in the cloud-pruned hedge, framed by woodland in the distance. Here, perfectly

poised and naturally framed, sits a shiny three-metre sculpture of the model Kate Moss in an impressive yoga position, her body weight resting on her elbows. The sculpture is called *Myth Venus*, created by the artist Marc Quinn, and is one of several arresting, yet strangely serene sculptures in this thoughtfully landscaped garden.

Another edition of Kate Moss guards the garden entrance like a sphinx; no visitor is allowed to escape her unblinking gaze. Marian's client, a well-regarded art dealer, loves the reaction they get. "They are quite unconventional here and I like that," she says. The former garden layout is still fresh in the memory: only five years ago, visitors were greeted by a tarmac turning circle, with some greenery hiding a well. Now, a grid of gravel bisected with paths of shot-sawn Yorkstone accommodates cars for the many guests, their vehicles disappearing into a matrix of deep border planting.

With more than one sculpture at the front of the house, the plant structure is strong, with clipped hornbeam hedging, cubed topiary trees, and columns of yew. Box balls emerge from mobs of white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*) and daisies of *Erigeron karvinskianus*, with *Geranium renardii* offering further green and white groundcover. Adding vitality for months before they flower, verticals of veronicastrums (*V. virginicum* 'Album' and 'Fascination') spring up all around the parking area. "We wanted to use soft colours at the front," says Marian, "to complement the house and to provide a gentle welcome

The plant structure is strong, with clipped hornbeam hedging, cubed topiary trees and columns of yew

on arrival." The energy of green bursts into orange in autumn, with free-form *Parrotia persica* repeated through *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Kleine Silberspinne' opposite the front door.

On the other side of the wide, neo-Gothic building, the view of the surrounding landscape is effortlessly glorious, taking in rocky hills of ancient forest. Despite or perhaps because of this spectacle, the great lawn of the past failed to meet the challenge, instead drifting away down a slope, partly blocked by four light-absorbing yews. These have been put to better use marking the four corners of a grounding croquet lawn, with low hornbeam hedging enclosing formal bosquets on either side. These contain small trees (magnolias, amelanchiers and lilacs) while also appearing to hold back larger park trees. Further out, beyond an area of wildflowers, is a ha-ha. Since this property is part of an estate, Marian was able to edit some of the less distant trees, adjusting the view as well as its frame.

Many of the trees planted over the past five years, such as white willow and tulip tree, have been added with the express purpose of attracting bees. Strapped to a venerable oak, a wild bee hive hangs over a wildflower meadow in the shape of a labyrinth. Marian used a classic medieval design, with bricks laid four across, in staggered bond. While the meandering path requires a certain concentration, ox-eye daisies, tufted vetch and ragged robin are the accompaniment. It is an effective way of experiencing a meadow without trampling through.

The labyrinth is the most recent part of this project, over the hedge from the oldest: the parterre. The parterre is another – looser – circuit of paths, curling around tall, effusive planting. Facing south, communities of hardy perennials, such as the elegant sunflower *Helianthus salicifolius* and deep-red *Persicaria amplexicaulis*, are held back by plumes of *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' and mats of *Hakonechloa macra*. Behind the glass windows of the orangery that overlooks it, two oversized and intensely colourful Marc Quinn flower paintings dominate the room. When Marian first arrived, the indoor Quinns set the tone for the outside. "We had a choice of going very quiet, to allow the paintings to shout alone, or to sing with them. Hence," says Marian with some understatement, "the garden is vibrant." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

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

Turn the page to see more of the garden



Top A sunken croquet lawn edged with Corten steel emphasises the clean lines of the flattened lawn, with sharply defined Yorkstone pavers in the grass. This setting adds even more drama to the view of ancient forest, with formal bosquets added on either side.

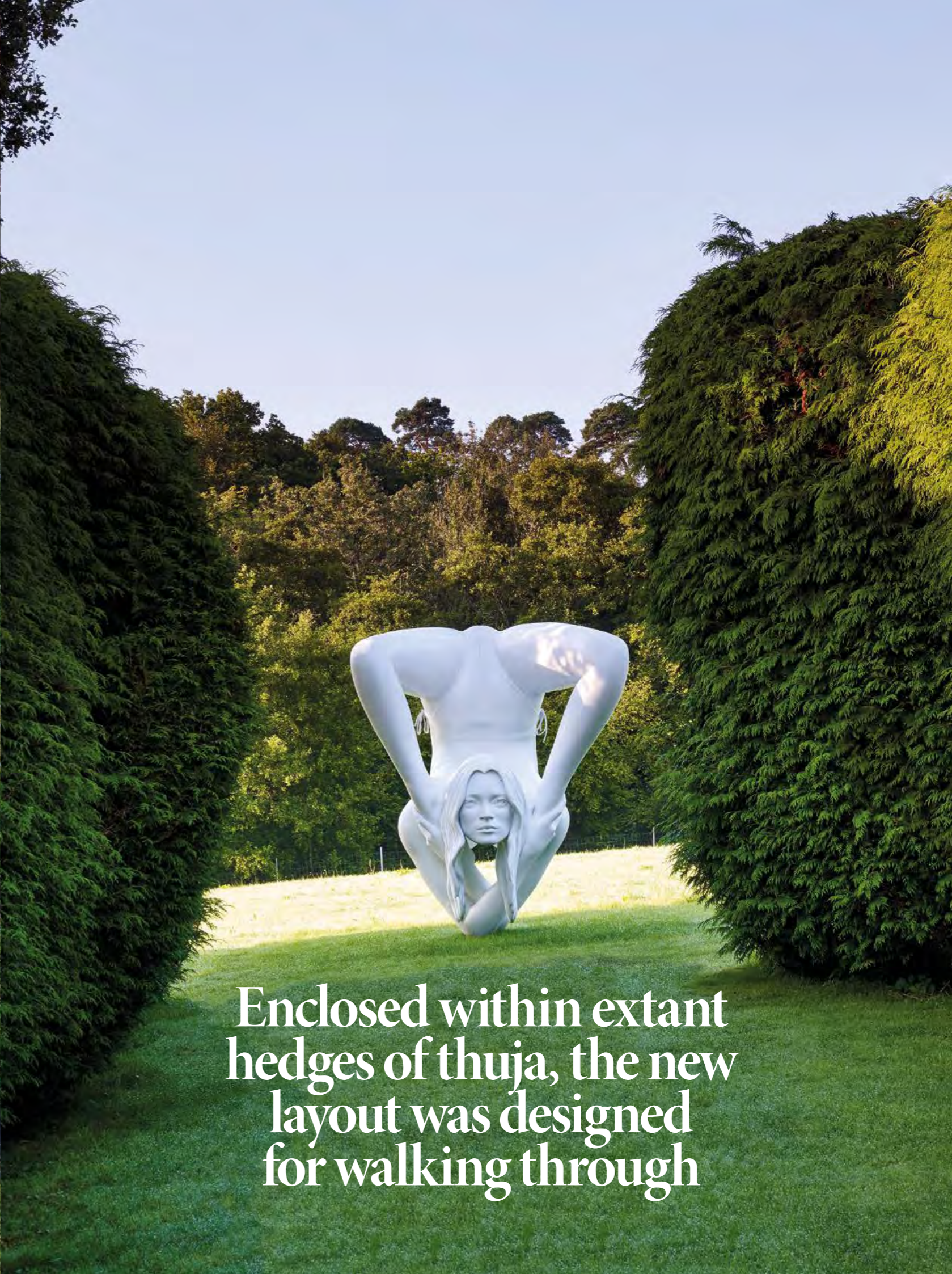


Below In the parterre garden fountains of *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' are joined by lively hardy perennials, and a katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*). In autumn, its scent of burnt sugar will be enclosed within the hedging of cloud-pruned thuja.



This image A meandering path of brick forms a labyrinth through a wildflower meadow sown with an Emorsgate Seeds general seed mix. This is intended as foraging for the wild bees that live in a log hive in one of the old oaks, while young trees that attract bees include *Liriodendron tulipifera*, *Tilia cordata* and *Arbutus unedo*.

Facing page *Myth Venus*, cast from white-painted bronze, is by the artist Marc Quinn. It can be seen from a balcony used for practising yoga and there is a calming symmetry to its position at the end of a corridor of cloud-pruned thuja with a backdrop of woodland.



Enclosed within extant hedges of thuja, the new layout was designed for walking through



Top Opposite the front door, the sculpture *Tear* by Richard Hudson sits in a grid of hard paths and dense planting in the parking area, and reflects the house as well as a backdrop of *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Kleine Silberspinne' and a line of *Parrotia persica* that turn a fiery orange in autumn.

Below Free-form *Crataegus persimilis* 'Prunifolia Splendens' mixes with topiarised trees of *Carpinus betulus*. For understory structure, Marian continues to plant *Buxus sempervirens* despite its well-known challenges. To protect it from blight she sprays it with diluted organic whey.



Top Crenelated garden walls were added when the neo-Gothic house was refurbished. Planting is given height with columns of yew and a vertical leitmotif around the front of the house: *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Album' and 'Fascination'. Box balls are mobbed by *Eurybia divaricata*.

Below The owner, a fan of the artist Marc Quinn, has included several of his sculptures in the garden. "They make people sit up and think," she says. Placed within modular planting, this image of model Kate Moss near the garden entrance called *Myth Mirror Sphinx*, is impossible to miss.

