

# ARTISTIC LICENCE

Inspired by the work of artist Marc Quinn, this colourful flower garden is a feast for the eyes, as well as for bees, butterflies and birds



**DESIGNER PROFILE** Marian Boswall established her design and landscape practice in Kent in 2004. She taught Historic Garden Conservation at Greenwich University and is renowned for her work on landscapes in historic settings, as well as for private gardens.

## What brief did the owner give you?

The property belongs to an art lover who wanted to have a parterre in this part of the garden, one that was inspired by Marc Quinn's paintings of big, colourful, abstract flowers. The garden would be visible from the orangerie, and also from a raised terrace close to the house, which meant that the parterre has to look good from all sides. The owner hosts summer parties here, so she wanted the parterre to be particularly beautiful during that season.

## How did you interpret the brief?

Marc Quinn's paintings are so bright and extravagant, they create a sensory overload, and I wanted the garden to evoke this lush feeling of abundance and sensuality. The huge *Thuja* hedges help to shelter this exposed site, which in turn allowed me to use taller plants that would move and dance in the wind. The hedges also provide a dark green backdrop to show off the bright flowers. I set out large flower beds in a simple geometric pattern around a central circle, and used plants that reach their peak in high summer. When they are in bloom, they provide a feeling of intimacy and enclosure, totally immersing you in flowers and surrounding you with scent, butterflies and bees.

## Tell us more about your choice of key plants.

The planting is bold and bright, with lots of texture and form. I wanted colour harmony in some areas, and brilliant contrasts in others, to emulate the Marc Quinn flowers, but I also wanted plants that would attract pollinating insects. The key flowers are the bright yellow daisies of *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm' (coneflowers) and willow-leaved *Helianthus salicifolius* (sunflowers), burnt orange *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty', and the tall slim stems of *Verbena bonariensis*, with its small purple blooms. Grasses, such as *Pennisetum* and *Miscanthus*, add movement and texture to the beds.

## How did you ensure year-round seasonal interest?

Although the planting peaks in summer, it has colour and interest all year. In winter, the plants' faded leaves, stems and seedheads create beautiful skeleton silhouettes that look amazing when dusted with frost and snow. The seeds also provide a feast for the birds. In spring, the garden is full of bulbs, including the tulips 'Queen of Night' and 'Ballerina', and a range of alliums. These carry the beds through until the first herbaceous plants get going again in May.

## Is a parterre garden like this easy to care for?

This garden is very easy to maintain and the owner has just one



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gardener to tend it once every couple of weeks. An early problem with rabbits, which were partial to the young *Hakonechloa* grass, was dealt with by building a temporary fence to protect the plants while they established themselves. Now, all that really needs to be done is weeding, and some staking in early spring. For that, we use chestnut stems from the local woods and make witches' hat frames for the taller plants, and we thin and Chelsea chop the sunflowers; the



### KEY PLANTS

- 1| *Thuja plicata* (cedar hedges)
- 2| *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' (catnip)
- 3| *Hakonechloa macra*
- 4| *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm' (coneflower)
- 5| *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' (Chinese fountain grass)
- 6| *Helianthus* 'Moerheim Beauty'
- 7| *Sanguisorba menziesii* (burnet)
- 8| *Amelanchier lamarckii* (snowy mespilus)
- 9| *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Kleine Silberspinne' (Chinese silver grass)
- 10| *Helianthus salicifolius* (willow-leaved sunflower)
- 11| *Buxus sempervirens* (box hedging)
- 12| *Verbena bonariensis*
- 13| *Baptisia australis* (false Indigo)
- 14| *Symphotrichum novae-angliae* (New England aster)
- 15| *Gaura lindheimeri* 'Whirling Butterflies'
- 16| *Geranium pratense* 'Mrs Kendall Clark'
- 17| *Erigeron karvinskianus* (Mexican fleabane)
- 18| *Astrantia* 'Roma'

### PLANT SUPPLIERS

**Burncoose Nurseries**  
01209 860316, [burncoose.co.uk](http://burncoose.co.uk).  
**Crocus** 01344 578000,  
[crocus.co.uk](http://crocus.co.uk).  
**Claire Austin** 01686 670342,  
[claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk](http://claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk).

### GARDEN DESIGNER

**Marian Boswall Landscape Architects**, 020 7305 7153,  
[marianboswall.com](http://marianboswall.com).

Chelsea chop is a pruning method of cutting stems almost in half, in late May, when the RHS Chelsea Flower Show opens. This type of pruning prevents the plants from growing too tall and encourages more flowering stems to form.

#### What is the key to combining bright colours in one bed?

Choose plants with strong but complementary colours, such as reds, yellows, and oranges, and use cooler colours to provide contrast. Here, the heleniums, sunflowers and coneflowers are of a similar tone and work really well together, while the pink bristly blooms of the *Pennisetum* grass echo the vibrant perennial flowers but bring the tone down slightly, creating a visual rest in the scheme. There is also plenty of foliage interest in the borders, which acts as a cooling, neutral note between the bright colours.

