

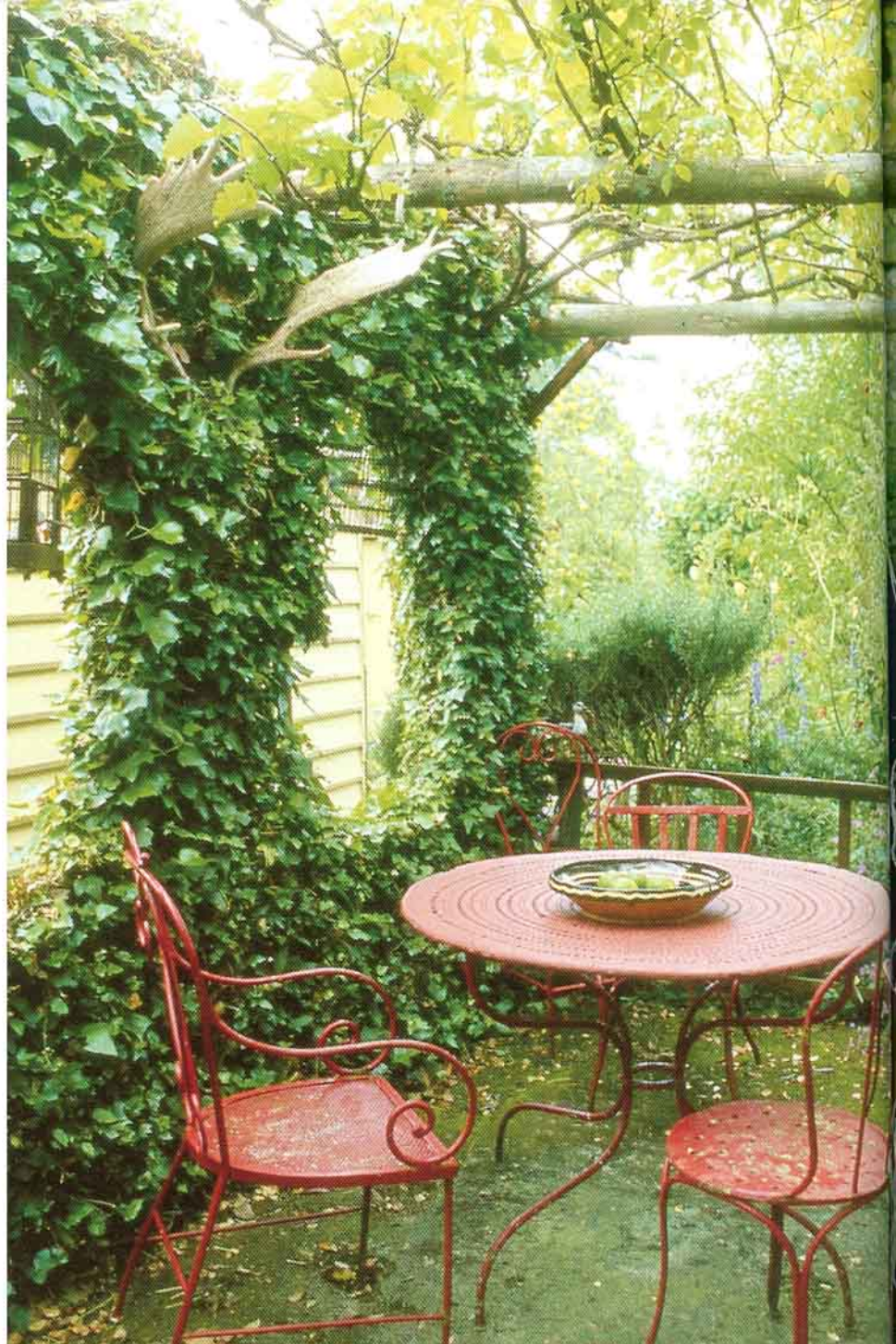


PLANTING *a private* PARADISE

Artistically arranged into elegant enclosures, this small cottage garden slowly reveals its many hidden corners and secret delights

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE GARRETT | WORDS BY STEPHANIE DONALDSON





PREVIOUS PAGE *Allium cristophii*. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A plant-inspired copper breakfast terrace; geraniums, hostas, euphorbia and vibrant pink foxgloves burst forth from

When Isabelle and Humphrey Bowden moved to Tillington in West Sussex from nearby Petworth, they were faced with a much smaller garden that was little more than a vegetable plot – and had no privacy. The two ‘old boys’ who lived in the cottages on either side kept the hedges trimmed low so that they could talk to one another across the dividing garden. The idea that the new residents wanted to interfere with this arrangement was all a bit perturbing

for them at first, but the Bowdens found it more than a little intrusive. Their first step was to ensure that the waist-high mounded hedge of holly, hazel and beech on the south side of the garden grew taller. Isabelle then planted a parallel length of freestanding tapestry hedge and the first patch of seclusion was established.

Over the intervening 20 years, Isabelle and Humphrey have gone on to create a jewel-box of a garden. Each compartment has its own special look and all are private from one another, as well as the neighbours. Hedges, pergolas, trellis and



ter sculpture hidden among the ferns; the vine-covered pergola and ivy-wreathed trellis walls provide shade on the inviting
a border flanking the pathway; fragrant red honeysuckle; pale pelargoniums grow prolifically in the little greenhouse

arbours lend a sense of height, so there is absolutely no indication from the house of the size and dimensions of the garden, which is full of odd angles and irregular in shape. There's a path that follows the line of the hedge, but because both it and the garden bend and twist, even this gives no clues, while some areas are planted widthways across the garden, creating divisions in its length.

Isabelle, who is largely responsible for the planting, is a painter who comes from a family of French artists and writers, while Humphrey designs and

makes plant-inspired copper fountains in his workshop adjacent to the house. He has a background in industrial design, but he found success in that world increasingly stressful: "For some time my brother and I had been pondering on how plant shapes would be brilliant for fountains. My brother dropped out, but I made some and displayed them at a small garden show. That was 16 years ago and I have been fully employed ever since making my water sculptures." Now, he only exhibits at Hampton Court and finds that this, his website and recommendations

generate all the business that he needs.

In the angle between the house and the workshop, the Bowdens have made a breakfast terrace, with a vine-covered pergola and ivy-wreathed trellis walls containing unglazed arched windows resolving the lack of shade here. The vine produced magnificent-looking grapes but the flavour proved a big disappointment, so it has now been replaced by a white rambling rose, 'Bobbie James', and an orange campsis. Isabelle trims the ivy on the trellis walls so that each square is apparent, and hanging in the arched ▷



windows are antique birdcages complete with decoy birds. The uprights for the pergola came from a person that Isabelle describes as "an old chap in the woods". Creative use of inexpensive materials is a characteristic of this garden.

While Humphrey is an accomplished sculptor he is also very happy to do things the easy way, so many of the arches in the garden are made from reinforcing rods that he has bent into shape using his knee. In among this improvisation his beautifully crafted water sculptures are placed in small ponds or containers and their gentle splashing draws you onwards through the garden. As each one comes into view, a flurry of birds flies off from drinking and bathing in the tiered copper leaves.

Halfway down the garden the couple planted a ring of apple trees. Isabelle

then had the idea of training them onto a huge circular arbour which is now smothered by a rambling rose, 'Francis Lester'. A central hole is kept completely free of foliage to frame the sky and arranged beneath are seats to provide a welcome refuge on hot days. The apples are not very prolific, but there's a superb display of spring flowers at the base of the trees earlier in the year.

Beyond the arbour lies a pair of rustic, brick-built piggeries, a reminder of when this row of cottages housed workers from the Petworth Estate. One, unchanged, is used for storage, but the other has been turned into a miniature greenhouse, while the little walled yard in front is now covered by an arched metal pergola through which wisteria twines. Beneath this, there's a dining table that's a favourite

spot for outdoor meals. The Bowdens have a clever technique for making great leaps forward in the garden – they invite friends and family for a weekend working party. In return for delicious food and wine, they set to and build arbours, dig ponds and anything else their hosts have in mind for them.

The final flourish in this *hortus conclusus* is to be found at the far end of the garden where you emerge to find yourself overlooking open country and the South Downs. Known as the Sunset Terrace, this is the spot where, at the end of the day, Isabelle and Humphrey relax in the last rays of the sun, secure in the knowledge that they have created their own very private paradise. 🍷

To see Humphrey's range of water fountains, visit humphreybowden.com

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Rambling roses beside the old piggery; antique birdcages hang in ivy-clad 'windows'; deep purple geraniums; metal leaves form intriguing fountains; an informal arrangement of hedgerow plants. THIS PAGE The rose arbour

