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Looking across the meadow and lawn, towards the house the ha-ha breaks up the expanse of grass. Its flint-filled gabions create a pleasing fusion of old and new, much like the rest of the property.

# In collaboration

In the tranquil surroundings of rural West Sussex, a new house and garden are growing together in pleasing synchronicity

WORDS BENJAMIN WILLIAM POPE PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

## IN BRIEF

**What** A modern country garden, partly enclosed by trees and hedges.

**Where** West Sussex.

**Soil** Constructed topsoil on top of underlying clay flint.

**Size** Two acres.

**Climate** Temperate, with warm summers and cool winters.

**Hardiness zone** USDA 8.

**A**t the foot of the South Downs in West Sussex sits a confident, modern house that echoes past traditions. Although visually striking, the house quietly occupies the site of two acres and is sympathetic to its agricultural setting. As if hunkering down, the building is rooted in its location through the use of clever landscaping and considered planting. There is an overriding sense of peace to the property, as the sun filters through the surrounding tree canopy and chickens bustle among the flowerbeds and tall grass.

This was not always so. Owners Jo and James Wells bought the property in 2012 and Jo remembers how the southern paddock dominated the site, in part resembling a muddy quagmire that could rival that of a wet Glastonbury Festival. Undeterred, the couple fell in love with the view south towards the Downs, and James, who leads his own architectural practice, set about designing a new house. Of course, building a new property in a conservative part of the countryside comes with its challenges. James recalls how important it was for the house to feel as though it >





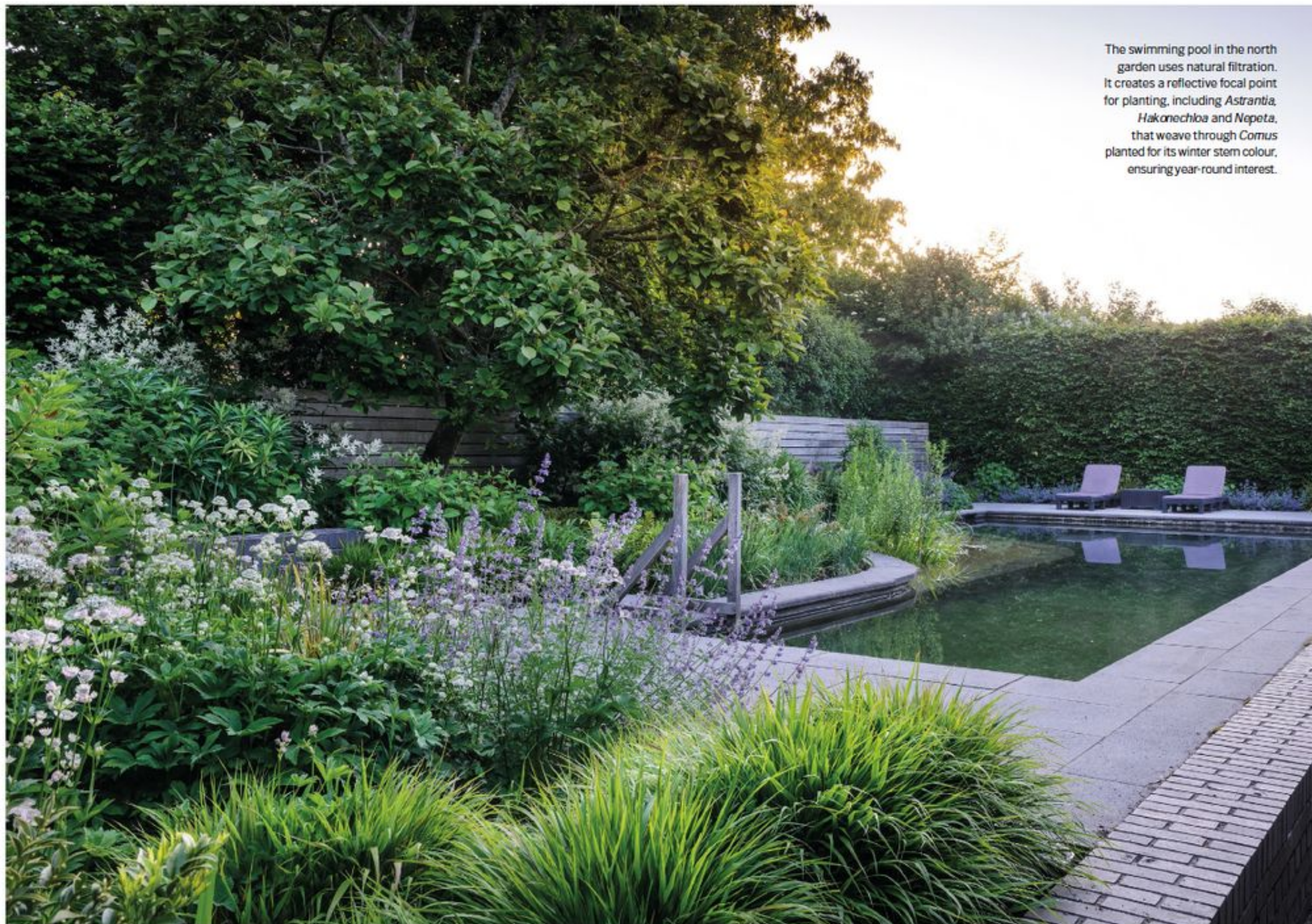
▷ belonged in its location, and so the couple entrusted the garden designer Chris Moss with the task of creating the garden.

In his work as an architect, James had already worked with Chris on various projects, so the collaboration was a familiar one. A deep understanding of each other's work would ensure a cohesive design, where the garden integrates fully with the house. In this case, the house acts as the central point of a compass, with four distinct areas to the garden.

To the north is the natural pool and the unassuming main entrance to the house. The pool takes centre stage, framed by an existing magnolia and mixed seasonal planting. In the east sits a terrace and vegetable garden, offering the perfect location for morning coffee while checking over the various crops. To the west, the garden slopes steeply to the lane below, giving access to the property and providing parking that is cleverly hidden from view. In all of these areas, the boundary planting is a combination of mature, deciduous trees and large,

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The swimming pool in the north garden uses natural filtration. It creates a reflective focal point for planting, including *Astrantia*, *Hakonechloa* and *Nepeta*, that weave through *Cornus* planted for its winter stem colour, ensuring year-round interest.

**This page, top left** A group of box-pleached hornbeams (*Carpinus betulus*) act as one to provide a bold structure to offset the house. Terraces and steps work harmoniously around the house to accommodate the changes in levels and provide growing spaces for plants.

**Bottom left** In the planting around the pool, staunch geometry meets soft and exuberant planting. Varying shades of green, in the form of *Euphorbia*, *Hakonechloa*, *Libertia* and *Rodgersia*, create a pleasing contrast with the grey of the linear screen and uniform paving.

**Among the abundant planting, there is a gentle sense of order and organisation from the formal layout and landscaping**



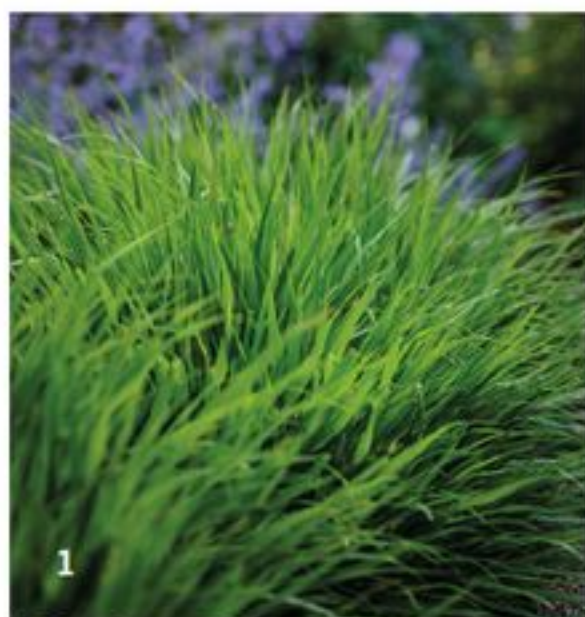


The first of the morning sun sweeps over the north garden, highlighting the tops of *Astrantia major* 'Alba' and *Acanthus mollis*, as well as the soft fronds of *Dryopteris affinis*. The restricted and subtle colour palette offer a sense of tranquillity that is reflected in the natural pool beyond.

## Shade-loving plants for a woodland setting

A shady spot in the garden is an opportunity to create something special, a tranquil retreat to retire to on hot, summer days. Plants typically suited to this location will often be early to flower, but will continue the season with foliage that has a lush appearance. In this garden, Chris mixes ferns with ornamental grasses and classic woodland perennials, with the aim of creating a tapestry of contrasting texture, shape and form. He prefers to be generous with his quantities, creating rivers of single species that flow into one another. "I like to layer the planting to create an understorey. This helps to cover the soil, offering protection, while adding interest." By way of example, he indicates a *Vinca minor* that gently scrambles among some hellebores, a less vigorous species than *V. major* and better behaved in a woodland setting. Plant selection is key to success and ongoing pruning of the canopy above and around the site is essential. As the planting matures, canopies will require lifting and thinning (usually best completed in winter) to prevent light levels from becoming too low. In dry areas, the use of organic mulch will help, although additional irrigation may be required during any prolonged hot weather.





**1 Hakonechloa macra** Deciduous, perennial grass with emerald-green leaves and fine flower panicles from late summer, followed by golden hues in autumn. Any soil but the driest, in light shade to full sun. 40cm. AGM\*. RHS H7†.

**2 Geranium phaeum 'Album'** Clump-forming, upright woodlander. Mid-green, palmate leaves from spring to autumn, with small, white flowers on thin stems. Any reasonable soil with some organic matter, in sun and shade. 1.2m. RHS H7.

**3 Astrantia major 'Alba'** Cottage-garden classic with fresh-green, bold, palmate leaves that have a toothed edge. Steely white, pin-cushion flowers from late spring to mid-summer. Most soils, but dislikes drying out. Light shade to full sun. 70cm. RHS H7.

**4 Persicaria alpina** Deciduous perennial of great stature and endurance. Large, oval leaves arch from central stems. Tiny, soft-white flowers turn rich pink as summer progresses. Heavy, rich soil in sun or part shade. 2m. AGM. RHS H6. USDA 4a-9b.

**5 Rodgersia 'Herkules'** Strong-growing, rhizomatous perennial with large, attractive palmate leaves tinted copper when young. Panicles of tiny, pink, star-shaped flowers in summer. Moist soil in part shade to full sun. 1m. RHS H6.

**6 Geranium Rozanne (= 'Gerwat')** Violet-blue flowers from late spring to autumn among soft, palmate leaves that form a vigorous clump with a sprawling habit. Rich, free-draining soil in full sun to part shade. 60cm. AGM. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

**7 Dryopteris affinis** Handsome, semi-evergreen fern. Long, mid-green fronds with contrasting golden stems are held upright to form a shuttlecock. Prefers a moist, shady site. 1.2m. AGM. RHS H5.

**8 Gillenia trifoliata** Demure, rhizomatous perennial with delicate, three-lobed leaves on thin, black stems. Panicles of white, star-shaped flowers, with contrasting reddish calyces, appear from late spring to summer. Rich, free-draining soil in part shade to light sun. 80cm. AGM. RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.

**9 Iris 'Flight of Butterflies'** Rhizomatous perennial with linear, grass-like leaves. Abundant, early summer flowers in violet with white marking. Moist, free-draining soil in full sun or light shade. 90cm. AGM, RHS H7.





▷ evergreen hedges. They gently hug and enclose the property, making much of the garden feel private and secluded.

In contrast, as Chris explains, “the south is all about the view”. Here the layout is simple and open; a well-maintained lawn drops down to a meadow that stretches away from the house to frame the countryside beyond.

Walking around the garden, there is a gentle sense of order and organisation, not from the planting, which is soft and abundant, but from the layout and landscaping. The dark grey of the Schellevis paving replicates that of the roof tiles, while complementing the varying tones of the traditional timber shingles and knapped flint, a historic building material of the local area. Geometric borders and well-placed shrubs gently divide the different spaces that effortlessly link with one another around the house, mirroring both the proportions and shapes of the building. It is as if the garden and house intimately speak to one another. “For me it is all about the small details,” explains Chris. He describes how the top of a small wall

**Above** Walking from the front gate up the curved path, the house begins to reveal itself. Softly planted borders of low perennials, are punctuated by *Amelanchier x lamarckii* and *Pyrus calleryana* ‘Chanticleer’ to add seasonal interest and a sense of enclosure.

**This page, top right** Sun-loving plantings of *Echinacea*, *Nepeta* and *Geum* give way to the architectural foliage of *Dryopteris*, as the garden slopes away from the house towards the lane.

**Bottom right** A tapestry of texture and form with *Geranium phaeum* ‘Album’, *Nepeta* ‘Six Hills Giant’ and *Dryopteris erythrosora* knitting together.





intentionally sits slightly proud of the surrounding paving, “defining it as an independent component of the garden that is replicated just metres away”.

With so much care and thought in perfecting the design, it would be easy to assume that the garden might be kept static. This is thankfully not the case. James and Jo are actively involved in the upkeep of the garden, and enjoy the natural processes and rhythm of the seasons. Over the years, changes and adaptations have occurred, in response to how well the plants have established and how the garden is used. Both James and Jo acknowledge the importance of having a connection to the garden and, as Jo puts it, “getting your hands dirty”. For Chris, James and Jo are the ideal clients, passionate and invested with what has been created, while willing to adapt in response to what nature dictates. □

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Chris Moss’s work at [chrismossgardens.com](http://chrismossgardens.com)