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Arne Maynard

His name may be Scandinavian and his style quintessentially English, but this master of design has lost his heart to a garden in the Welsh hills

WORDS CAMILLA SWIFT PORTRAIT CHARLIE HOPKINSON

His father was American, his mother German, he has a Scandinavian name yet Arne Maynard is the acclaimed designer of quintessentially English country gardens. Arne caught the gardening bug early. Aged four he fell for a majestic neighbouring yew shaped like a wedding cake; topiary as pointers still feature large in his designs. Arne and his fully functioning child-size mower spent happy hours following his adopted grandfather (who always gardened in a tie) and a vintage Suffolk Punch. At school, gardening books won over sport. He devoured them, despite being a terrible reader. Percy Thrower's *In Your Greenhouse* was an early favourite, followed by Gertrude Jekyll on asters. He just loved being outside, exploring abandoned cottages, deserted gardens with plants piercing brambles; "traces of other people's passions". He remains inspired by the natural environment, seeking out plant combinations in hedgerows, meadows, verges, unusual materials in walls, fences, and buildings.

His godmother, who confidently prophesied that whatever he did he would be good at it, took him to nurseries and gardens, armed with an umbrella, closed even in rain, a repository for purloined cuttings. "We called them umbrella plants," says Arne. They went to Cranborne, the first time he'd seen a knot garden, or an old fashioned rose. "I loved it without knowing why. Something inside me went that's right." He talked plants with a nice lady gardener, neck frills, strings of pearls, and a butler hovering with a jug of ice-cold lemonade on a silver salver. Lady Salisbury has been a principal source of inspiration ever since. In his late teens, disenchanted with gardening, he went to Oxford Polytechnic to study architecture – "too technical, it didn't flick my switch" – followed by a spell in San Francisco, but missing the seasons, he returned to work at Clifton Nurseries. Bored of watering hanging baskets he apprenticed himself to Peter Hone, the architectural salvage and statuary dealer. "Peter made it happen. I started by designing places to put pieces bought by his clients." Arne took off.

In the past 25 years he's created nearly 200 gardens the world over, including two show gardens at Chelsea: with Piet Oudolf in 2000 for *GARDENS ILLUSTRATED*, and again in 2012 for Laurent-Perrier, both gold medal winners and the first also winning Best in Show. "But I wouldn't want to do that again for a bit, I can't reinvent the wheel in such a short time." He prefers real gardens: farmhouses, Chelsea mews, Middle Eastern palaces, beach houses in the Hamptons. New climates and new plants excite him, he enjoys working with

Americans. "But as a gardener, I love to come home. I am most comfortable designing for English country houses and estates."

Besides their gracefully romantic planting and strong architectural features, Arne's gardens stand out because of his extraordinary talent for capturing the sense of place, blending formal, informal, traditional and contemporary, with apparently effortless elegance. He will spend considerable time looking from inside a house out because, "I want the garden to walk hand in hand with the house. My passion is creating the perfect harmony between house, garden, history, landscape, plants and the dreams of the owners. This is the soul of the garden."

He likes to take clients on the design journey, visiting gardens such as Rousham, getting them to love the process of gardening; but they must always feel they are making their own decisions. "I'll sow the seed and leave it," he says. Seeds have sometimes involved moving a lake or diverting a driveway. "Looking out of the window on to a sea of cars is like living in a Sainsbury's car park," he says.

Allt-y-bela, his own garden, is hidden in a valley near Usk. When he moved here with his partner William Collinson seven years ago, it was love at first sight. "I felt we had come home." Arne and William's self-imposed brief was to create a garden that, should they decide to circumnavigate the world (both are passionate sailors, so not impossible), they could wake it, Sleeping Beauty-like, on return. They wanted a medieval park without boundaries. Here, going against his beloved symmetrical formality, Arne's signature topiary trees are planted asymmetrically; standing alone, or congregating in small groups; sentinels, signposts.

This garden, a living mood board of planting palettes and themes, is where Arne watches his ideas bed in over the seasons; a continual process of learning and experimenting, "which stretches my mind and make me rethink". Soon he will bring clients here. "Their reaction to it may decide whether I am the right person for the job," he says. I don't think he need worry. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Arne's work at arnemaynard.com and read his insights into historic tulips on page 44.

NEXT MONTH

Plantsman Nick Macer.

"My passion is creating the perfect harmony, between house, garden, history, landscape, plants and the dreams of the owners. This is the soul of the garden"

