







# Pooled resources

Inheriting a confusion of styles and disparate parts, the new owners of Goldingtons in Hertfordshire spearheaded its coherent restoration with a bold new swimming-pool garden, discovers Tiffany Daneff

Photographs by Clive Nichols



**W**E bought the view and the house came with it,' says Sue Roberts, indicating south-west towards a broad chalk valley, along which run the clear waters of the River Chess. When she and her husband, Richard, moved here in 2016, however, there was much to be done—or, rather, undone to the Georgian property.

The most prominent eyesore was a tennis court that had been dug with sharply angled banks into the lawn at the back of the house in the 1920s. Although one can almost hear the calls from the mixed doubles tournaments and picture the trays

of Pimm's going around the thirsty spectators, the court could hardly have been in a worse spot, as it breaks the view of the valley. Doubling down on that decision was taking

out a summerhouse from the same period that ruined the view to the river. Now, the lawn runs smoothly down from the flagstone terrace to three handsome limes. These may well have been planted when the garden was originally landscaped in the 1750s, at the same time as the house was built. There were deer in the park then and the ha-ha remains.

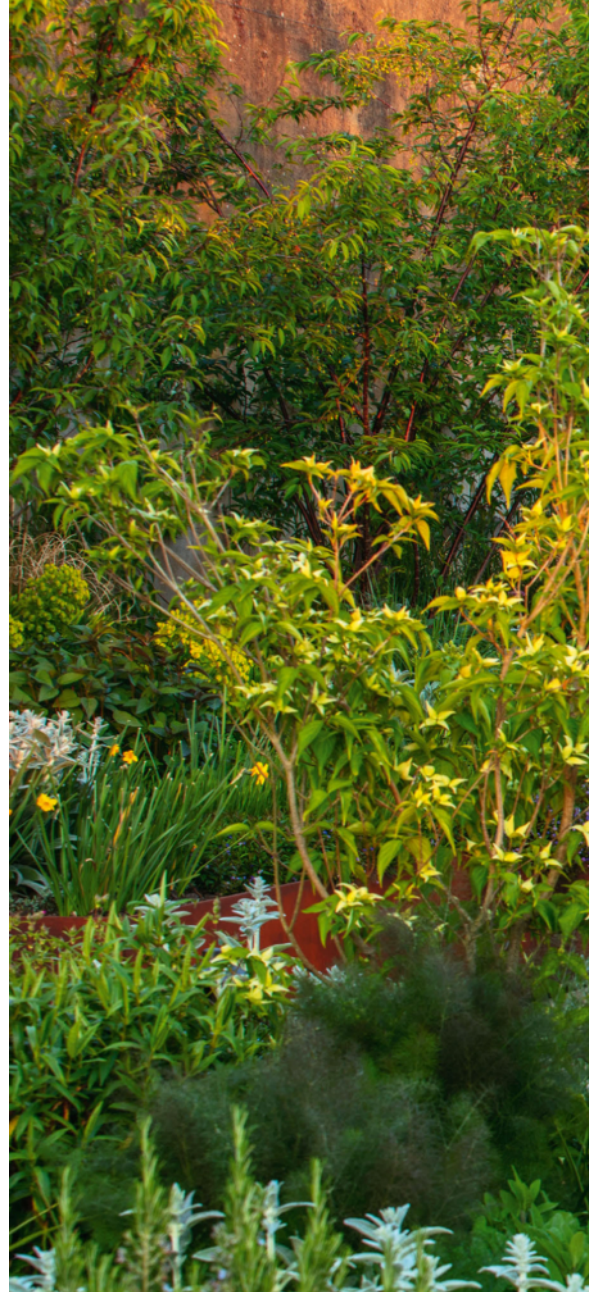
*Preceding pages:* **A Griffin glasshouse has replaced an old garage in the pool garden.**  
*Below:* **The terrace is planted with alliums 'Purple Sensation', 'Globemaster', 'Violet Beauty', A. giganteum and A. christophii**

After the tennis, croquet and badminton players left the scene, the house was variously let to tenants and, in the 1960s, it was being used as a smallholding, which explains the numerous little brick lean-to buildings erected, some within the old walled garden, others somewhat randomly tucked in here and there as pigsties, chicken houses and workrooms. The old coach house, with its tall doors, was overshadowed by an ugly modern garage and, following the sale of parts of the working estate—including the barn and some out-houses—the property felt confused and much in need of some re-thinking.

**'The brief was for the garden to flow more easily and for colour throughout the year'**

You could not walk around the house or from the house to the walled garden with any ease and everywhere was divided by five-bar gates, which looked out of place in this setting. To make matters worse, an awkward extension and fire escape had been tacked on to the Victorian service range, which itself had been added at the back of the Georgian house.

It was vital that house and land should once again be considered in tandem, so, as work was done to improve the building, the extension and the tennis-court lawn were removed and a pond was dug to the west under the Scots pines that gently define this end of the property. The Robertses had brought with them three David Harber sculptures, one of which now sits at the end of the pond to help stop the eye from wandering beyond the garden.







**A contemporary mood is created beside the pool by edging the square flowerbeds in Corten steel and repeating the planting scheme of a single, multi-stemmed *Prunus serrula*, surrounded by *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' and *Erigeron karvinskianus***

In the autumn of 2017, discussions began with James Scott, who knew the garden well, having repurposed the walled garden for the previous incumbent. The brief was for the garden to flow more easily and to bring together its disparate parts. Both the new owners are keen gardeners and wanted big herbaceous borders that would enable them to have colour throughout the year and to grow some bold, architectural plants.

As a beekeeper, Mrs Roberts needed simple flowers and also hoped for blooms she could dry, so the scheme for the borders above the lawn contains plenty of stachys, phlomis, acanthus and alliums. She was less enthusiastic about grasses, so Mr Scott has scaled back their numbers.

The new borders flow across the area left after demolition of the extension and lead to a new gate into the walled garden. Planting here begins in the spring, with narcissus and early bulbs and, by early summer, the borders are filled with lavender, nepeta, roses, geranium and iris. Yellows (from *Achillea* 'Moonshine' and *Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm') and purples (salvia, lavender and nepeta) dominate and are repeated throughout the garden to help knit the space together.

Flagstones from the Victorian kitchen have been lifted and replaced to make the terrace that passes the new borders and wraps around to the back of the house, where the flags are dotted through a gravel planting. Here, where there is more shade, ferns, hellebores, acers

and box domes thrive. So effective is the broken-up planting one doesn't notice that the house and the wall that supports the raised lawn are aligned on different angles.

When the walled garden was redesigned in the early 2000s, Mr Scott created a system of three inter-connected ponds. The design cleverly flows around the western walls, with willows and a contorted hazel set around the first and largest pool. These have settled in so well that only the occasional glimpse of the old wall and a gnarled medlar remind one of the original productive garden. A circular lawn surrounded by raised beds of shrubs and perennials was designed for parties. The shrubs had been heavily pruned into domes but the Robertses allowed the ceanothus, ➤





**Above:** The circular pool, designed for the previous owners by James Scott, is one of many water features. Next to it is *Nepeta x faassenii*. **Below:** A sculpture by David Harber sits beside the pond and stops the eye from wandering into the landscape beyond

lilacs and other shrubs to grow out of their former confinement and become more relaxed. Above this lawn, and running along the upper walls, are a further two smaller ponds that lead to the new swimming pool, where Mr Scott has created a contemporary design of beds edged in rusted Corten steel.

There had been a swimming pool in almost the same spot before, as well as a garage in the far corner, but these were looking awkward with excessive hard landscaping. For weeks, bulldozers dug out the rubble, after which the new pool was laid and fresh beds set into the surrounds. Two small square planters of lavender are set into one end of the pool, with three larger planters edged with rusted steel running along its length. Each of the latter contains a central multi-stem *Prunus serrula*, the mahogany bark of which gleams through the confident underplanting of *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine', *Erigeron karvinskianus*, *Pennisetum* 'Hameln' and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna'. These give colour and interest until the autumn and more spring colour is provided by narcissus ('Pueblo', 'Sailboat' and 'Quail') and alliums (*A. atropurpureum*, 'Gladiator', *A. stipitatum* 'Violet Beauty', 'Christophii' and 'Globemaster').

By far the most dramatic introduction is the deep bed that runs along the base of the high wall at the top edge of the walled garden.



This could not be removed because, at some point in the mid 20th century, this south-west facing wall appears to have been built up and covered with render. Worse still, there are workshops on the other side. There was a good deal of consternation over what best to do, but Mr Scott's solution of using the now weathered surface as a backdrop for training vines and passionfruits has

proved a great success. Planted last year, these are already moving along their wires.

Four *Prunus serrula* are planted along the deep and generous bed, also edged with Corten steel. The planting here is selected to create an autumnal show and includes figs and *Stipa gigantea*, *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' and several euphorbias (*E. polychroma*, *E. mellifera*, *E. characias* subsp. ➤





***Stachys byzantina* 'Cotton Boll', a tall form of lamb's ears topped with velvety bobbles, softens the hard landscaping by the steps. Vines and passionfruit are trained against the south-west-facing weathered brick wall that remains from the old walled garden**

*wulfenii*), as well as *Macleaya cordata*, with palmate leaves that echo those of the figs.

Replacing the garage is a Griffin glasshouse. It leads past the pergola and through a pillared opening in the wall to the working areas, which have been given a cottagey feel with softer planting.

There is more to do before work is complete, not least the question of how to marry the simple Georgian front with the ornate Victorian pool, but the Robertses are in no hurry. Rather than rushing in, Goldingtons' new owners are happy to wait and reflect. 🐸

## Horticultural black book

**Garden design** James Scott of The Garden Company (01442 832666; [www.thegarden.co.uk](http://www.thegarden.co.uk))

**Landscaping** The Garden Company (01442 832666; [www.thegarden.co.uk](http://www.thegarden.co.uk))

**Riven Yorkstone paving** Reclaimed from the garden

**Greenhouse** Griffin Glasshouses (01962 772512; [www.griffinglasshouses.com](http://www.griffinglasshouses.com))

**Swimming pool** The Garden Company and Stephen Langley of Millennium Pools (07979 804994)

**Rusted-steel edging** T. Brown and Sons

(07825 925257; [www.tbrownandsons.co.uk](http://www.tbrownandsons.co.uk))

**Fountain and sculpture** David Harber (01235 859300; [www.davidharber.co.uk](http://www.davidharber.co.uk))

**Sawn sandstone and natural rock** Rand and Asquith (01484 719263; [www.randandasquith.co.uk](http://www.randandasquith.co.uk))