

Garden OF THE WEEK



Gardener Sandy Coppen, with some assistance

Location The Beeches, Barcombe, East Sussex BN8 5TS

Size 5 acres, including a wildflower paddock

Soil Leaning towards clay, but with some shingle

Open May 19, 20 and July 21

More info www.thebeechesbarcombe.com; www.ngs.org.uk.



A very English country classic

Lashings of perennial plantings contribute colour and energy to this elegant garden nestling in the East Sussex countryside

Words Naomi Slade
Photos Matthew Bruce

It's the stuff that dreams and period dramas are made of. Tea on softly-striped lawns, buildings with elegantly muted Regency grandeur, classically bouffant herbaceous borders and the heady scent of climbing roses in the air.

There were few of these things when Sandy Coppen first moved into The Beeches, near Barcombe, Sussex, nevertheless, it was the culmination of a long-held fantasy. "I was a photographic agent in London at the time, and my partner Kim and I both grew up nearby. So we used to cycle past a lot, thinking 'wouldn't it be great if we owned that!'"

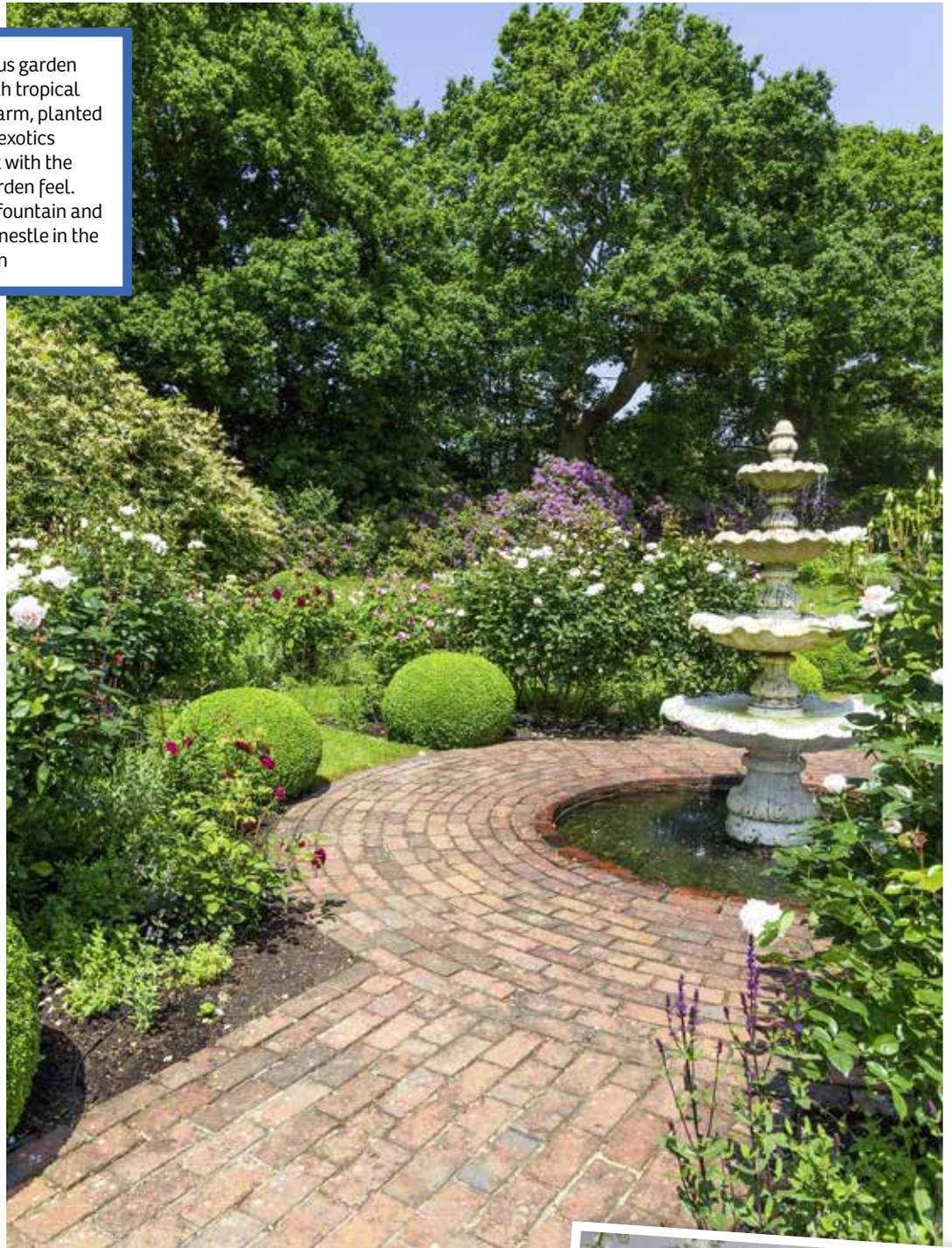
But the purchase was entirely serendipitous. Sandy had been helping a friend look for a house locally, but the friend changed her mind, so Sandy cancelled the estate agents and thought no more about it. "But I must have forgotten one! One day, out of the blue, we got the particulars. We moved in eight months later."

So it was, that in October 2000, the couple found themselves in proud possession of a much-coveted house, an overgrown garden with potential, and Jack the gardener, who had worked at The Beeches for 30 years.

"I don't know what we were thinking! I didn't know anything about gardening so I enrolled on some RHS courses and sought



This glorious garden bristles with tropical coastal charm, planted with spiky exotics to contrast with the cottage garden feel. Right, this fountain and brick path nestle in the rose garden



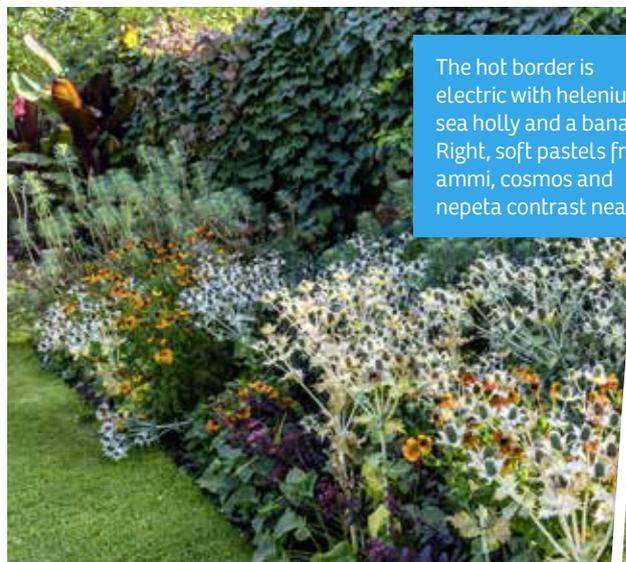
the help of fellow gardeners. We dug out and planted the first border a year later."

One of the initial jobs was working out - and sorting out - the things they didn't want. "There was *Rhododendron ponticum* all up one side so we got the diggers in and knocked it right back," she says, rather gleefully. And, as their confidence and experience grew, the plan came together.

The front garden with its lawn and a large lime tree was augmented by smart cubes of clipped box, they created the 'birdbath border' and, in 2009 they created a rose garden with a fountain. This, however, was not all plain-sailing.

"It was a big old job. We didn't get the roses in until 2011, and then the rabbits ate the lot practically overnight!" she says. Fortunately, along with her gardening skills, Sandy has developed a somewhat sanguine approach to trial and

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The hot border is electric with heleniums, sea holly and a banana. Right, soft pastels from ammi, cosmos and nepeta contrast nearby



Garden OF THE WEEK



'Dots and dashes'
Spires of foxgloves and blobs of astrantia give texture and form

'Backdrop'
Striking green hedging provides the perfect backdrop

'No straight lines..!'
Curved border edges are softer on the eye

error. "I always say that one should try things. Don't obey all the rules. It will either work or it won't."

With the garden more or less rabbit-proofed, features established, new plants growing well and the soil enriched with vast quantities of horse manure, Sandy's hand turned once again to constructive destruction. A large, gloomy, overgrown laurel bush that was hanging over a ditch was ripped out and the area reimagined as a cool woodland garden.

A pump has transformed the ditch into a running stream, the water trickling over rocks and stones on its way back to the pond, and solidly bridged with railway sleepers. Meanwhile the banks are studded with gunnera and tree ferns; towering foxgloves, frothy *Alchemilla mollis* and some magnificent hostas. "As the primroses and primulas spread, it is getting prettier and prettier each year," says Sandy.

Although it had humble beginnings, the house is now quite substantial, and the garden wraps around three quarters of it, with a kitchen garden to the east side. The lawns and borders are extensive and demonstrate a classic sense of style. Structure and height are provided by trees, walls and clipped evergreens, while lashings of perennial planting contribute colour and energy.



The perfect spot to marvel at the exquisite planting. Right, airy plants, such as opium poppies, give a cottage feel



"I've always been drawn towards herbaceous perennials," she says. "I struggle with shrubs but I'm trying to get over it. I like formality with a bit of chaos and I repeat plants a lot." As a result of this the garden hangs together well and, although the areas are themed, they segue in a pleasing fashion.

With an eye on managed chaos, Sandy likes to exert a certain amount of control on the garden's more renegade tendencies. "When

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Sandy's gardening tips

- 1** We apply nematodes every six weeks to guard against slugs.
- 2** Keep tools clean to prevent diseases spreading. After pruning the box and weeding under it, I spray the tools with Jeyes Fluid.
- 3** Support your wall-trained climbers with wire and vine-eyes, but make sure
- 4** you fit a tensioner (they're available from www.screwfix.com) so you can tighten it as necessary. My favourite hand tool is the wonderful speedweeder (find it at www.speedweeder.co.uk), you can go around all the annuals in a season and really get some pace up!

Sandy's country garden favourites



Euphorbia characias wulfenii
A cheerful, sun-loving evergreen that's drought tolerant once established and architectural in form. An easy back-of-the-border plant.



***Lavandula multifida* 'Spanish Eyes'**
A very attractive lavender with distinctively fern-like foliage and long, large, sky-blue flowers.



***Scabiosa caucasica* 'Fama'**
Beautiful free-flowering pincushions of intense blue are loved by butterflies. Blooms for months on end throughout summer and into autumn.



Roses 'Munstead Wood' and 'A Whiter Shade of Pale'
'Munstead Wood' with scented, wine-red blooms teams elegantly with bluish-pink 'A Whiter Shade of Pale'.



***Thalictrum* 'Hewitt's Double'**
A lovely double-flowered form of this airy perennial, which grows huge sprays of tiny pom-pom shaped flowers in late summer. Best grown in part shade.



***Helianthemum* 'Henfield Brilliant'**
Papery, hot orange flowers above silvery foliage make this a striking shrub for light, well-drained soil.

weeding through the borders you often find seedlings that are not supposed to be there. I call them the 'non-inviteds' and put them back where they need to be. For example, aquilegia and *Alchemilla mollis* keep trying to grow in the hot border, which is all red, orange and yellow. They are far too 'cottagey' for all that, so you have to hoik them out."

Her London life left behind, Sandy now runs The Beeches as a B&B, while tutors are brought in to use the new wooden barn for courses on subjects such as willow-

weaving and pruning. And, as spring gets into its stride, Sandy, Kim and their helpers have their hands full. "In April everything starts unfolding and growing like crazy," she says. "We're sowing like mad in the greenhouse, getting all the cut flowers and veg going, and Kim is starting mowing and general lawn-care, too."

"I love that fresh, new, green quality when the hedges and trees are covered in blossom and new leaves. And when the swallows come back to nest in the garage, I know that we're really off!"

The gunnera border, next to a babbling brook, is planted with alchemilla, hostas, ferns and foxgloves. They enjoy the shade and moisture

