

FROM AGE TO AGE

Anne and René Olivieri combined postmodern elements with the Georgian ideal at Morton Hall in Worcestershire. In doing so they created a flamboyant garden imbued with a sense of the past

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Shafts of dawn sunlight strike the Monopteros, setting fire to this atmospheric garden.

ANNE AND RENÉ OLIVIERI FIRST SAW Morton Hall in April 2007. A carpet of snake's head fritillaries beside the drive greeted them, and this massed planting made a dramatic first impression. "We were struck by the beauty of the meadow and the decision to buy Morton Hall was made almost immediately," remembers Anne. The Grade II listed Georgian house, built around 1780, is situated near Inkberrow in Worcestershire. Located on the crest of a steep embankment, the property enjoys spectacular views over the Vale of Evesham as far as the Malvern Hills and the Welsh mountains.

At the time, the eight acres of existing garden and park were dominated by large blocks of Edwardian laurel hedges. To the west of the house, the views were obscured by a semi-circle of pleached limes. Anne and René's vision was to link the house, garden and park to the wider estate beyond, in the way of the Georgian ideal. Ever mindful of this vision, in 2007 garden designer Charles Chesshire was commissioned to bring these ideas to life. His principal brief was to create external and internal vistas and a sense of connectivity. This he translated into a succession of linked garden rooms laid out around the house, each with its own planting style and colour scheme.

The journey begins in the Mediterranean-inspired West Garden where the house is less symmetrical. Rather than a formal lawn, a tongue of mown grass leads to the kitchen door, where it is bound with soft mounds of lavender, thyme and rosemary interspersed with the tall wiry stems of *Verbena bonariensis*; *Agapanthus* and white *Rosa* 'Kew Gardens' provide eye-catching highlights. This purple-themed planting is low, so as not to distract from the panoramic vista across the ha-ha and fields.

Nearby, the Kitchen Garden is "flamboyant and dramatic," says Anne. A combination of vegetables and flowers in hot colours has been planted to reflect the path of the sun, with the expressionist palette ranging from the pink-toned *Lilium* 'Black Beauty', magenta *Rosa* 'Falstaff' and pale lavender-coloured *Viticella Clematis* 'Emilia Plater' in the Sunrise Borders. In the Midday Borders, bright yellows, reds and oranges dominate in the shape of fiery lilies at the height of the summer, carried on by *Rudbeckia laciniata* 'Starcadia Razzle Dazzle', heleniums 'Moerheim Beauty' and 'Indianersommer' as well as *Lobelia cardinalis* 'Queen Victoria'. The Sunset Borders are all about dusky, burnt textures and colours.

Productive beds in the centre contrast against a background of dark chocolate-red dahlias 'Chat Noir' and 'Karma Choc'. Each corner of

Top Clipped topiary box shapes contrast with smooth parkland leading away from the house. **Right** The imposing front of Morton Hall catches sunlight at dawn.



Below Deep velvety red cactus *Dahlia* 'Chat Noir'. **Bottom** *Amaranthus* 'Pygmy Torch' edges potager beds in the Kitchen Garden.



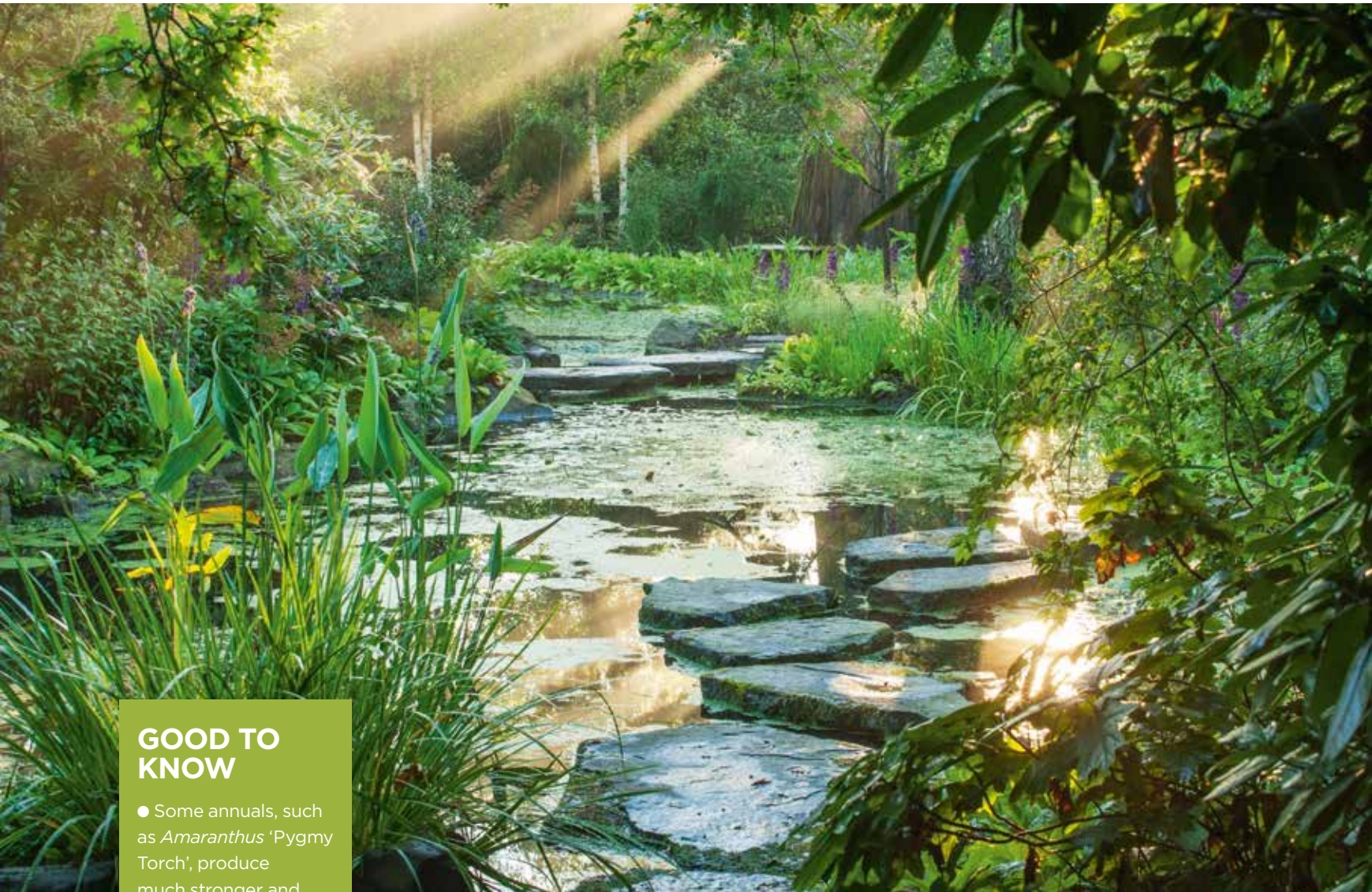
A combination of vegetables and flowers in hot colours has been planted to reflect the path of the sun

the carefully laid-out potager parterre is framed by small hedges of burgundy *Amaranthus* 'Pygmy Torch' and filled with *Cosmos* 'Brightness Mixed'. The vegetables here are chosen for aesthetic appeal as well as their culinary use. Swiss chard 'Bright Lights' is one example, set off by the orange tones of *Calendula* 'Citrus Cocktail'.

An archway leads to the South Garden which contains many elements that epitomise an English garden. Rectangular York stone terraces complement deep borders in impressionist pastels and planting is sumptuous, with emphasis on roses and *Clematis*.

A protected 200-year-old horse chestnut tree beside the South Garden provides shade beneath which are planted spring bulbs. Nearby, a wooden





GOOD TO KNOW

- Some annuals, such as *Amaranthus* 'Pygmy Torch', produce much stronger and healthier plants when directly sown outside compared to modular sowings under glass.
- Sow carrots between garlic and salsify, which act as carrot fly repellents. We also use an organic biological control to protect the brassicas, rather than netting.
- Apply liquid barley straw fortnightly to control blanket weed from March to May and September to October, and weekly from June to August. Additionally, clear debris and leaves with a net once weekly.



“The garden is a journey from Georgian elegance to post-modern reflection”

harbour clad in *Wisteria* leads to the rockery. This is a natural woodland dell approached by steep stone steps “like a rocky glacier” says Anne. The grey Kington rocks are seemingly strewn about, providing not only walkways but a background against which a cool blue-and-white planting scheme flows in successive waves.

A laurel dome leads to the Stroll Garden, presided over by an exquisite Japanese tea house. Stroll or promenade gardens are

a classic Japanese garden design that emerged in the Edo period (1600-1854). They usually consist of one or several ponds with a meandering path alongside, with the feature of a bridge

Above Artfully placed stepping stones lead the way across the pool in the Stroll Garden.

Left Late-flowering *Clematis* 'Emilia Plater' clammers through lily 'Black Beauty'.

or stepping stones across the water. Here, the stones appear to float across the dark pool and

provide an opportunity to view the June-flowering Japanese water irises (*Iris ensata*) and reflections of the trees and tea house at close range. The planting scheme is elegant and restrained, and amalgamates Asian and European planting styles in a continuous display from early spring to late autumn.

From the tea house, the garden continues across the drive in the four-acre fritillary meadow where tens of thousands of crocuses, daffodils, anemones and primulas also flourish in spring. The focal point of the meadow is the recent addition of a stone monopteros which has been positioned to capture the first rays of the sun each morning.

Anne describes her reformed garden as “a journey from Georgian elegance to post-modern reflection”. Her precise ideas and attention to detail, combined with the efforts of a hard-working team of gardeners led by Harry Green, a former RHS scholar at Aberglasney, mean that her original vision for the garden is now all but complete. ■

Morton Hall is open on selected days from 1 April to 30 September. Morton Hall Gardens, Morton Hall Lane, Redditch B96 6SJ. Tel: 01386 791820; mortonhallgardens.co.uk



Below Expressionist shades in the ‘Sunrise’ section of the Kitchen Garden borders.

MORTON HALL NOTEBOOK

Imposing sculpture and thoughtful landscaping have created a timeless, elegant garden setting



MONOPTEROS

The Monopteros was designed in 2014 by Berlin architect Carl Georg Luetcke. It is crafted from white sandstone imported from Saxony, Germany. A postmodern interpretation of the classical Monopteros, it can be viewed from all sides.



STEPPING STONES

Stepping stones in the Stroll Garden at Morton Hall are hewn from Welsh Kington rock and are set on brick pillars, 1.5m high, below the water’s surface. Niches have been left in the brick structures to provide shelter for amphibians.



CONTINUAL VIEW

The Malvern and Clee Hills offer a grand view from Morton Hall. An illusion of continuity has been created by felling selected trees on the edge of the Hall’s escarpment, building a ha-ha and by taking the west lawn all the way up to the kitchen terrace.



WOOD SCULPTURE

Anne and René commissioned artist Andy Burgess to create a series of wooden pillars from an ailing *Sequoiadendron* that had to be felled. The resulting sculptures were assembled to create the impression of a collapsed structure tumbling down the slope.