

# PRIVATE VIEW

PHOTOGRAPHS NICOLA STOCKEN | WORDS STEPHANIE MAHON

A walled garden in Berkshire has been transformed from flat and featureless into an intriguing space with different levels, features and themed rooms to discover

A swing seat  
from Fantails  
([www.fantails.net](http://www.fantails.net))  
by the pool at  
Wickham House.

**D**esigner Robin Templar Williams was called in by Philippa and James D'Arcy to redesign the half-acre walled garden at Wickham House in Berkshire in 2007. The space, surrounded by beautiful 19th-century walls, had in the past been used to grow cut flowers and vegetables for the house, but the couple wanted to create something more interesting - a series of garden rooms with different themes, from cottage planting to Mediterranean, all within a classic framework. The result is an updated 'English' style garden, featuring varied planting in both formal and informal areas. →



► FROTH OF FLOWERS

This avenue of *Alchemilla mollis* and catmint *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant' leads to a wall fountain. Robin acknowledges this pairing is 'a bit of a cliché, but I'm a great believer in good doers, and it is an all-time favourite combination'. The climbers are planned to soon cover the entire woodwork of the pergolas, which are built from larch, to create 'a living green tunnel, consumed by the planting'. Copper lamps hang between the struts to illuminate at night.



▼ TOUCH OF FORMALITY

A more formal pathway is lined with yew hedges and box balls in lead containers - Philippa is now replacing these with new ones from Suregreen. Choisya bushes sit either side of another wall fountain. Both are from Architectural Heritage, a company that creates copies of original period pieces. This clean, crisp style contrasts with the floriferous, informal feel elsewhere in the garden.



→ The starting point of the design was the yet-to-be-constructed swimming pool, and a building beside it which was to contain a dining room, sitting room, art room and changing room. Robin suggested moving the site from the centre of the garden, and making the building asymmetric and L-shaped. This building and area became the point from which the rest of the garden design grew.

Robin split the space into five separate areas using hedging and large pergola walks that run through the space at different angles. He wanted those experiencing the finished garden to feel immersed in each of the areas individually, so he used planting to obscure and reveal each diversely themed space in turn, as one journeys through the space. Gravel paths lead in various directions to benches and fountains, the swimming pool, the sunken lawn and summerhouse, a green-and-cream area and an informal walk around the periphery

of the garden. 'The pergolas link the architectural elements of the garden,' he explains, 'and the careful use of large shrubs and trees such as yew and holm oak serve to hold and separate the spaces, and anchor all the different parts of the garden. I used the rest of the planting to soften the buildings and structures - the line of the design is strong, but the planting softens the edges.'

The result is a classic garden of rooms with a modern twist. 'There's a mix going on here, a fusion of old favourites like roses and lupins; integrated with high, wispy perennials such as gaura and cephalaria; and scatter-through plants, such as *Stipa gigantea*, which obscure the boundaries between areas without compartmentalising the design, and soften the formality and rigidity of the box and yew.'

The garden opens for the National Gardens Scheme, and for groups of 20 or more by appt, May to Sept. [www.wickhamhouse.com](http://www.wickhamhouse.com)



◀ WELCOME WALK

The entrance to the walled garden is through a wrought-iron gate in line with the house. The gravel path is edged with standard bay trees and box balls in lead containers, with borders of *Iris* 'Black Tie Affair', alliums, cardoons and foxtail lilies. It leads to a gazebo, from which the pergola walks that define the garden spaces emanate.

*The result is a classic garden of rooms with a modern twist*

◀ ALL GOING SWIMMINGLY

The pool house was the pivot for the design. Robin took the opportunity to change levels here, and drop the pool down into the landscape, out of the eyeline of the rest of the garden. In the raised beds, which are built with drystone walls, he gave the area a Mediterranean feel, with ealegnus trees to mimic the look of olives. *Cephalaria*, *Rosa Graham Thomas* and red lupins offer a warm scheme against the York stone paving. In a luxurious touch, steps continue down right into the swimming pool, which features dark-green tiles. →





► **TREE TUNNEL**

A 'bosquette' of multi-stemmed, high-pruned *Malus toringo* var. *sargentii* trees arch over a lawn in the green-and-cream area. Robin loves this variety of crab apple, and uses it often in his gardens. In spring, it puts on a show of white blossom, and in autumn it has colourful foliage and fruits. Beyond, through the gap in the yew hedge, is a contemporary figurative sculpture by the artist John Brown. Philippa has several of his works, which focus on relationships. See [johnbrown-sculptor.co.uk](http://johnbrown-sculptor.co.uk)



► **BEAUTIFUL BOWER**

This arched walkway was handmade by Tristen May ([www.tristenmay.co.uk](http://www.tristenmay.co.uk)). It is made from galvanised steel, and supports clematis such as 'The President' and climbing roses. After a few years, Philippa began to dislike the woody, bare look of the clematis in the off season, and is soon replacing them with Group 2 varieties, so this year the show is offered solely by roses.



DESIGNER PROFILE

**ROBIN TEMPLAR WILLIAMS** runs a garden and landscape design consultancy based in Wiltshire, specialising predominantly in large private gardens in the UK and internationally. Robin has received numerous awards including several RHS Gold Medals at RHS Chelsea and Hampton Court Palace Flower Shows. In addition to his design practice, he is very much involved with the industry, including the Society of Garden Designers (SGD), the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) and the Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD) USA. As well as designing, he is a director and co-principal of the Garden Design School, a private school teaching garden design to professional standards. [www.robinwilliams.co.uk](http://www.robinwilliams.co.uk)



◀ **RELAXING SPOT**

Beyond the pergola and a beautiful early summer scheme of roses and foxgloves, there is a sunken lawn that ends in a raised deck with seating, and a summerhouse. The elegant Lavenham model from HSP Garden Buildings has a lead roof and a decorated interior, where Philippa and her husband James love to sit and enjoy the garden.



◀ **HAPPY HUT**

Philippa found her rattan furniture at OKA ([www.okadirect.com](http://www.okadirect.com)). The snug in the background was a custom build by Southview Garden Architecture, and then thatched by master thatcher Jason Morley ([www.master-thatchers.co.uk](http://www.master-thatchers.co.uk)). It is now smothered in *Rosa* 'Paul Noël'. This paved terrace also features large colourfully planted pots.

