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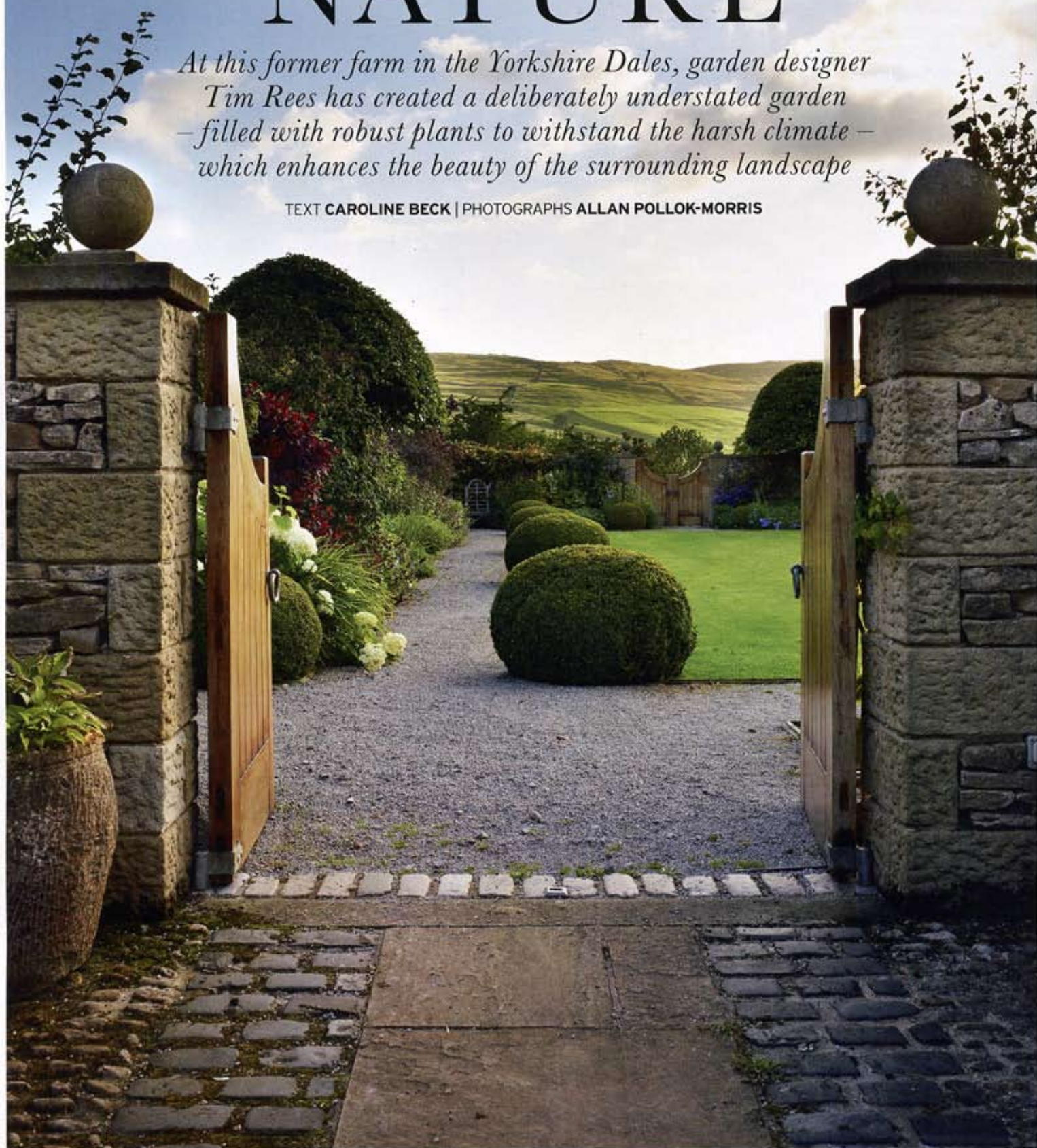
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At this former farm in the Yorkshire Dales, garden designer Tim Rees has created a deliberately understated garden – filled with robust plants to withstand the harsh climate – which enhances the beauty of the surrounding landscape

TEXT CAROLINE BECK | PHOTOGRAPHS ALLAN POLLOK-MORRIS





OPPOSITE At the back of the house, wooden gates open into the walled garden, made by local drystone wallers using stones from the nearby River Wharfe. THIS PAGE A lawn opens up at the front of the house, with views towards Kilnsey Crag, part of a long limestone escarpment.





The eighteenth-century landscape designer Capability Brown famously created artificial landscapes that his clients swooned over: the odd serpentine lake here, a copse there; and, if an ugly village offended the eye, he had it moved. Garden designers have always employed conjuring tricks when the surrounding landscape doesn't quite match up to the vision of paradise their clients demand. This usually involves distracting the eye or covering up the eyesore with judicious planting. But at Throstles Nest in the Yorkshire Dales, designer Tim Rees has wholeheartedly embraced the landscape surrounding the former farm and deliberately turned down the volume on the garden. 'The story here is the landscape, and anything other than simple planting would have detracted from it,' he says.

And it's a landscape by which only the unimaginative could fail to be enthralled. The stone house lies in a densely wooded fold in the valley, bound on one side by the upland turmoil of the River Wharfe and on the other by a long, scree-marked limestone escarpment. Kilnsey Crag, a favourite of climbers, stands like an Easter Island statue, with drystone walls the colour of ashes and silver running crazily across the fells. Before being commissioned by the owners, Jo Haigh and her partner,

Tim had never been to Yorkshire. 'It had a bleakness and grandeur that reminded me of some parts of France,' he says. And it was a magazine article about a French garden that Tim had designed, Mas de Pilon, that first caught Jo's eye. 'We had other designers here who suggested things such as an Elizabethan parterre, but when I saw Tim's French garden, I liked the simplicity and the structure. So I called him up and we immediately got on.'

That was 12 years ago and now the garden has quietly filled out and yet never fought with the long view across the fields and fells – a view that hasn't changed in hundreds of years. At the front of the house, mounds of cloud-pruned box and large sycamore trees pick up the billow of the moving, massed clouds – in the Yorkshire Dales, the sky is never still – and the drama comes from numerous acers, their finely cut leaves looking as though a dressmaker has gone mad with pinking shears. All the plants have to be tough. 'The house faces south, but it also gets all the weather, so the plants have to be able to withstand anything,' says Tim. The flowers are kept to blues and purples, which seem to intensify in the long summer evenings.

The main garden is at the back of the house, where interconnected courtyards and allées

backed with clipped hornbeam hedging gather around a larger walled garden. 'There was no garden here – it was just an access route for the builders renovating the house – and so the land was traumatised, rutted and compacted by heavy machinery,' says Tim. The walled garden, which was made using the skills of local drystone wallers, builders and joiners, has more late-summer perennial planting such as veronicastrum, phlox, agastache, thalictrum and campanulas, but again the colours are rich purples and blues, with a little white to stop it being too moody. Some of the stones in the walls, softened and rounded by thousands of years of being battered in the river, look like giant sugar lumps, their pale colour a contrast to the green of espaliered apples, plums and cherries.

But wherever you are in the garden, your eye is always looking up to the limestone landscape. 'I love working on limestone. It feels lighter, and the flora is richer,' says Tim. Another unexpected collaboration is between the garden and the wildlife. Jo regularly sees black and white oystercatchers on her lawn, blackbirds nesting in the cloud-pruned box and, aptly for the name of the house, song thrushes in the sycamores □

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OPPOSITE A raised waterlily pond is edged with tightly clipped box. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Large sycamore trees contrast in scale with box mounds at the front of the house. A gate opens on to the garden at the front, with a meadow beyond. Portuguese laurel trees flank the gate to the walled garden. White cosmos grows in a stone container in the front garden. A ha-ha acts as boundary between the garden and the meadow