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DESIGNER SECRETS

Tim Rees reveals the inspiration behind this Provençal garden's deceptively simple scheme



DESIGNER PROFILE

TIM REES graduated from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in 1982

and formed a design partnership with Brita von Schoenaich in the 1990s. Together they developed their own naturalistic style of planting design. In 2003, Tim started his own practice, Trees Associates. He has received international acclaim for his modern country gardens and restoration work, as well as for his bolder, more contemporary urban designs. In addition to designing landscapes and gardens across the UK, he has worked in France, Corfu, Italy and America.

THE BRIEF The clients wanted their garden at the foot of the Alpilles in Provence to be divided into themed rooms. The olive garden (shown) was created close to the house as a shield against the mistral.

"When I first visited the garden, it had just a partial allée of plane trees, a few cypresses and the remnants of plastic greenhouses set around an old farmhouse. The rest of the plot was made up of open fields with no wind protection from the damaging mistral, so my first job was to provide a shelter-belt. We enclosed the main part of the garden with a wall and in one area created this olive garden.

"Provençal gardens demand a structural palette and I was inspired by Nicole de Vésian's use of clipped, rounded shrubs and topiary in her iconic garden. The design works well here, creating a thoroughly relaxing landscape; to my mind, perennials send a subliminal message of staking and hard work. I used two types of santolina punctuated by eight olive trees that form a square pattern – you can see just two of them here. The only other colours are the red of the dwarf pomegranate – a highlight among the silvery cerastium and a useful spreading plant that knits the other shrubs together beautifully – and a few spires of lavender."



USING A MONO-CULTURE SCHEME

"I like to create very simple gardens using just one or two types of plant, which provide a refreshing contrast in scale and complexity to more intricate plantings. Here, I have chosen a silver and green form of santolina, a tough ground-hugging evergreen shrub native to the Mediterranean. To add interest, I set out the plants in a geometric pattern, like a contemporary parterre."

INTERVIEW ZIA ALLAWAY



2 MAINTAINING GARDENS IN PROVENCE

"Although I have worked with a drought-resistant planting scheme, I installed an eco-friendly irrigation system for the lawn, whereby water is pumped up from an underground well. Regular pruning is required to maintain the rounded shapes of the trees and shrubs. We clip the olives in January or February and the santolina and evergreens early in spring. For the rest of the year, the plants take care of themselves."

3 CHOOSING TREES FOR A MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE

"As well as the olive trees, I have used another Mediterranean native, the carob tree. It has a long tradition in this area as the pods are used for animal feed and as a cocoa bean substitute in chocolate. Both trees are drought-resistant and, with a bit of shelter, can withstand the harsh winds."

FACT FILE

KEY PLANTS

- *Cerastium tomentosum* (snow-in-summer).
- *Ceratonia siliqua* (carob).
- *Erigeron karvinskianus*.
- *Lavandula stoechas* (French lavender).
- *Olea europaea* (common olive).
- *Perovskia atriplicifolia* (Russian sage).
- *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Variegatum'.
- *Punica granatum* (pomegranate).
- *Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary).
- *Santolina chamaecyparissus* (syn. *S. incana*), *S. rosmarinifolia* subsp. *rosmariniflora* (syn. *S. virens*).
- *Stipa tenuissima*.
- *Teucrium fruticans* (tree germander).

WHERE TO BUY

Perryhill Nurseries,

01892 770377, perryhillnurseries.co.uk. Supplies a variety of sun-loving shrubs suitable for Mediterranean-style gardens.

Merandal,

0033 4 90 49 16 10, pepiniere-merandal.com. Supplier of a wide range of sun-loving shrubs. Based in St Etienne du Grès, Provence.

Pépinière Filippi,

0033 4 67 43 88 69, jardin-sec.com. Nursery with mail order, specialising in drought-tolerant plants. Based near Montpellier.

LANDSCAPE MATERIALS

The landscaping here is primarily soft green lawn made up of drought-tolerant grasses. A protective wall behind the planting was made from breeze blocks with a simple concrete render.

WHERE TO BUY

Castorama,

0033 8 10 10 41 04, castorama.fr. The French arm of B&Q, offering a good range of building materials.

CONTACT DETAILS

Trees Associates,
020 8965 7085,
treesassociates.com. ■