



## GARDEN DIRECTIONS TIM REES

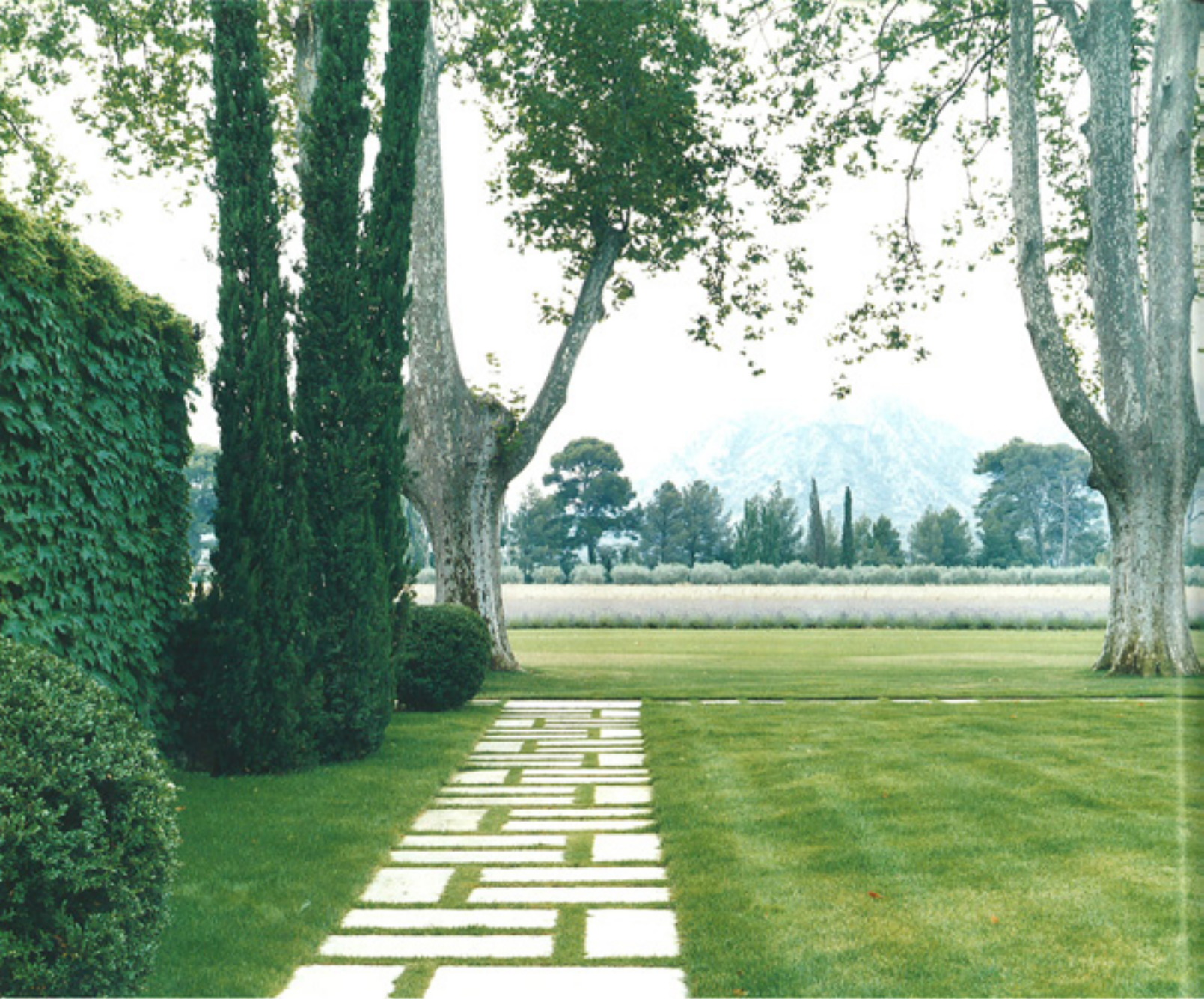


TOP Beyond the horizontal planes of the lavender field, flower meadow – here in seed – and olive grove, a line of mature pines and the jagged outlines of the Alpilles provide a breathtaking boundary to the garden. BOTTOM A large-scale topiary planting in the French Garden



In the first of a series assessing current gardening trends, TANIA COMPTON leafs through the portfolio of Tim Rees





ABOVE A view of the Alpiques from the lawn near the house. BELOW The house, behind its protective line of magnificent plane trees. OPPOSITE A corner of the terrace





Mild-mannered garden designer Tim Rees has reached an exciting stage in his professional life, with a stream of clients as varied as the sites with which they present him. Tim modestly attributes his ability to adapt to the challenges of different projects – recent work includes a maritime garden commission on Cape Cod, and an arid-zone planting scheme in Umbria – to his extensive training in horticulture. Tim worked in the Oxford Botanic Garden for five years before undertaking the three-year diploma course at Kew; in both places he absorbed a knowledge of plants that is the cornerstone of his versatility as a designer. He learnt how to lay paving and drainage at Merrist Wood College, was course director at the Inchbald School of Garden Design and has also done a stint as a 'horticultural therapist'.

Tim is best known, and still lauded, for his work as joint orchestrator (with business partner Brita von Schoenaich) of the 1995 'Perennial Symposium' at Kew





on naturalistic planting. International experts in the field gathered to inspire a mesmerized audience of landscape architects and garden designers, many of whom have never looked back. Tim's early experimental meadow plantings, growing indigenous and non-native plants together, were already under way at the time of the symposium. 'Meadows have become my first love and possibly my favourite work. You are impelled to walk through them and they subtly communicate a sense of balance, which is what good gardening is all about.'

Tim's work is not, however, exclusively concerned with natural planting. His structural design and formal planting are on a par with his meadows, legacy perhaps of his experience working with a handful of horticultural doyennes he is happy to call his mentors, such as Rosemary Verey. 'I spent so many formative weekends at Barnsley House and learnt totally to trust Rosemary's opinions. When she felt I was ready, she was incredibly generous about passing on work to me.' Anne Cox Chambers, who has been a client of Tim's for fifteen years, was introduced to him by Rosemary. Tim speaks of Anne with admiration and fondness. His favourite clients are those who are as passionate about their gardens as he is. 'The best clients are those who wish to make a practical contribution – they understand the how and why of garden development, and end up with the most interesting gardens.'

That is certainly the case with Nancy and Holcombe Green. Tim has been working with them for the past five years on their garden outside St-Rémy-de-Provence. It is hard to believe that until five years ago Mas des Pylons, the garden on these pages, was a semi-derelict group of farm buildings on clay – cracked and unyielding when the sun shone, like chewing gum when it rained. The site was flat but not featureless, with its magnificent view towards the jagged-tooth-topped range of the Alpilles, a garden boundary that dwarfs any other. A majestic line of plane trees mitigates the sun's violence in summer and seems to magnify cooling breezes – though judging from the bent trunks of old cypresses behind the house, there is more mistral than breeze here. To create an instant windbreak, the entire contents of a tree nursery near Nimes were transplanted into paddocks behind the garden; walls also shelter this north side of the garden from the mistral.

Tim created a series of linked gardens, including the stark, atmospheric Santolina Garden, where ancient olive trees have been planted in four identical squares, underplanted with santolina and wall germander; these make wavy undulations in spring and summer, when they are pruned into dense balls. Such detailed and intense planting on this the north side of the house is a wonderful contrast to the expansiveness of the garden to the south. The pancake-flat valley has been planted in horizontal planes that direct the eye to the hills like a

LEFT In the French Garden, Tim Rees played games with conventional topiary, making undulating patterns of interlocking geometric shapes



lesson in perspective, gradually rising from lawn to lavender field, through meadow to a distant grove of olives. A densely planted mound of mature pines and cypresses disguises the only jarring note in this landscape, a red and white electricity pylon.

This garden exemplifies Tim's many talents. The design is simple but spatially varied and exciting, there are dramatic long vistas and the planting befits his years in botanic gardens. His attention to detail is apparent in the skilful way he bridges the gap from terrace to lawn by laying large, limestone paving stones in a regular pattern with wide margins of grass between each slab. The French Garden turns conventional topiary on its head, with a wall of shapes that merge into or perch on top of each other in a horticultural juggling act. The garden feels, looks and smells good but it also produces abundant fruit. The larder is stocked with jars of preserves: pear, apricot and orange marmalade, quince cheese, *compote de figes*, cherries in brandy. The almond trees



provide almonds for pralines, olives are turned into oil and paste, and trailer loads of lavender flowers are taken annually to St Rémy, where they are used to make lavender oil and water.

Tim is diffident about his success. He credits his clients and mentors but most lavishly his business partner Brita. The partnership's portfolio is divided more or less equally between projects for businesses and Tim's private commissions. 'We bounce ideas off each other and can bring a fresh perspective to each other's work.' Work that is innovative, exhilarating and, according to Tim's adoring clients, wonderful to live with □

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OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Cypress hedging. Olive trees underplanted with santolina and wall germander. The Pool Garden. The Santolina Garden. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Cyresses bent by the mistral. An avenue of clipped *Quercus ilex*. Plane trees lead to a summerhouse. The meadow in seed