

# COUNTRY LIFE®

PPA MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR 2019

EVERY WEEK | AUGUST 21

## Is this the corgi's last stand?



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Why your kitchen needs antiques









# Taking the long view

*The Newt in Somerset, Bruton, Somerset*

Rarely, these days, are gardens made on such a scale and with such vision as those at the former Hadspen House, says Kathryn Bradley-Hole

Photographs by Clive Nichols

**I**N 2013, an advertisement in *COUNTRY LIFE* set in motion the reinvention of Hadspen House, in Somerset, which had belonged to the Hobhouse family since 1785 and had, in the 1990s, become famous in garden circles for the colour-themed walled garden planted by Sandra and Nori Pope.

South African businessman Koos Bekker and his wife, Karen Roos, saw in the advert the opportunity to buy somewhere that was already special and into which they could invest their own enthusiasms for English gardens and traditions.

Here, they might also make something new, adventurous and lasting, perhaps in the spirit of Babylonstoren, their organic estate in the Drakenstein valley of the Cape winelands of South Africa.

Hadspen House, set within 300 acres of parkland and pasture, struck Karen as one of the most beautiful Georgian country houses she had ever seen: 'Rather small, strictly symmetrical and with the burnt orange glow of the Hadspen limestone.'

In the 1970s, Penelope Hobhouse lived here, launching her career with the publication of her first book, *The Country Gardener* (Phaidon, 1976), based on her experience developing the garden. After she moved to Tintinhull in 1979, Hadspen's parabolic and steeply sloping walled garden was rented by Canadian nursery owners the Popes, whose refined and very-high-maintenance, colour-coordinated approach to planting was documented in their seminal book *Colour By Design* (1998/9).

After they left in 2005, Niall Hobhouse, Penelope's son, ploughed up the walled garden and launched an open competition for new design ideas, but after much discussion, argument and comment nothing was done—until now.

**This is one of several colour-themed gardens, vibrant with *Crocosmia*, day lilies and various *Stipa* grasses**

On acquiring the Emily Estate (as it's known), the Bekkers brought in a tried-and-trusted friend, the French restoration architect Patrice Taravella, whose historicist leanings and eye for design details are winningly accompanied by a connoisseur's appreciation of gardens and good food (*COUNTRY LIFE*, June 25, 2014).

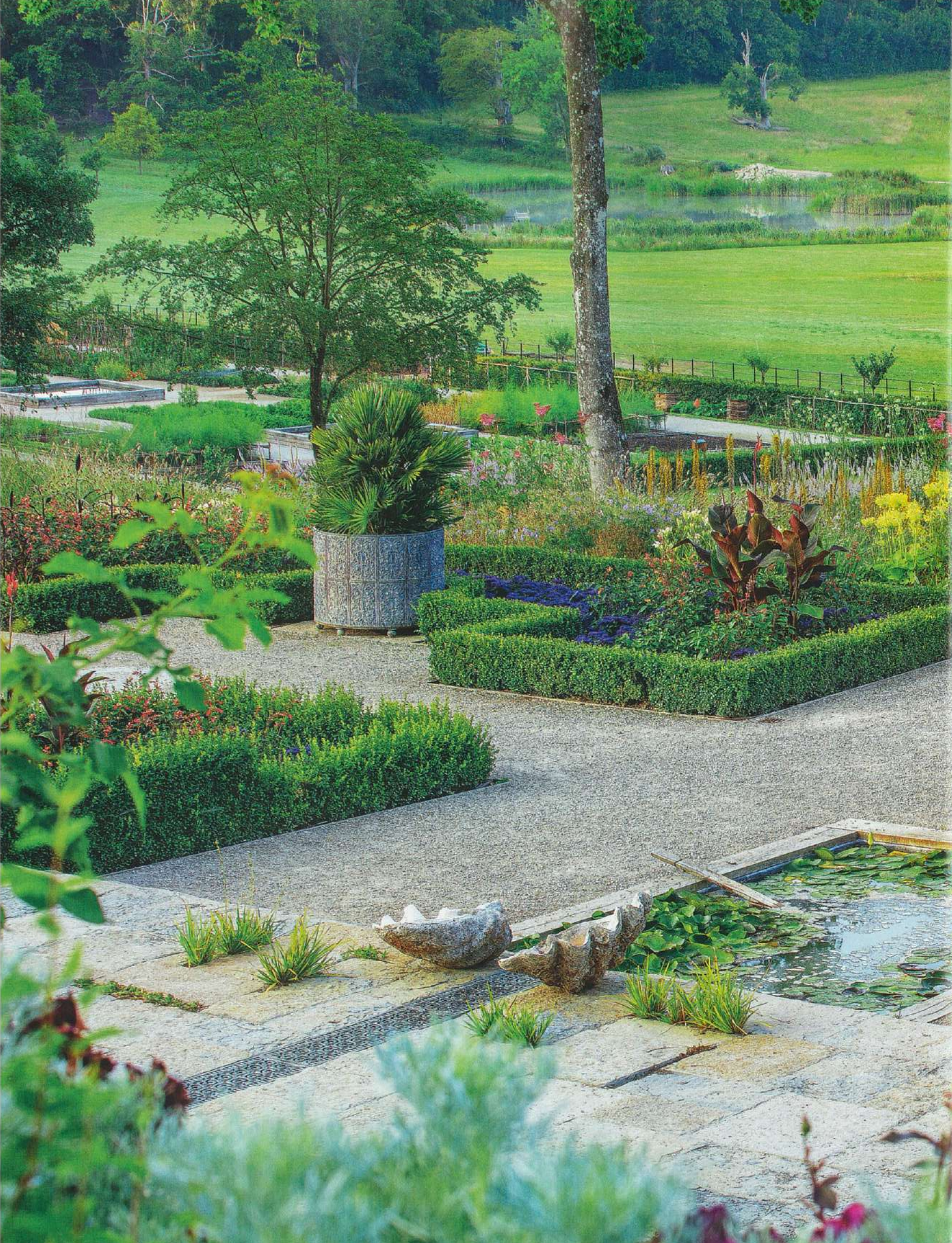
It was M. Taravella whom the Bekkers had engaged to transform their Cape Dutch farm of Babylonstoren into the thriving, photogenic visitor attraction and centre of horticulture it now is. At Hadspen, a similar approach was sought. As Karen says: 'Patrice is an exceptional architect, who brings out the latent character of a place, rather than imposing something new. I love working with quirky people.'

In the six years that have passed since the idea of creating a complex garden and visitor attraction first took root, an impressive amount has been achieved, enabling the gardens to be launched this summer; the opening of The Newt hotel (in the refurbished Hadspen House) follows at the end of this month.

Visitors arrive some way north of the garden, where the car park is the most floral I've seen anywhere, with a collection of crab-apple trees and flowerbeds separating the orderly rows. From there, a serpentine boardwalk of close-set, narrow planks wends its way through woodland to a fine, stone threshing barn that acts as a meet-and-greet area. This might at first be thought to have existed since the 17th century, but its crisp new stonework reveals that it's only just been built, by traditional methods.

From there, the lie of the land starts to make itself felt. The uppermost section of the Parabola—Hadspen's renowned old walled garden—comes into view across a short stretch of lawn. The ground falls away fairly steeply to the south-west, revealing views of the lovely, undulating Somerset country; the old, curving wall following the downhill gradient. ➤













*Preceding pages:* Parterres of Victorian-style summer bedding flank lily ponds on one of the upper terraces. *Above:* The former kennels now make a smart hen-house

Despite the long-understood practical benefits that a curved wall can offer, particularly for ripening fruits, curved walled gardens are quite rare. This one, dating from the early 19th century, is a three-quarters-of-an-acre suntrap, owing to its south-westerly incline, and it's here that the most intensively detailed landscaping and planting have taken place.

Its key focus is English apples, a theme that runs throughout the gardens and estate.

'In previous ages,' says Karen, 'when water was too dangerous to drink, locals consumed gallons of juice and cider every week. We started collecting proverbs and quips that celebrate apples. The Romans, I discovered, had a lovely expression: *ab ovo usque ad mala* or 'from the egg to the apples', meaning from the start to the end of the meal. That links the egg shape of the Parabola rather nicely to apples.'

The walled garden's interior was, therefore, levelled out into a series of descending





*Left: The lower section of the cascade, where the Giant Toad and her offspring fire trick jets of water. Above: The view up the Long Walk to Hadspen House*

meadow and the productive kitchen garden, where dozens of squared-up beds are raising crops for the garden cafe.

The Long Walk leads past a series of small, colour-themed gardens and above them is the Cascade, where water tricks send out surprise jets, among toad and fish sculptures in a 'pond' of mosaic pebble-work and bronze water-lily pads.

As befits a watery area, assorted aquatic plants flank the stepped cascade that descends a gentle hill. Areas of stylised damp meadow grow either side, enlivened by ligularias and primulas, liatris and astilbe.

The Cottage Garden contains colourful beds encircling a tiny, original 17th-century thatched cottage. I wasn't sure of the purpose of its pergola, running along the garden's western edge, because you can't stroll under it, as pergolas are meant to be used.

**“Karen Roos began the project “absolutely clueless. One thing simply led to another”**

Nearby a new French greenhouse of 19th-century design is gradually being populated with exotics. Its first occupants include a big old pomegranate with gnarled trunks, ancient cycads and shapely succulents. Look carefully and you'll see the apple theme continued in the specially commissioned ironwork grilles aerating the glasshouse floor.

As if this weren't enough, there are woodland walks that lead to new and developing features, including a museum of gardening and even a reconstruction of a Roman villa. A bakery, gift and farm shops and a Cyder Cellar are already open.

Karen says she began the project 'absolutely clueless. One thing simply led to another—we got carried away'. Be that as it may, to create a garden of this complexity

### The Newt's horticultural black book

- The overall design was by French restoration architect Patrice Taravella ([www.vignamaggio.com](http://www.vignamaggio.com))

- The ironwork throughout the gardens was completed by both a local ironmonger and Ironart of Bath ([www.ironart.co.uk](http://www.ironart.co.uk))

- The Victorian-style glasshouse was made by Serres et Ferronneries d'Antan, France ([www.serresdantan.com](http://www.serresdantan.com))

- The new barns and buildings, shop and Cyder area were designed by the estate manager Paul Rawson, who is also an architect

- The boardwalk was created by Paul Rawson, working in house with landscape architect Katie Lewis

- Water cascade and trick fountains are from Waterscapes, Wincanton, Somerset ([www.waterscapeslimited.com](http://www.waterscapeslimited.com))

- Dry-stone walling was by local specialist Tom Trouton (01747 840447; [www.tomtrouton.co.uk](http://www.tomtrouton.co.uk))

- Landscape construction, including the walled garden, was by specialists LDC Ltd, of Guildford, Surrey ([www.ldclandscape.co.uk](http://www.ldclandscape.co.uk))

terraces, supported by dry-stone walling and reached along gently sloping paths of cobble and hoggins. An aerial view reveals a symmetrical pattern of curves and circles centred on a fountain pool and descending rill.

The swirling design is reinforced by curved evergreen hedging and ironwork fruit tunnels. Hundreds of apple trees have been planted as cordons, espaliers, step-overs and goblets.

Echoing the culinary intentions of the walled garden and the raised-up, glass-walled restaurant beside it, rows of recently planted orchard apples reach away to the horizon across the fields on the opposite hillside.

A gate in the straight south wall at the bottom leads to the grassy area for free-ranging hens that live in the former kennels. This new, semicircular area forms the lower half of the 'egg' design begun with the arc of the Parabola. South of it is an ancient, square bathing pond, set into a square lawn, with a turf vista: the Long Walk that leads to the house. Eastwards lies a wildflower

from scratch is an extraordinary achievement—and one that's driven with passion and, mostly importantly, the long view. *The Newt in Somerset, Bruton, Somerset. In partnership with GWR, The Newt has arranged a day return trip from London Paddington to The Newt, including first-class, same-day rail travel, breakfast and light supper on the train, transfers to and from The Newt, guided tours of the gardens, lunch in the Garden Café and cider tastings. Available until October 27, £285pp. Telephone 01963 577777 or visit [www.thenewtinsomerset.com](http://www.thenewtinsomerset.com)*