

Stone walls shelter deep borders of thriving perennials, including *Phlox*, *Thalictrum* and hardy geraniums.

SUMMER LOVING

Perennials rule at this Cornish garden, which peaks in midsummer when its hot border bursts into bloom – a testament to owner Wendy Perry’s artistic skill in combining colour and texture with accomplished flair

WORDS **STEPHANIE MAHON** PHOTOGRAPHS **JOHN CAMPBELL**

CORNISH GARDENS, WITH THEIR ATTENDANT CAMELLIAS, rhododendrons and magnolias, are often associated with spring. The surprise of Bosvigo in Truro is that it is, in fact, a summer garden, created by owner Wendy Perry over the past 40 years.

“Shrubs rule in Cornwall,” she says, “but I am not a shrub person at all – in fact, I hate camellias. It is the mouldability of herbaceous plants that attracts me. You can create an effect with them within a year or two, but when it comes to shrubs, you have to wait four to five years to see if you have made a mistake; or they die on you.”

The 2.5 acres of gardens Wendy tends include a walled garden with glasshouse, a woodland walk, a small parterre and a hot garden that peaks in August. “I am all about colour,” Wendy explains. “One of my earliest memories is of lying under a poppy and looking up through the red blooms. It was my need for colour that made me want to do a late-season hot garden. When you first start gardening you get very sniffy about red things and think, how vulgar, but now I love the vulgarity of it.”

The hot garden is a hedged space mostly hidden from the house, not betraying its extravagant nature until you round the corner, and then, pow: a vision of vermillion and burgundy, maroon and tangerine, mustard and ochre assails you. Plants including dahlias, *Crocosmia*, *Salvia*, *Lobelia*, *Hemerocallis* and *Helenium* vie for attention among dark foliage and spicy blooms. The colours clash, contrast and harmonise in turn,

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moving the eye around constantly in a balancing act achieved by an accomplished gardener.

“My background is in art,” Wendy explains, “so it is kind of like painting pictures on the ground for me. It is not the easiest spot to grow on. Christopher Lloyd once asked me why I made the hot garden in such a shady area, but I am overhung with trees, so really it was the only place to put it.”

The other spaces here are influenced by the steeply sloping terrain that surrounds Bosvigo House, a patchwork construction, with sections dating from medieval and Stuart times remodelled by the Victorians. The courtyard areas around the house are framed by hedges, rock faces and walls, and Wendy’s aim when she began 30 years ago was to create a sense of enclosure.

“We pulled down an Edwardian wing that was stuck on the side, and in doing so balanced the front of the house. With the stone that was left, we built garden walls – I had always wanted a walled garden,” she says. The resulting space offers a small lawn

edged with large herbaceous beds of pink and pastel blooms that peak in June and July. Around the feature bench, topiary and glasshouse are masses of *Aconitum* and *Astrantia*, *Phlox* and *Thalictrum*. “I love thalictrums,” says Wendy. “I studied the work of Norah Lindsay and she fired them off at random in her plantings. The cultivars I have chosen mean I have thalictrums blooming from the end of May until September.”

Her other plant superstars include dark astrantias such as ‘Hadspen Blood’, “as long as you always deadhead them”;



WENDY'S TOP PLANTING IDEAS

■ Take a notebook whenever you visit gardens or go out in your own, so you can write down combination ideas. You will not remember otherwise, even if you think you will.

■ When trying to place a plant in an existing scheme, it helps to pick a bloom and carry it around to 'offer it up'. You can even leave it in a milk bottle in different spots to see what it looks like with the other plants.

■ Choose the best form of a plant. There is always one cultivar that has the edge, whether it is how it holds itself, flowering length or the size of the bloom.

■ Although I try to avoid bedding out, *Cuphea ignea* and *Cuphea cyanea* are worth the trouble as they flower from June until the frosts. I lift them and keep them through winter in pots. They are invaluable in red schemes.

■ I will not grow invasive plants, and I do not like plants that self-sow freely. I deadhead and remove seed heads religiously.

■ I would urge people to consider ferns. Put them in your borders as texture plants, like they do at Sissinghurst and other great gardens.

■ Nori Pope of Hadspen once told me that planting a border is like creating music: you should repeat your patterns. Another good layout is to have a ribbon of one plant running through the border, to lead the eye.



Aster divaricatus 'Eastern Star', which is "more compact, holds itself at a better angle, flowers for at least 10 weeks and will grow in bone dry shade"; geraniums including 'Rozanne', 'Patricia' and 'New Hampshire Purple', which will "return within a fortnight after cutting back"; and *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Alba', which looks radiant in combination with ferns.

Wendy takes a minute to enjoy this small piece of success. "I talk to my plants and praise them, but I also threaten them regularly if they are misbehaving," she jokes.

On the other side of the wall lies the Vean, a small formal garden in yellow, blue and white, divided into four beds by a cross of paths with a central stone pedestal. Topiary

Above Cool colours are favoured next to the house.

Left The hot borders are a triumph of clever planting in the garden's heavy shade.

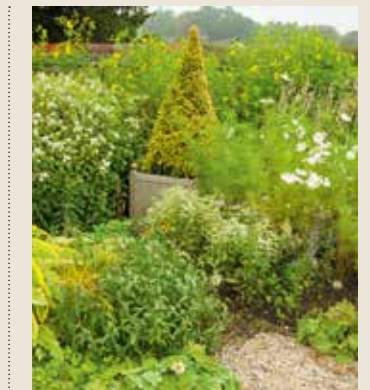
BOSVIGO NOTEBOOK

Colour, form and texture from perennial plants are all-important in this painterly garden



CHOICE DAHLIAS

Wendy doesn't have to dig her dahlias up every year, so she is particularly keen on them. 'David Howard' is one of the best from the hot garden, as it doesn't need any support. Another favourite is the mini pink pompon 'Franz Kafka' (above), which thrives in the walled garden.



PLANT PERFECTION

For a visible contrast, Wendy combines plants and colours by working in opposites. With contrasting colours, this is easy, but "if you are working in the same colour, such as white, put a large white dahlia beside a slimmer white flower, creating a contrast in shape and size".



SOOTHING HUES

Wendy follows the advice of Gertrude Jekyll. "I don't want to look straight out on reds and hot colours," she says. "Jekyll advised having quite bland, soothing hues around the house." Wendy followed this concept when designing the gold, white and blue scheme in the Vean garden, alongside the house.



TOP THALICTRUMS

Wendy has thalictrums in flower all through the season, starting with *T. aquilegifolium*, then *T. delavayi* and rare *T. reniforme*, a species that Wendy recommends for its large purple flowers and no staking. Later come 'Thundercloud' and 'Hewitt's Double', which is sterile, so the flowers last a long time.



cones of golden privet stand head and shoulders over plantings of box, *Hakonechloa* grass, geraniums, ferns and hostas.

The woodland walk is the odd one out, offering a springtime show, the stars of which are hundreds of hellebores in flower. Wendy's daughter died in the Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami of 2004, and each year she holds an open garden day with *Hellebore* tours and sales, tombola, stalls and food, in aid of the charity Shelterbox, which sends boxes of supplies to emergency-hit areas. Last year, the day raised the significant amount of £2,500 for the cause.

Wendy does this and all the gardening on her own, with some occasional help on lawns and hedges. "I am in the garden all day, every day," she says. "I am nearly 70, so I need to slow down, but I go out into the garden and potter about and then, before I know it, three hours have passed." She has no plans to create new areas and is instead focusing on reducing her workload with clever plant choices, and reviewing what is already in place.

"I am trouble-shooting now," she explains. "Ideally, you want to have as little trouble as possible at this stage. I constantly edit plantings and move things around, and plants that present problems get taken out. But I can always see things I should have done or need to fix, and that rarely balances out with those wonderful moments where something just works, like the *Persicaria* and ferns," Wendy says.

Years of work, and moments of harmony, perhaps. She laughs. "I'm going to have that on my gravestone," she says. ■

Bosvigo is open 11am-6pm, Wednesday to Friday, between March and September. Bosvigo House, Bosvigo Lane, Truro, Cornwall TR1 3NH. Tel: 01872 275774; bosvigo.com

Above Wendy's greenhouse anchors fulsome borders of herbaceous plants. **Right** Chunky dahlias contrast well with sprays of *Crocosmia*.

