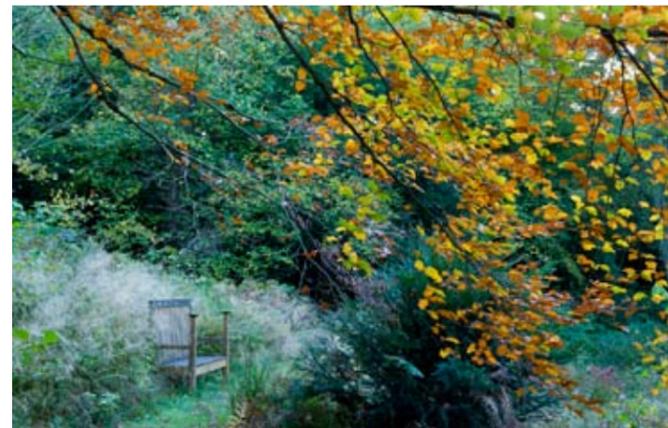


There is very little level ground in the Malvern Hills, so the planting of formal hedges and topiary in a partly walled garden was a brave decision, but they provide essential structure for the still-developing space

# WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

*In areas of this garden in the Malvern Hills, the wild flowers growing on the thin soil – Malvern means ‘bare hill’ – have a prominent role; elsewhere, the necessary formality indicated by the Arts and Crafts house is provided by terraces, hedges and topiary*

TEXT NOEL KINGSBURY | PHOTOGRAPHS MARK BOLTON



It is difficult to make gardens for houses of exceptional architectural interest – they are too hard an act to follow; where there is outstanding scenery as well, the difficulty increases all the more. Yet this did not deter Gillian and Mark Archer, who embarked upon the courageous adventure of making a garden around a house in the Malvern Hills designed by Charles Voysey. Perrycroft is a wonderful example of Arts and Crafts architecture – its line, adventurous detailing and the distinctive green of the metal- and woodwork inevitably make a powerful impression. The garden, however, lives up to the expectations created by the house, with a simple formality combined with an abundance of wild planting.

Built as a summer house, Perrycroft faces south, towards the majestic hill fort of British Camp. A terrace along its south-facing wall offers a tempting place to sit and is home to a rich assortment of tender shrubs, which are sheltered from the prevailing westerly winds – vital at an altitude of 300 metres. The terrace overlooks a yew hedge around the tennis court, which has been clipped so that it appears to have shallow buttresses – echoing the similar buttresses that are a feature of the house. This witty touch was Mark's brainchild, but the very existence of the hedge is down to Gillian. 'I did a course in garden restoration at the Architectural Association, which helped me to interpret what was here,' she

explains. 'It gave me confidence; to undertake restoration pruning of hedges, for example, you have to cut them right back to bare wood.'

The steep slope below the house is a rich wildflower meadow, the legacy of the 30 years of benign neglect before Mark and Gillian bought Perrycroft in 1999. The 10-acre property had been owned by The Boys Brigade, which, apart from grazing a few sheep, did little garden maintenance. The thin covering of soil over varying types of rock affects the distribution of wildflowers. 'They are a real patchwork,' explains the gardener, Stephen Buck. 'There are layers of clay, so some areas are wetter than others, and the varieties change from year to year, so the

mowing programme is altered accordingly.'

At the bottom of the slope is a spring, a pond and a bog garden, where the legacy of early twentieth-century planting – rhododendrons, a huge philadelphus, and some naturalised giant perennials such as *Fallopia sachalinensis* and *Filipendula camtschatica* – are combined with moisture-loving plants added by Gillian: hostas, hemerocallis, aruncus and wild flowers, with a particularly dense population of spotted orchids.

The view west from the house takes in a gentle slope – on which Gillian has instilled a gentle formality with clipped topiary – a terrace, formally planted with a central square of box, surrounded by blocks of 'Hidcote' lavender, santolina and

*Sedum 'Herbstfreude'*, and the entrance to the walled garden. In an adjacent border of robust herbaceous plants, *Aster umbellatus* and *Rudbeckia subtomentosa* draw the eye in autumn. This garden features plenty of late summer- and autumn-flowering herbaceous plants – Old Court Nurseries, famous for its Michaelmas daisies and other late perennials, is nearby.

Further on, the sloping walled garden used to be cultivated for vegetables, but, as Gillian explains, 'it was hopeless – the soil was too thin.' Here her restoration training came in useful again: 'We found traces of paths hidden under grass, worked out where they ran, and restored them.' Voysey's plans show the original beds,

now reinstated, although there is no record of what was planted there. At the far end of the walled garden, shrub roses run riot in early summer – 'they love the clay soil,' says Stephen – while rudbeckias, dahlias and asters sustain interest later in the year.

A number of Arts and Crafts-style oak benches, designed by Gillian, are dotted around the garden. They provide perfect places from which to admire this intriguing design, where order and wilderness come together □

*Gillian Archer Design: 01684-541506; www.gillianarcherdesign.co.uk | Perrycroft is open for the National Gardens Scheme, Herefordshire: 01483-211535; www.ngs.org.uk*

Perrycroft (top left) – with its distinctive green metal- and woodwork – is a wonderful example of Arts and Crafts architecture. Traces of paths were found in the sloping walled garden (top centre and right) and have been restored. Dahlias and other late-summer flowers make a splash in the lower part of the garden (above)

A summer house (top left), part of the original Voysey design, sits at the bottom of the walled garden. Roses climb over one of the garden entrances (top centre). Much of the garden is a gently managed wilderness (top right) interspersed with mature trees and robust perennials. A bridge (above) gives access to a pond and bog garden