

The Garden

October 2016 | www.rhs.org.uk | £4.50



**PEAR
CALENDAR:**
*Six months of
delicious fruit*

**COLOURFUL
JAPANESE MAPLES
FOR POTS**

*Plants to pollard
for dramatic
summer foliage*

Saffron

**Growing autumn's
treasured spice**



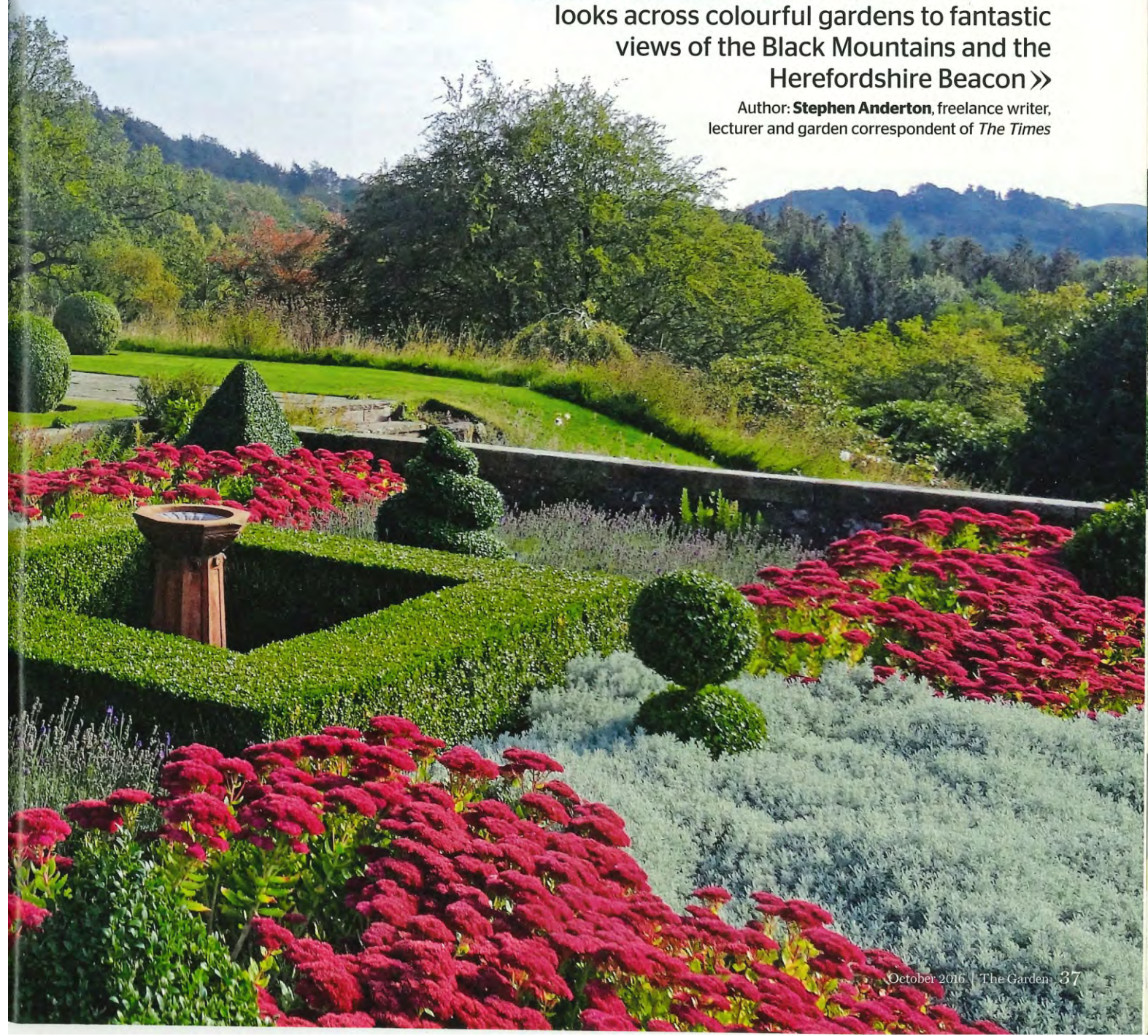
Architect CFA Voysey designed the house and garden at Perrycroft, Herefordshire in 1893. The aspect and the sloping site were chosen to provide the best views across the landscape. Today, Gillian and Mark Archer garden in keeping with the style. In the parterre, low blocks of *Sedum Herbstfreude* Group 'Herbstfreude' provide bold colour without interrupting the view, while *Vitis coignetiae* on the house wall ties the building to its garden, turning red as autumn progresses.

GILLIAN ARCHER

Inclined to make the finest views

On a steep southwest-facing hillside near Malvern, a beautiful Voysey-designed house looks across colourful gardens to fantastic views of the Black Mountains and the Herefordshire Beacon >>

Author: **Stephen Anderton**, freelance writer, lecturer and garden correspondent of *The Times*



Many gardeners will be familiar with Edwin Lutyens, the architect behind many wonderful Arts and Crafts gardens. Far fewer have heard of Charles Voysey (1857–1941), Lutyens' close contemporary, whose properties had so much in common with Lutyens' but yet had a slightly more modern flavour. Perrycroft, at Colwall near Malvern, is a Voysey property with a fine garden by him.

When Mark and Gillian Archer saw Perrycroft up for sale 17 years ago, being lovers of the Arts and Crafts movement, they fell for it. For Gillian, whose horticultural heroes include Vita Sackville-West, Christopher Lloyd and Russell Page, it offered a fine architectural template upon which to garden.

Uninterrupted views

Voysey built Perrycroft in 1893 for John Wilson MP and was invited to choose the location and orientation of the house. His decision was to dig into a steep, southwest-facing hillside and create a wide platform for his house. Unusually, the house does not nestle at the back of its platform or stare outwards from its lip; instead it thrusts one corner out, like the prow of a ship. From here, the southern aspect of the house looks directly at Herefordshire Beacon with its terraced Iron Age hill fort known as British Camp. The house mirrors this delightfully, sitting on its own terrace and grassy banks.

The other aspect of the house faces west, this time to the Black Mountains across the England–Wales border. On both sides the garden is kept lower than the house in order to have uninterrupted views; a square sunk garden, flower borders, and a sloping yew-hedged garden lead through an arched doorway, down to woodland, all as devised by Voysey: simple and strong. But he left no indications about plant choices, meaning Perrycroft has been Gillian's to play with.

There were many repairs to do before the luxury of replanting could start. For some years Perrycroft was owned by the Boys' Brigade, used as

an outdoor centre – most of the garden had been grassed over or allowed to grow unchecked. Voysey's beds were visible only as humps and bumps when the long grass was down in winter.

Once Gillian excluded grazing animals, the lower woodland slopes produced sheets of *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* (wild daffodil); yew hedges had to be drastically cut back and the regrowth clipped to re-create their previous tight shapes; and fastigate yews became flat-topped drums once more.

Finally, with the structure revived, in 2002 replanting could begin. Gillian's planting of the top terrace directly around the house is simple and tight: *Vitis coignetiae* on the walls, then a broad path lined by box balls and fastigate golden yews. Voysey's sophisticated lime-green >>

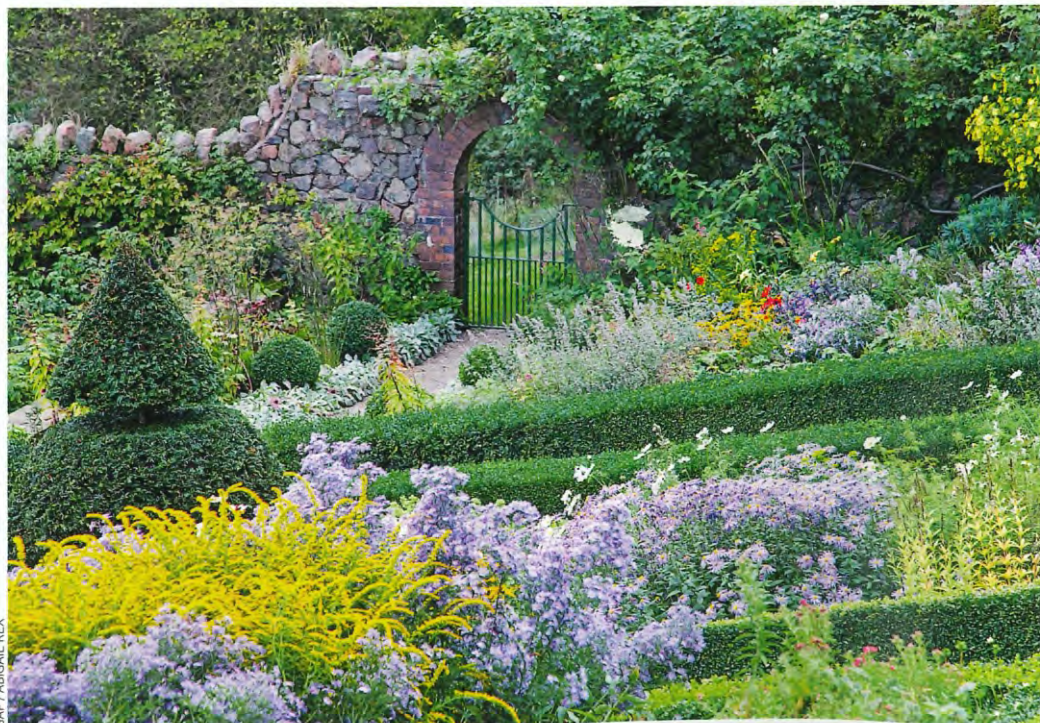
Hot planting in the formal garden (right): fiery dahlias and *Salvia* overlook yew topiary and formal hedging further down the steep slope.

At the bottom of the formal garden (below) the main path leads through an inviting gate into the woodland garden beyond.

'Gillian stays with tried-and-tested plants, which do not jar with the period of the house'



GILLIAN ARCHER



GARY/ARIGAIL REX

Herefordshire garden



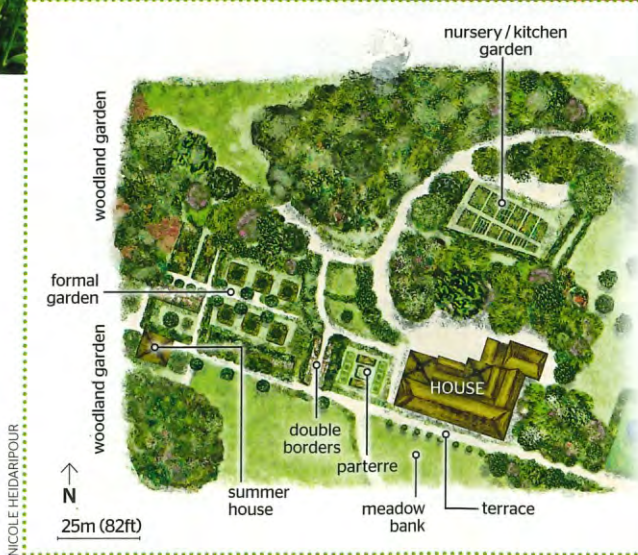
GILLIAN ARCHER

This sunset view south from the garden (above) looks along the Malvern Hills towards the hill fort called the British Camp or Herefordshire Beacon.

Below formal *Buxus* balls on the terrace south of the house (below) the ground drops steeply away down the meadow bank. Mown annually, this area is host to an increasing number of wildflowers. When reforming Voysey's massive stepped yew hedge behind, Mark Archer suggested buttresses in its profile to bring a sense of greater stability.



GAP / ABIGAIL REX



NICOLE HEIDARIPOUR



Perrycroft

Jubilee Drive, Upper Colwall, Herefordshire
WR13 6DN; www.perrycroft.co.uk

Location: on the spine of the Malvern Hills, near Great Malvern.

Size: 10 acres (4 ha). **Soil:** mildly acidic clay.

Aspect: partly terraced, sloping steeply to the south and west.

Elevation: 250m (820ft).

Summary: a largely formal Arts and Crafts garden (1893) defined by walls and hedges, with views to the Herefordshire Beacon and Black Mountains. The planting today is in late 20th-century country house style.

Key seasons of interest: daffodil time, early summer and autumn.

Open: Mar-Jun and Sept-Dec by appointment. For National Gardens Scheme on 2 Oct and other times; 2017 dates to be confirmed. www.ngs.org.uk

Herefordshire garden

paintwork keeps the scene plainer still. As the years go by, Gillian is by contrast becoming ever more fascinated by meadow wildflowers, and so the steep bank immediately below the terrace is allowed to grow long for the sake of orchids, bedstraws, knapweed and ox-eye daisies.

Bold and charming

The parterre with its little sunk garden is arranged as a formal cross around an Arts and Crafts terracotta birdbath. Gillian has kept the planting bold, using clipped box hedges and pyramids, with lavender for summer and *Sedum Herbstfreude* Group 'Herbstfreude' to flower through late summer into winter. All is low enough not to interfere with the open prospect from the house terrace.

Reviving the pair of parallel borders below the sunk garden was relatively easy, as the design is so strong, focused directly on the hill fort through the gap between a pair of reshaped upright yews. She uses yellows and blue-purple here, with catmint, geraniums, daylilies, *Phlomis russeliana* and euphorbias. Gillian does not seek out the latest must-have perennials, but stays with tried-and-tested plants, generously used, well-grown, and which do not

jar with the period of the house.

An archway through a yew hedge now leads down to a large, open, hedged enclosure. Here, the land slopes not in one direction but in two directions at once, diagonally, corner to corner across the rectangle. Undaunted, Gillian decided to go ahead with a formal, symmetrical scheme of box-edged beds set in fine lawn, and cones of yew marching in pairs beside the central gravel path.

It has what Gillian calls an 'Alice in Wonderland' quality about it, all slightly topsy-turvy – is it the garden or house that's wonky? – but still it is charming, and the joyfully colourful planting far outweighs the compromise on levels. Mowing is tricky on those slopes, but Cornish gardener Roger Standley manages it with great skill.

Through a doorway the woodland garden begins with banks of wild and cultivated daffodils and *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (common spotted orchid). Roger is planting *Primula Candelabra* hybrids alongside Gillian's beloved deciduous azaleas around the pond. Floating inevitably above the tall trees that shelter these hidden glades is Voysey's stupendous view from house to hill fort. For Gillian, as for Voysey, it defines the garden. ●



GAP / ABIGAIL REX

Gardening on a slope

✦ In an early photograph of Perrycroft (right) it is clear how steeply sloped the property is, and why a platform had to be cut into the hillside to build the house. Here, the garden was not yet realised.

✦ Charles Voysey built comfortable steps and stone-paved landings to link terraces (above), knowing grass paths on slopes can be slippery; but still there are many steep gradients with which Gillian has had to cope.

✦ Understanding the need for good access between levels, Gillian has cleverly made a curving stairway (right), cambered sideways to provide steps for feet at one side but gravel for wheelbarrows at the other. It is practical and provides wonderful shadow play.

✦ To avoid regular hazardous mowing, Gillian cuts the meadow bank below the house just once, in late summer. In the mixture of fine grasses, wildflowers grow. From the path below they can be appreciated at eye-level – a novel take on meadow gardening.

✦ The garden's steep slope means frost drains away easily. Gillian and Roger are taking this as an opportunity to experiment with plants from Cornish or maritime gardens – agaves, echiums, *Luma apiculata* and *Leptospermum grandiflorum*.



PERRYCROFT



STEPHEN ANDERTON

Looking down the formal garden (left) shows how Gillian defines spaces with hedging. Playful yew cones march in pairs down the sloping central path, flanked by beds full of colour, to the Voysey-designed summer house below.



GILLIAN ARCHER