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MARCH 2021

GIFTS FOR ALL SEASONS

Cleverly crafted planting schemes create an evolving picture throughout the seasons in this modern country garden in Buckinghamshire

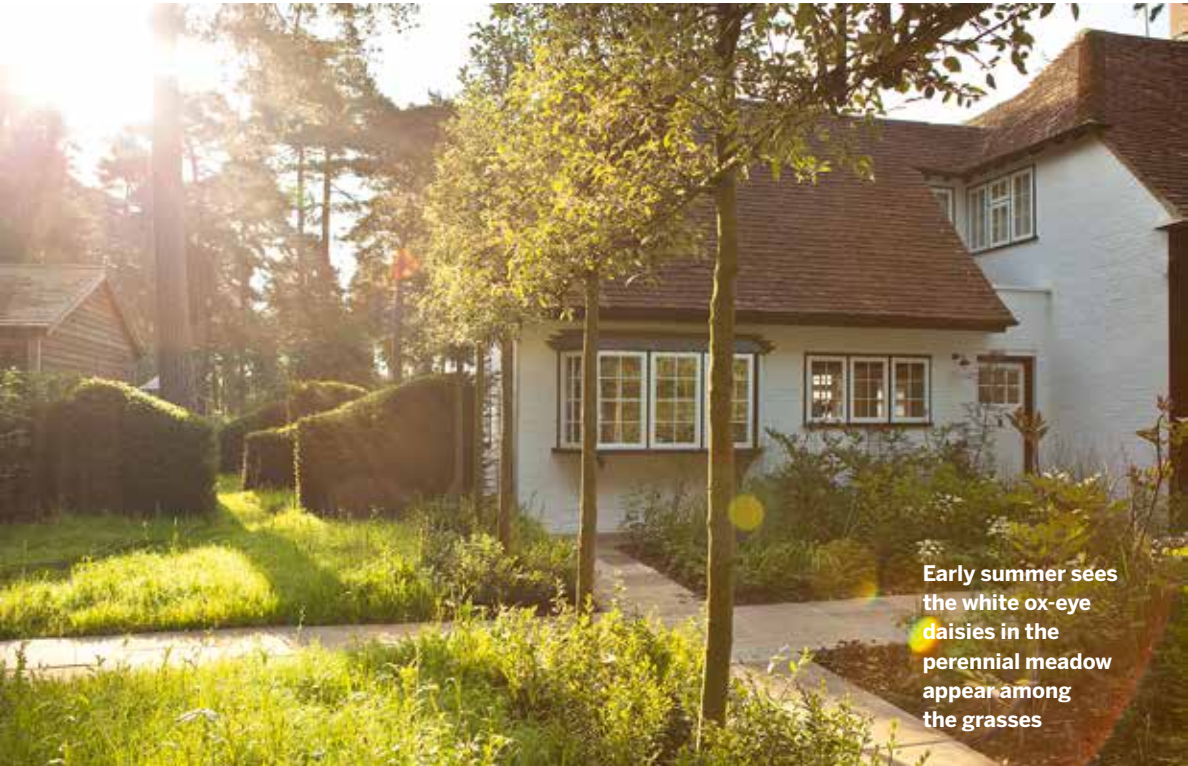
WORDS ZIA ALLAWAY PHOTOGRAPHY ROSANGELA PHOTOGRAPHY/STEFANO MARINAZ



As summer arrives
the crab apples
evolve into a leafy
green screen and
the meadow bursts
into flower



The leaves of bugbane (*Actaea simplex* Atropurpurea Group) mingle with the dainty white bell-like flowers of Chinese meadow rue (*Thalictrum delavayi* 'Album') in summer



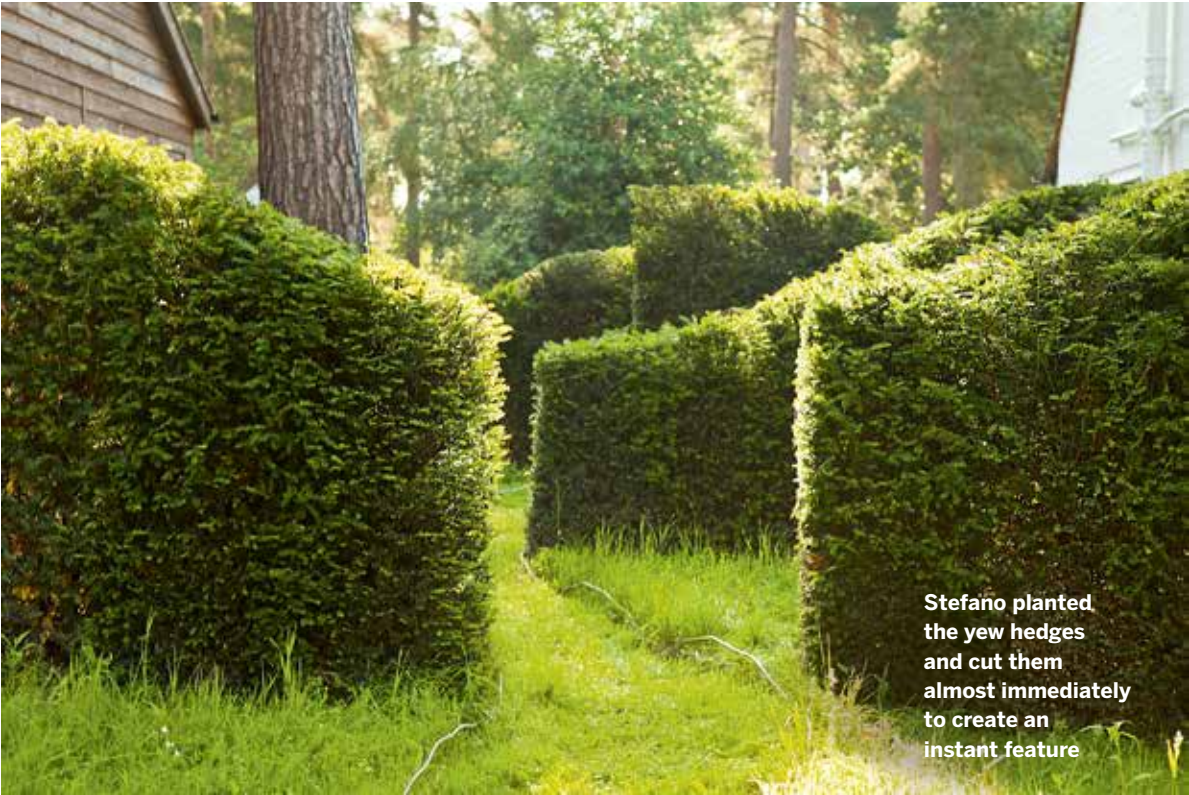
Early summer sees the white ox-eye daisies in the perennial meadow appear among the grasses

Surrounded by the stunningly beautiful Buckinghamshire countryside, the garden at the Gate House celebrates the natural cycle of the seasons, with each month offering an evolving kaleidoscope of plants designed to delight the senses. Landscape architect Stefano Marinaz’s inspiration for this family garden near Gerrards Cross was the rare heathland and pine woods that bleed into the property to the rear and stretch out beyond its boundaries on all sides. He also took his cue from the architecture of the buildings, creating a connection between the early-20th-century house and its sleek new cedar-clad extension.

‘The owner contacted me when work had begun on the extension and he wanted a new design to complement it,’ explains Stefano. ‘It was good timing, because the first thing I decided to do was to move the car park from in front of the house to the side, which we tagged on to the extension build.’ The front garden was originally laid to lawn and the owners were keen to keep some grass, but were

otherwise open to ideas. While this gave Stefano the artistic freedom to do as he pleased, his instinct was to create a design that would complement the natural landscape. ‘I decided to use a palette of seasonal bulbs and perennials in the courtyard in front of the extension, with structure supplied by pleached crab apples,’ he says. ‘These partly mask the building as you enter the property, revealing the planting and the house gradually as you walk up the path.’ To increase biodiversity yet still offer a sward of grass, Stefano designed a perennial wildflower meadow that greets visitors with a sea of blooms in spring and summer. ‘After the meadow is cut in late summer, it just looks like a lawn for half the year,’ he explains. ‘But as summer approaches it explodes with flowers and draws in bees and butterflies that animate the space, bringing it to life.’ In addition to the meadow, he has also edged the property with a wildlife-friendly hornbeam hedge.

Stefano replaced the wooden fence that divided the front and back gardens with a set of yew hedges clipped into playful wave-like shapes, an idea →



Stefano planted the yew hedges and cut them almost immediately to create an instant feature

inspired by the garden of the famous Dutch plantsman Piet Oudolf. A grass path meanders through the hedges and opens up to reveal a large lawn behind the house, which provides space for the client's three children to play.

Beyond the lawn lies a couple of acres of natural heathland and pine forest. Here, Stefano has mown paths through the trees and augmented the existing grasses, ferns and rhododendrons with climbing roses, spring bulbs and witch hazel – with its colourful, fragrant winter flowers – to increase the interest throughout the year.

The planting in front of the house was chosen to complement the white building and Japanese-style burnt sugi-board (carbonised cedar) cladding on the extension. Stefano says: 'Many of the bulbs are white or black to pick up these colours, and include snowdrops in February and March, followed by the tulips 'Angel's Wish' and 'Queen of Night'. Then come the white alliums ('Mount Everest' and *allium nigrum*) and black-flowered *Iris chrysographes* in late May, with white cyclamen following on in

autumn. The late summer-flowering perennial *Actaea simplex* Atropurpurea Group and shrubby black elder, *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva' (syn. 'Black lace'), sport both dark foliage and white flowers, offering two for one in this duotone scheme.

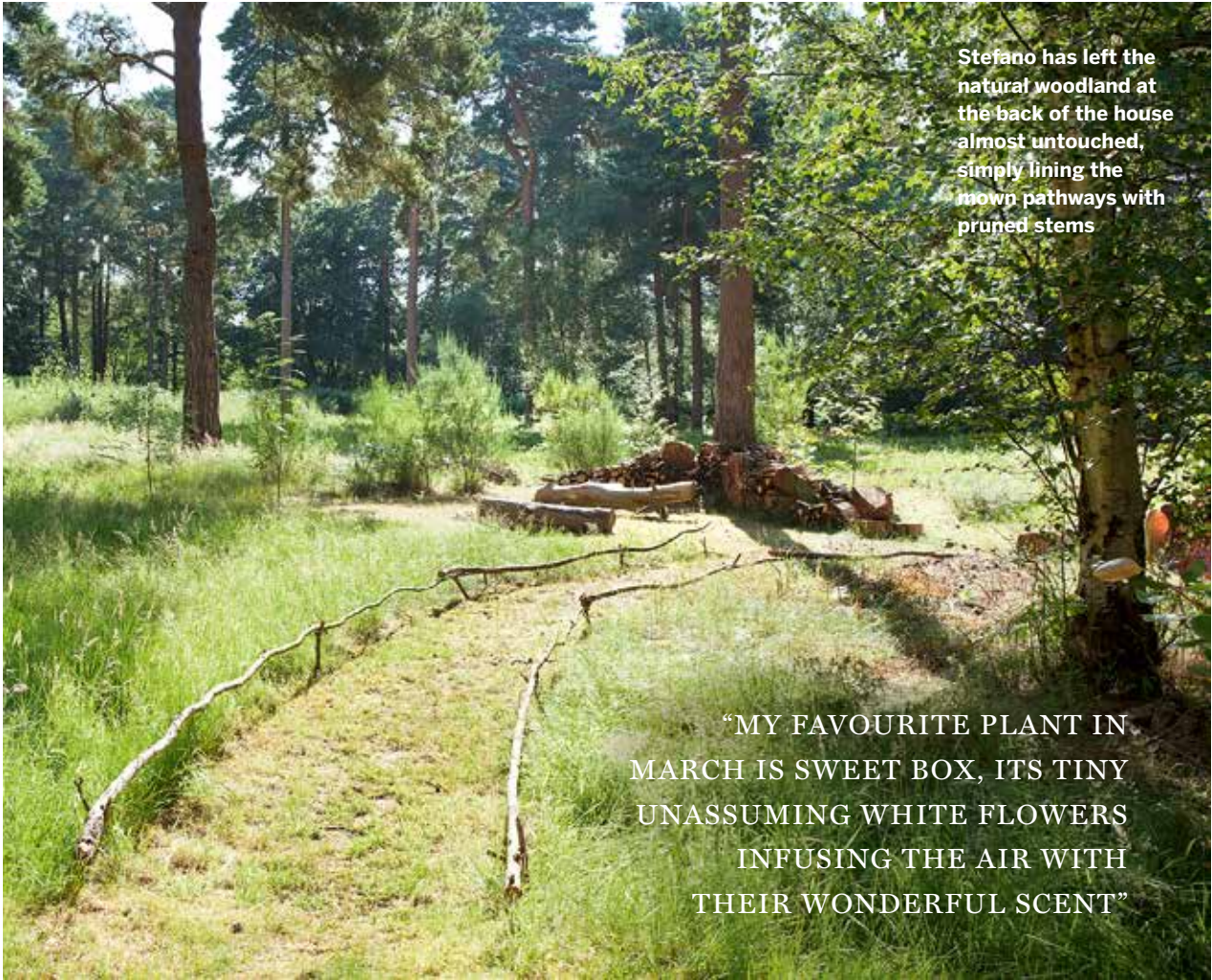
Year-round interest isn't forgotten closer to the house either. 'I've used combinations of dogwoods (*Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire'), hellebores and daphnes, which have fragrant winter flowers, in the large pots on either side of the front door to introduce some permanent colour and texture,' says Stefano.

Despite the seemingly complex planting design, the front garden needs very little maintenance. The pleached crab trees just require an annual prune in late winter, and the perennials in the courtyard are cut back at about the same time. The meadow is mown once a year in late summer, after the flowers have gone to seed, and the cuttings are then removed a few days later and composted. The result is an easy-care, modern garden that the owners love for its panorama of plants that deliver surprises for twelve months of the year. 🌿



“I LOVE THE PLANTS IN THE COURTYARD, STARTING IN SPRING WITH TINY BULBS AND ENDING AS THE SUMMER FLOWERS TURN INTO BRONZE SEED HEADS OVER WINTER”

White astrantias and *Molinia caerulea* grasses are picked out by the morning sun, creating a striking contrast with the black extension



Stefano has left the natural woodland at the back of the house almost untouched, simply lining the mown pathways with pruned stems

“MY FAVOURITE PLANT IN MARCH IS SWEET BOX, ITS TINY UNASSUMING WHITE FLOWERS INFUSING THE AIR WITH THEIR WONDERFUL SCENT”

GARDEN GUIDE

ORIENTATION The front garden is north-facing.

SOIL TYPE Imported sandy-loam soil at the front; poor, slightly acidic soil in the woodland area at the back.

SPECIAL FEATURES Courtyard featuring bulbs, perennial plants and pleached crab apple screen; perennial wildflower meadow; sculptural yew walkway; play lawn; natural heathland and woods.

GARDEN DESIGN by Stefano Marinaz, Stefano Marinaz Landscape Architecture, 020 3727 7264/075150 23 760, stefanomarinaz.com

Chinese meadow rue
Thalictrum delavayi
‘Album’ (above, right) produces a profusion of dainty white flowers on tall stems in late summer

White astrantias and purple summer-flowering alliums (right) are dotted amongst the *Molinia caerulea* grasses

The fragrant blooms of sweet box (*Sarcococca confusa*), above far right, are followed by long-lasting berries

The black elder *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* ‘Eva’, far right, has near-black foliage with sprays of creamy white spring flowers

