

# Absolute perfection

*Turn End, Haddenham, Buckinghamshire*

This noted 1960s property shows what can be achieved when designs for garden and house are created in tandem, says Non Morris

Photographs by Val Corbett

THE beating heart of Turn End—the celebrated three houses and garden designed by architect Peter Aldington in the 1960s—is the courtyard garden, which extends seamlessly from the folding glazed doors of the living areas and is enclosed by a mellow, sand-coloured wall. Its pool is fringed by the luminous backlit foliage of Japanese water iris. Lush-fingered leaves of tree peony spread down to the water's edge and a gnarled *Robinia pseudoacacia* rises up towards the sky. The stroke of genius is a simple concrete seat, suspended over the water and angled with consummate ease away from the kitchen windows. It is the perfect place to invite your guests to sit with a drink before lunch.

“It is this practical, organic approach to garden-making that is so compelling”

The soft mustard garden walls are wichert—a form of cobb made of local limestone mixed with straw and water. Curving wichert walls define the Buckinghamshire village of Haddenham, with its closely grouped cottages and narrow winding lanes. When Mr Aldington and his wife, Margaret, came across the overgrown, half-acre plot in 1963, they were determined to prove three, simply made, but comfortable modern cottages could be built here without losing the strong >

No-mans, with *Stipa gigantea*, *Iris Bronze Bird*, *I. Argus Pheasant*, *Eremurus x isabellinus Cleopatra*. The armillary sphere sundial by David Harber was erected in memory of Peter Aldington's parents





sense of place that characterises a village house. The Aldingtons still live in one of the three houses—the other two are also occupied, but the garden is theirs alone.

Mr Aldington has always been passionate that architecture should be intimately connected to the way people live and despaired at the forlorn ranks of box-like houses that were then appearing all over the country. The group of houses at Turn End forms one of only 12 post-Second World War domestic projects with a Grade II\* listing and, in 2017, the garden was listed, too, in recognition of the connection established between inside and out. At that time, it was the only post-war listed project in which house and garden had been created by the same person.

When the Aldingtons—who still live at Turn End—set to work on what was to be the garden, a priority was to keep as many mature trees as possible. Mr Aldington recounts with glee their realisation that a huge walnut tree they had hoped to retain was, in fact, one too many in the small courtyard. 'I was working for the London County Council, so rang our contract tree firm and said "how do you move a walnut?" They said they had never moved one—"tell us how you get on!"' The walnut tree was simply shifted to the entrance using a digger (where it has thrived ever since) and the resultant hole became the glorious pond.

## ‘I am a maker, rather than a theoretical designer’

It is this practical, organic approach to garden-making that is so compelling. The Aldingtons quite literally built the house with their own hands: Mr Aldington became his own carpenter and Mrs Aldington, a former nurse, describes herself as a 'very happy navvy'. The garden was developed in the same intuitive way, with Mr Aldington marking out areas with canes or with full-size shapes laid out on the ground. 'I am a maker, rather than a theoretical designer,' he stresses.

The use of rock around the pond and in the alpine garden was instinctive—'we were both rock climbers'—and one of the garden's *leitmotifs*. 'The idea of enclosed spaces, partially hidden with a sense of something beyond' was borrowed from an arrangement Mr Aldington had admired in the village.

One part of the garden is linked to the next via a series of narrow arches, which has been especially helpful over the years as extra corners of land have been added to the domain. When the handsome coach house—now >

**Rooms to explore: the sunken Daisy Garden, looking through the Victorian Coach House (now the Potting Shed) to Box Court**

a potting shed—became part of the garden, it offered framed views of both the Box Court and the sunken Daisy Garden. Mr Aldington's greatest influence, however, was the 'garden of rooms' made by Maj Lawrence Johnston at Hidcote. 'It was a revelation,' he says, of the exemplary Arts-and-Crafts design.

Among the discrete spaces leading from the sinuous grassy glade that forms the backbone to the main garden is the shady Office Garden, with its circular pool, glossy *Magnolia grandiflora* and deep crimson *Rosa Hillieri*. The path to the Square Pergola is lined with a jungly collection of tender plants—a sort of exotic outdoor museum—and the open curving Summer Borders are filled with roses and dahlias in pinks and mauves, occasionally electrified by a splash of orange.

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The Spring Garden spreads out gently from the glazed house door, from which broad steps lead down through dappled planting and three 100-year-old apple trees—all that remains of a Victorian orchard. Welsh poppies spread along the path, the stands of bamboo are alive with birdsong and self-seeded tree peonies settle against low-growing juniper. The timber-frame windows of the house are almost hidden here; you could be in Japan.

The shared entrance court for the three houses on the far side of the building has a very different atmosphere. The open carport draped with the clear yellow *Rosa Mermaid*, the rough-textured white walls and the low pools of *Bergenia* create a clean and uplifting welcome, evocative of California.

The neighbouring section of garden is open and sunny, too. Created in the 1980s and called No-man's, because, at one point, there was no direct access to it, this is a scented haven of naturalistic planting within a comparatively formal layout. The chunky raised beds are made from railway sleepers, a relaxed echo of the timber that was used to make the house. 'I love this part of the garden because it changes more than anywhere else—there is so much succession,' says Turn End's gardener, Jackie Hunt, as she reveals a pomegranate trained against a south-facing wall and Mr Aldington's favourite bearded iris, *Smokey Dream*.

Thankfully, with its talented and welcoming gardener and the dynamic Turn End Trust in place, this inspiring garden is now secured for the future.

In one corner, a low bench is tucked in among tree peonies and stands of the orange poppy, *Papaver rupifragum*. In front stands a beautiful collection of troughs and bowls filled with *Sempervivum* perfectly interplanted with delicate fans of *Cotoneaster horizontalis*. One can see the warm red-tiled roofs of the house, the craggy *Robinia* and, through an archway, a flutter of white water *Iris*, with which my visit began. 🐌

For open days, visit [www.turnend.org.uk](http://www.turnend.org.uk)



Above: *Stipa gigantea*, white valerian, *Eremurus x isabellinus* Cleopatra and *Papaver orientale* Princess Victoria in No-Mans. Right: The pergola with *Rosa Madame Alfred Carrière*, *R. Adelaide d'Orleans*, *Actinidia chinensis* and perennial peas (*Lathyrus latifolius*)

