

PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED

Making plans

Inspiring ideas for the year ahead

HOW TO START A
**micro
nursery**

Tom Stuart-Smith's
iconic design for
**Hepworth
Wakefield**

James Basson's
fresh take on tradition
in Provence

**THE BEST
BIENNIALS**
to grow
from seed

10 favourite
**EARLY
FLOWERING
PLANTS**

Brilliant kit
for new gardeners

ISSUE 296 FEBRUARY 2021
UK £4.99 USA \$11.99 CANADA \$14.99
9 770968 892115





Dry climate planting at Pépinière Filippi.



James Basson's design for Mas Dou Gaou garden.

24-28 JUNE 2021

PRIVATE GARDENS OF PROVENCE

Join experts James and Helen Basson to discover a new approach to gardening in a Mediterranean climate



GUEST HOST

James Basson lives in the south of France where he and his wife Helen run award-winning Scape Design.

The region of Provence, in southeast France, with its long, hot and dry summers provides a wonderful opportunity to learn how to design and plant gardens adapted to such conditions. The landscape remains essentially unchanged: medieval hill towns rise among olive groves and vineyards, and fields of lavender and sunflowers soak up the sunshine. Dusty roads fringed with pines give way to banks of wild cistus, rosemary and thyme. Hidden behind old iron gates or an avenue of ancient plane trees, old country estates have been elegantly rejuvenated in recent years by contemporary designers, creating sensuous gardens, each in its own way responding to the spirit of place and the designer's eye. Designers James and Helen Basson show us two of their recent projects for private gardens and introduce us to the legendary **Pépinière Filippi** nursery near Montpellier, where Olivier Filippi's experimental techniques in dry gardening have transformed our understanding of Mediterranean gardening practice. Other highlights include the garden designer Dominique Lafourcade's home **La Pomone**, in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, and **Le Terrain**, the garden of artist-tree surgeon extraordinaire, Marc Nucera. Our hotel for the stay is the 5-star Hotel d'Europe, in the historic heart of Avignon.



TOUR LEADER

Kirsty Fergusson trained at Capel Manor. She is now a garden writer living in France.

BOOKING DETAILS

The price per person, based on two people sharing is £3,890 (a single supplement of £490 is levied by the hotel).

The price includes: four nights bed & breakfast at Hotel d'Europe; three evening meals and four lunches, all with local wines; and return flights to Marseille with British Airways. Those wishing to make their own travel arrangements should state this on the booking form and we will deduct £143 per person from the tour price. The price does not include extras or travel insurance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO BOOK PLEASE CONTACT

Boxwood Tours, 1 West Street, Buckingham HK18 1HL.

Tel +44 (0)1341 241717, email mail@boxwoodtours.co.uk

Website boxwoodtours.co.uk

The tour has been arranged exclusively for readers of *Gardens Illustrated* by Boxwood Tours Quality Garden Holidays, a specialist garden tour company set up in 1990. Please note that itineraries may be subject to change for reasons beyond *Gardens Illustrated*'s control. The tour is financially protected by the ATOL scheme. When you pay you will be supplied with an ATOL Certificate. Please ask for it and check to ensure that everything you booked (flights, hotels and other services) is listed on it. Please see our booking conditions for further information or for more information about financial protection and the ATOL Certificate go to: atol.org.uk/ATOLCertificate

Outward looking

James and Helen Basson have given a classic Provençal garden a naturalistic twist to blend with the stunning surrounding landscape

WORDS: TIM RICHARDSON | PHOTOGRAPHS: CLAIRE TAKACS





IN BRIEF

What Provencal garden, with a naturalistic twist.

Where Tourrettes-sur-Loup, France.

Soil Heavy clay

Size Around two and a half acres.

Climate Mediterranean. Several springs in the garden mean soil is waterlogged and poorly drained in winter but, due to the southwest-facing site, baked solid in summer.

Hardiness zone USDA 9.

The pool terrace affords stunning views including part of the plateau of the Col de Vence. While notes of formality, such as the cypress trees and mulberries, remain, designer James Basson has added a range of dry-climate shrubs and flowers, allowing it to segue with the surrounding landscape where teucrium and olive trees eventually give way to downy oak forest.



The clients were open to
James's missionary zeal for
a looser, wilder tone,
and over the years it's turned
into a real collaboration


When James and Helen Basson re-located to the South of France in 2000, their aim was to set up a design practice inspired by the contemporary 'naturalistic turn' in planting design. The idea of a garden made up chiefly of late-summer-flowering perennials and grasses has been sweeping Europe and latterly America over the past few decades, and James and Helen have spent their time in the Alpes-Maritimes honing a plant palette that can survive and thrive in what can be an extremely harsh environment. In this project they have found an able collaborator in Olivier Filippi, a Languedoc-based nurseryman who has emerged as an authority on dry-climate plants of interest and distinction, and who has also advised Tom Stuart-Smith, James Hitchmough and other British designers on Mediterranean projects.

A garden in Tourrettes-sur-Loup, set in an enviable elevated position midway between the towns of Grasse and Vence with 270-degree views taking in both sea and mountains, is an intriguing and in some ways untypical example of the Bassons' work. It demonstrates how a modern planting attitude can be absorbed into the traditional Provençal garden vocabulary of cypress trees, olive groves and clipped shrubs in familiar species such as rosemary, lavender, cistus and teucrium. The clients were open to ▶

To continue turn to page 80

The planting seems to overflow the retaining wall by the pool and dining terrace — which was part of the designer's intention. The traditional vocabulary of lavender, euphorbias, teucrium and rosemary is enlivened by the likes of *Phlomis purpurea*, on the right, and *Teucrium fruticans*, *Lavandula dentata* and *Tulbaghia violacea* at the foot of the wall.




A photograph of a garden landscape. In the foreground, a rough, sandy dirt path winds through various plants, including purple flowering Salvia atriplicifolia. To the right, a swimming pool is partially visible. The middle ground is filled with tall, slender cypress trees and dense green shrubs. In the background, rolling hills are visible under a bright sky with the sun shining from the upper right, creating a lens flare effect. The overall scene is a blend of formal garden elements and naturalistic planting.

It's as if you are almost pushing the garden back into the surrounding landscape by creating more natural forms

This image A path that encircles the property descends past the pool terrace towards the surrounding plantings of olives and oaks, with cypress trees acting as way markers. The surface of the path has been left deliberately rough-looking, while *Salvia atriplicifolia* (formerly *Perovskia atriplicifolia*), which is native to the Middle East and Asia, explodes over the path from the right.

Facing page The pathway eventually roughens down to the merest indication of a formal way, flanked by seeded flowering prairies, which includes pink mallow in the foreground along with the white sprays of wild carrot and subtle pale-blue bituminaria.






▷ James's missionary zeal for a looser, wilder tone, and over the years it's turned into a real collaboration. "We've tweaked and edited and added, remoulding it a little more every year. That's the joy of it."

The result is a garden that retains certain classic Provençal elements – cypresses, lavender and a certain formality around the house – leavened by choice plants from James's growing roster of reliable additions, creating in the process a slightly 'shaggier' look that blends more easily with the rugged landscape. "We've been resculpting those clipped topiary balls into more pebble-like shapes that seem right with the landscape," he says. "It's as if you are almost pushing the garden back into the surrounding landscape by creating these more natural forms. Some things are pruned and some things are left, so you get that contrast."

Around the pool and terraces, James has retained formal elements, such as flanking lines of mulberry trees, while loosening the feel of the planting beds ranged around, so that they seem to tumble over the walls and into the space. Structurally these beds are still dependent on the bushy forms of lavender, rosemary and teucrium, with the addition of plants such as *Phlomis purpurea* and three species of *Euphorbia*.

But the area where James has been given freest rein to experiment is in the network of paths that encircles the garden at a lower level. Some paths extend into the surrounding landscape, creating a feeling that the ▷

At the back of the house is a path that leads through a mix of structural shrubs includes cistus, rosemary, atriplex, lavender and rosemary, with arbutus and olive trees above, and a clipped olive hedge in the background. To the left of the path, flower interest comes from the white umbels of wild carrot, *Daucus carota*, and the purple society garlic, *Tulbaghia violacea*.



We've tweaked and edited
and added, remoulding it
a little more every year.
That's the joy of it

▷ garden is somehow part of the wild. Traditional elements, such as cypress trees, help define the line of the paths, with James's flowering plants added to the mix to create interest and richness.

Among James's favourites are *Bupleurum fruticosum*, a Mediterranean shrub with large, spreading umbels of yellow-green flowers, and *Daucus carota*, which produces more compact umbels of white flowers and acts as a link plant. "It is difficult in some ways as it self-seeds so much and can be messy looking," James says. "But in this garden it creates this floating structure at height – and then just disappears."

The key is maintenance. James and Helen have come to realise that the plants themselves are not enough to create and sustain an intended tone. This is true everywhere, of course, but perhaps even more so in this harsh climate, where the local gardeners are used to working in a particular way. To this end, the Bassons have developed a team of trusted 'artist-gardeners' who work in pairs, dropping in on their gardens to ensure that the garden is not beginning to look too manicured. In the hills of Provence, it transpires, the plants alone are not enough – more than ever, it's the gardening that counts. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about the Bassons' work at scapedesign.com/en

This image Close to the entrance to the house, a relaxed seating area beside a water trough is shaded by two white mulberry trees that link the planting to the pool terrace at the rear.

Facing page A straight, stepped path (with *Centranthus ruber* sprouting at lower right) provides access at the front of the house, which faces the sea. However, a tall clipped-olive hedge has been planted to create a hard boundary, obscuring neighbouring houses on the slopes below. It makes for unimpeded vistas in almost every direction and a feeling of glorious solitude.

