

Stop and smell the pages

Romantic, thoughtful and practical, this part-diary, part-handbook on fragrant planting is one of the best gardening books John Hoyland has read for years

Gardening/autobiography
Scent Magic

Isabel Bannerman (Pimpernel Press, £30)

JULIAN and Isabel Bannerman are garden-makers responsible for some of the most innovative and extravagantly theatrical designs of the past 30 years. The couple conjure with temples, bridges, pillars and obelisks (crafted from wood rather than stone) to create gardens that feel as if they have long been a part of the landscape. The plantings are sumptuous, relaxed and romantic.

At Woolbeding and Arundel Castle in West Sussex, the stumpery at Highgrove, Gloucestershire, and numerous other sites, they have designed gardens to linger in, enticing us to pause. For many, they are the most creative and singular designers working in Britain today.

‘This book is an absolute feast, not only for gardeners’

Following the success of their book *Landscape of Dreams*, which explores the roots of their shared aesthetic and describes many of their creations, Isabel has now produced a book that is, on the surface, about scented plants. In fact, it is, in part, a diary of her gardening year—filled with advice about, among other things, scented plants—and, in part, an autobiography of a rich life spent ‘jostling with children, work, houses and gardens’.

Finding the right words to describe scent is a challenge, particularly as we all experience it in our own way. There have been many other books on scented



Roses, such as Minnehaha, are tricky to describe, rich and subtle

planting. Isabel’s own copies are well-thumbed and she is generous in acknowledging their importance, ‘but none of them told me how it “feels” to smell *Matthiola incana* after a shower in April’.

How we perceive scent is determined by many things: memories, season, gender, time of day, mood, weather. The author describes what she smells in her garden in Cornwall in a particular fleeting moment. Her diary starts with the perfume of hyacinths sweeping away her querulousness one New Year’s Day and glides through the year to the resinous scent of pines at Christmas.

Her writing is fluid and gentle, drifting easily through childhood memories, references to poets and artists, incidents from home and garden life. Interspersed with diary notes is solid, practical advice about scented plants, which, learnt at first hand, are the sort of invaluable gems all gardeners long to find.

to the melancholic image of an Echium skeleton seen against the watery light of winter.

Particularly captivating are the plant portraits, taken against black backgrounds, which evoke still lifes of 17th-century Spain and Holland. A sumptuous study of three quinces could have been painted by Francisco de Zurbarán

Part-practical handbook, part-biography, part-philosophical reflection on art and Nature, *Scent Magic* is also a kind of love letter to the author’s husband, whose presence as ‘Mr B’ helps form the warp and weft of the book’s tapestry. Whether putting diesel into a petrol car, being enchanted by snowdrops, sharing advice on growing night-scented stock or worrying that age is making him resemble Jeremy Corbyn (more like Capt Haddock, she reassures him), he is threaded through every part of the book. Their relationship is a *leitmotiv* that offers a glimpse into a creative partnership responsible for some extraordinary gardens and clearly fizzing with ideas and dreams.

Now that so much garden writing is reduced to photo captions or bite-sized Instagram commentary, this book is an absolute feast, not only for gardeners, but for anyone interested in art and Nature and in living well.

Recent books on growing things

The Flower Garden: How to grow flowers from seed
Clare Foster & Sabina Rüber (Laurence King, £19.99)

Planting the Oudolf Gardens at Hauser & Wirth Somerset
Rory Dusoier (Hauser & Wirth and Filbert Press, £30)

Primrose
Elizabeth Lawson (Reaktion, £16)

Heritage Apples
Caroline Ball (Bodleian Library, £25)

The Garden Jungle: Gardening to Save the Planet
Dave Goulson (Jonathan Cape, £16.99)

Wild About Weeds: Garden Design with Rebel Plants
Jack Wallington (Laurence King, £19.99)

Isabel Bannerman, RHS; Helen Dillon

Botany

Wisteria: The Complete Guide

James Compton & Chris Lane (RHS Publications, £40)

‘NO CLIMBER... has added more to the beauty of gardens.’ That was the verdict of Kew’s curator William Bean in 1914, and nothing has happened since then to challenge his judgment.

What has changed, however, is the sheer number, variety and excellence of wisterias from which to choose.

James Compton and Chris Lane have written the first complete guide since Peter Valder’s *Wisterias: A Comprehensive Guide* (1995) and it should have a good run before a further monograph is needed. This is a smashing book—wonderfully comprehensive and completely satisfying. Everything you ever wanted to know about wisterias is here: their history (there’s an exquisite Chinese painting from the 10th century), taxonomy, propagation, cultivation, the oldest, the largest, where to see them and much else. It will please and intrigue beginners



Well-named *Wisteria sinensis* Prolific adorns RHS Rosemoor House, Devon

and experts alike. And no question is left unanswered.

There are five species of wisteria—*W. frutescens* from the US (seldom seen in Europe), *W. japonica*, *W. floribunda* and *W. brachybotrys* from Japan and *W. sinensis* from China.

Biography

Beth Chatto

Catherine Horwood (Pimpernel, £30)

THE LIFE STORY of this elegant plant guru contains enough drive and determination to inspire any modern woman. The daughter of a village policeman, Beth Chatto was clever and ambitious from the start. Meeting the grandson of the founder of the publisher Chatto & Windus as a schoolgirl, she discovered he shared her interest in ecology and plants. He owned a fruit farm and was 14 years older than her; they married when Beth was 20. Once, when I interviewed her about one of her books, she told me: ‘I owe everything to Andrew.’

In her twenties, Beth led the life of a conventional middle-class housewife and mother. Her phenomenal energy was channelled into cleaning and she later

confessed that, in times of stress: ‘I always find making my home clean and tidy is comforting.’ Dress-making, flower-arranging and gardening absorbed her. So far, so normal for most women in the post-war years, but her flower-arranging skills soon brought her fame as a lecturer. Getting out of the house and away from the increasingly reclusive Andrew suited her driven temperament.

Meeting Cedric Morris, the artist gardener with his very different life from her own bourgeois occupations, changed her ideas on gardening. Morris told her that she would never make a garden on the boulder clay that surrounded her first married home, so she persuaded her husband to build a house on the edge of a fruit farm at Elmstead Market, Essex. As the farm failed and was finally sold, the famous Beth Chatto nursery began to take over their lives. The energies



Beth Chatto at Great Dixter, home of her friend Christopher Lloyd

that had gone into housekeeping were now absorbed in propagating and planting—as well as into a love affair with a neighbour, who, for her birthday, gave her scent and a striking green swimsuit; her husband gave her Mahler’s *Song of the Earth*.

The creator of those beautiful Chelsea Flower Show displays in the 1970s changed the way we garden today. To meet, Beth was

development of wisterias has sped up over the past 40 years. More will be bred and introduced in the years to come, not least because, so far, there has been almost no hybridising between the species. ‘The choice of cultivar is vital,’ the authors say, and they are keen to tell us about the best of the new.

This is a book to pick up and read—it’s too small to be a coffee-table book and the paper is rather thin, although the design, content and illustrations are all of the highest standard.

The photographs are imaginative and absolutely superb. There are wisteria avenues and arches and houses completely smothered by purple trusses, plus clear close-ups of every individual cultivar—nearly 100 of them. The descriptions are authoritative, absorbing, fascinating and inspirational: you will end up wanting to grow every one of them.

Wisteria: The Complete Guide lacks nothing. Well written, well edited and, therefore, highly readable, it cannot be faulted or recommended too highly. *Charles Quest-Ritson*

an inscrutable coiled spring of a person, beautifully composed, a brilliant lecturer and writer and, of course, a terrific grower.

We learned a little about what kind of a person she was from her exchange of letters with her lifelong friend Christopher Lloyd, published as *Dear Friend and Gardener*. This book shows what a remarkable woman she was. *Mary Keen*

Art

Eileen Hogan: Personal Geographies

Elisabeth R. Fairman (Yale, £50)

DESPITE REGULAR gallery shows over the past 40 years and frequent exhibits at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, Eileen Hogan has been a largely unsung hero of the British art scene. Now, thanks to the publication of this book, a recent major retrospective at the Yale Center for British Art in the US and an exhibition opening today at Browse & Darby in London, the veil has been lifted. This handsome, profusely illustrated, near 300-page volume, with essays by Duncan Robinson, Elisabeth Fairman, Todd Longstaffe-Gowan and others, reveals more than half a century's creative output, from her time as a teenager at Camberwell College of Art to today's septuagenarian professor of Fine Art and painter of London's gardens and hidden spaces, as well as a royal portraitist.

Observation and drawing have always been at the heart of Prof Hogan's work: witness sketchbook drawings of trees from the late 1950s. Trees, particularly London's plane trees with their scaly bark, have always held a particular fascination for her. She is shown, in one of Sandra Lousada's many photographs that enhance the text, shrouded



Kensington Gardens, a place 'where my mind stops being busy'

against the weather, drawing the trunk of a great plane in Lincoln's Inn Fields. For her, planes are not merely generic, they are as individual as people, each with their own characteristics; a vibrant oil study of the bark of one reproduced here gives new meaning to the term tachism.

Although she is an unashamed realist, abstraction is never far from the surface of Prof Hogan's paintings, underpinning her perception of the natural world and its inhabitants, human as well as arboreal. In his perceptive essay, Mr Longstaffe-Gowan notes the linearity of her work: 'Lines,' he writes, have a 'paradoxical quality', particularly in her garden paintings, in which 'bold, layered, horizontal contours' demarcate paths, beds and boundaries.

Despite being largely an urban artist, Prof Hogan is heir to the great tradition of British landscape painting, albeit more in the wake of London Impressionist Paul Maitland than John Constable. Sky seldom intrudes into her land- and cityscapes, as she keeps her eyes down, concentrating on exploring squares, gardens and other urban spaces, sketchbook in hand. She does not sit at her easel in front of her subject, but gradually distills it through an elaborate evolutionary process, from cursory jottings to finished work.

Her various sketch- and notebooks are as full of the written word as they are of drawings and she is not averse to both camera and computer as aides to composition. By the end of her prolonged distillation process,

her subjects have been transformed, not in an *Alice in Wonderland* way, but rather, as Duncan Robinson points out, subjected to a 'visual game of hide-and-seek, their forms dissolving to become one with the shades with which they mingle'.

An observer by nature, Prof Hogan's talents were honed in her early years by a period of prolonged study. From attending Saturday-morning classes at Camberwell at the age of 14, she progressed to a full-time, four-year course, followed by three years at the Royal Academy Schools, a year's scholarship at the British School in Athens and a further three years at the Royal College of Art. During this period, she not only studied painting, but also lettering and book production; later, during her years as a teacher, she founded the Camberwell Press.

Prof Hogan is also an impressive, if informal, portraitist; in 2015, Prince Charles commissioned her to paint two of the surviving D-Day veterans for the Royal Collection Trust, as well as informal portraits of himself and the Duchess of Cornwall.

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Gardening

The Story of Gardening

Penelope Hobhouse with Ambra Edwards (Pavilion, £35)

TWO THINGS immediately stand out in this new and updated edition of Penelope Hobhouse's classic *The Story of Gardening*: more and much better pictures and a simplified format that does away with the old Dorling Kindersley obsession with pulling themes out of the main story and squirreling them away in panels and sidebars. Further delving reveals the changes go deeper, often thanks to new discoveries.

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, it turns out, were almost

certainly in Ninevah, near modern Mosul, and built not by Nebuchadnezzar II in the sixth century BC, but by the earlier king Sennacherib. Also, in 2017, a small, painted wooden model

'The changes go deep, thanks to new discoveries'

was found in the tomb of Meketre, chancellor to Mentuhotep II. This was made in Thebes in about 2000 BC and is one of the earliest representations of a garden, although, with its copper-lined fishpond and doll's house-sized



Thomas Allom's House of a Chinese Merchant Near Canton, 1845

'sycomore' fig trees with green-painted leaves, it's almost modern.

Other changes include more on Islamic gardens, the development of Renaissance styles in Europe

and beefed-up chapters on China, plus, of course, a broader appreciation of today's gardens. Much to absorb and enjoy.

Tiffany Daneff