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HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GLOW?

DAY-TO-NIGHT DRAMA

STAR STYLE

CATH KIDSTON, PAUL SMITH, KAREN MILLEN, LEE BROOM AND MORE

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STEP INTO *Summer*

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IDEAS AND INSPIRATION FOR YOUR HOME, GARDEN AND LIFESTYLE

Light & shade

If cutting-edge style that works as well by day as by night is your idea of the perfect garden, we have all the inspiration you need

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PHOTOS: HARPUR GARDEN IMAGES

From far left: Philip's latest project: the garden's minimalist style mirrors that of the house's interior; trees appear to float in reflective pools; water spills from a long trough

Philip Nixon's good-looking garden designs have won him global acclaim

With designs decorating the pages of top style magazines and three Chelsea Flower Show gold medals under his belt, it's no wonder the rich and famous come calling at Philip Nixon's door when they want something special for their garden. The stunning space pictured on these pages encapsulates his signature style – a vision of light, stone, foliage and flowers that just oozes sophistication. But how does he conjure up these amazing landscapes? To find out, *ACHICA Living* went to meet the green-fingered guru to talk about his latest project.

Your latest garden project reminds us of a piece of modern sculpture. Was that your inspiration?

'The owners love art and their new-build house is very contemporary and decorated in a crisp, minimalist style, which I wanted to mirror outside. The garden is quite a large space, and lends itself to bold, dramatic landscaping. It wraps around the side and back of the house and the rectangular blocks of paving and planting unify the design.'

> *'A large space like this lends itself to bold, dramatic landscaping'*

We notice you're a fan of water features – what's the trick to getting them right?

'I've always admired the beautiful water trough in a garden by the Mexican landscape architect Luis Barragán, and used the idea for this design. The trough is almost the width of the garden and designed so water spills continuously over the top to create a smooth, reflective surface and soothing rippling sound. The pools between the limestone bridges also reflect the sky and planting, and a UV filtration system keeps the water clear. I asked fountain designer Andrew Ewing (andrewewing.co.uk) to create and install the features. His expertise put my mind at rest because mistakes involving water, electricity and lighting can result in disaster if anything goes wrong.'

Left: perovskia. **Below:** heleniums. **Far right:** Verbena bonariensis

PLANTS THAT BURST INTO BLOOM IN JULY

'Try heleniums – they come in a range of hot colours and their daisy-like blooms look great in bold groups. Perovskia is a lovely blue-flowered shrub that makes a great partner for these perennials. Also look out for Verbena bonariensis, with its long, slim stems topped with little mauve flowers that will bloom for many months.' You'll find all of these plants and more at Crocus (crocus.co.uk).

DO YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN? SHARE IT WITH US AT FACEBOOK.COM/ACHICA.FANPAGE

TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

'These owners have a number of lighting artworks, so we extended their passion for light into the garden with a range of exciting visual effects. The blue glass panels have LED lights inside them, while the timber summerhouse has been inlaid with strips of light to create a sculptural installation, which provides a dramatic focal point at night. Placing small spots at the base of trees or in pots washes plants with light, showing off stems and foliage colours.'

'Repeating plants and features adds rhythm to a design, punctuating key areas of the garden'

How did you decide which plants made the final cut?

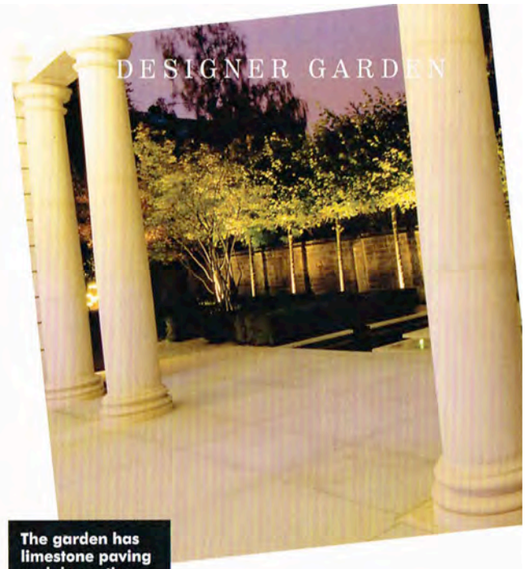
'I wanted something wild and shaggy to contrast with the sharp, linear geometry of the design and chose flowering perennials, such as heleniums and crocosmias, for the main beds. These produce an abundance of colourful blooms in late summer and also look after themselves, requiring very little maintenance once they're established.'

What part do the hedges and trees play in your design?

'The shrubs and trees add structure and textural interest. I've used beech hedging, which has serrated leaves that turn an amazing copper colour in autumn, and multi-stemmed *Amelanchier* trees. These also offer autumn colour, as well as white spring blossom and purple berries in the summer. At the side of the house, I chose lime trees for their large heart-shaped leaves, and clipped them to form a pleached hedge along one wall. This is basically a hedge on stilts, where the trunks are left bare and stems above trained to form a dense leafy screen. Blocks of clipped box, or *Buxus sempervirens*, add to the graphic picture, and are very easy to plant. Simply buy plants that have already been clipped into cubes and fit them together to form the shapes you desire.'

If it was left to us, those shrubs in containers wouldn't look so lush and healthy! What's the secret?

'They're spindle trees, or *Euonymus europaeus*, which I've included for their blazing autumn foliage and pink berries, and although deciduous, they still retain their vase-shaped stem structure over winter. Repeating plants and features adds rhythm to a design, and I've used rows of these spindles in grey cubes like sculptures to punctuate key areas of the garden. Plants in containers need more care than those in the ground, and I've installed an automatic watering system to ensure they have sufficient moisture. Shrubs also need feeding once a year in spring.'



The garden has limestone paving and dramatic classical pillars

Clockwise from above left: The garden transforms into a sculptural installation at night; uplit lime trees are mirrored in the water; rows of vase-shaped spindle trees in cube containers contrast with the linear architecture

You've designed so many gardens over the years. Spill the beans: who was most fun to work with?

'I love working for people who love plants, like me. Sometimes, my clients don't know a lot about gardening when I first meet them, but take it up as a hobby and are really keen to learn more once the garden is complete, which is really satisfying. One of my most enthusiastic clients was the TV and radio presenter Jamie Theakston, who's such a nice guy. We created a wonderful outdoor room for him, complete with bookcases and sofas.'

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