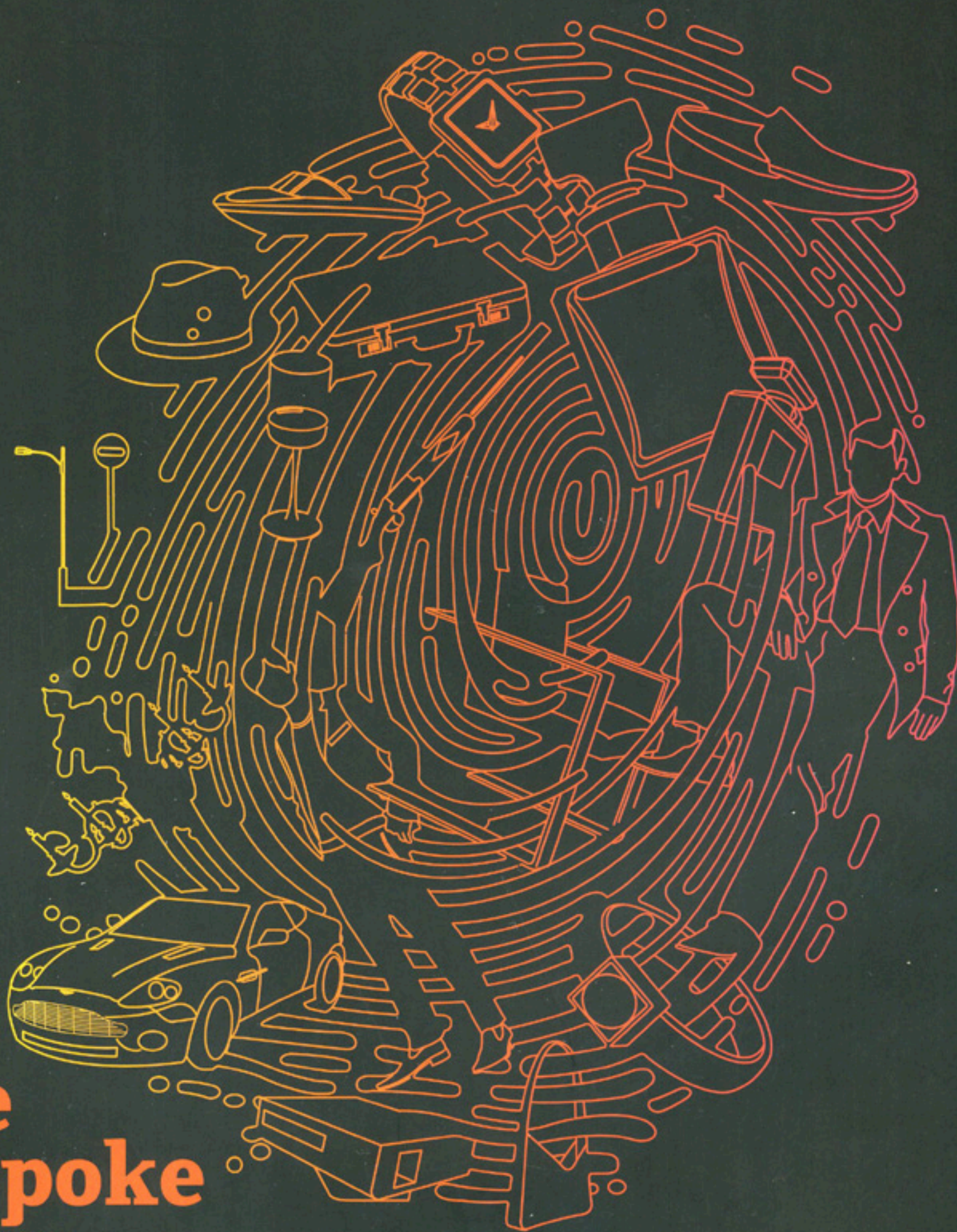


BRUMMELL

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Gardening leave

Swapping the City for the outdoors has led to a successful career in contemporary garden design for this former bond trader



For any tortured, creative souls hiding on the trading desks of London's investment banks, Philip Nixon offers a glimpse of how sweet life away from the markets can be. Just two years after graduating from the Inchbald School of Design, 41-year-old Nixon is one of the rising stars of British garden design, with two gold medals from the Chelsea Flower Show to his name.

Having started out designing gardens with £20,000 budgets, he has just received a £500,000 commission for a garden in Suffolk. These days, he won't get out of bed for a commission of less than £25,000 – and that doesn't include his fee. "People who've spent a fortune doing up their house obviously want their garden to match it," he says. And Nixon's calm, contemporary designs have proved popular with wealthy Londoners.

His signature style is making the built elements of gardens as important as the plants. His gold-medal-winning entry for this year's Chelsea Flower Show, designed with Marcus Barnett for property company Savills, took inspiration from the works of modernist architect Mies van der Rohe, while his design for a Chelsea house owned by an equities banker looked less like a conventional garden and more like an outdoor room in which plants played an integral part.

At school he thought about a career in architecture, but when he weighed up seven years' study with no

"People who've spent a fortune doing up their house obviously want their garden to match it"

money versus the promise of a well-paid City job, Mammon won. After stints at Belgium's Kredietbank and Swiss Bank Corporation, he joined Japanese bank Yamaichi in 1995. "That was the big cheque," he says. But, after six months, it was clear the bank wasn't as committed to European capital markets as it had claimed. Nixon negotiated a decent pay-off and spent four years trading the money on his own account. "It soon became boring. I was good enough to make a decent living, but was never going to make big bucks."

He took three months off to work out what to do. "I knew I couldn't go back to being an employee," he says. Having been a friend of the Chelsea Physic Garden, he signed up for a gardening course, which reignited his love of design. "It wasn't really an option to pursue architecture," he says. "But garden design offered me a route to doing good architectural work."

He's been winning rave reviews ever since. But, leaving the trading floor behind doesn't mean Nixon has lost his alpha-male tendencies. He's delighted to be indulging his passion, but is also determined to build a successful business. He says, "There's something about making money that gives anything a serious edge." ♣

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Above Philip Nixon has captured attention with his sleek, award-winning garden designs (like the Savills garden, right and far right), but also likes turning heads with his Vespa Granturismo

