



Weeping mulberry trees mark the corners of the long pond. Beyond it lies a bank that is now grassed over but was once covered by shrub roses

# Reaping the rewards

Over the course of almost 50 years, Ian and Caroline Bond have created a beautiful Cotswold garden from scratch, in which mature trees and shrubs flourish alongside formal plantings and wildflower meadows

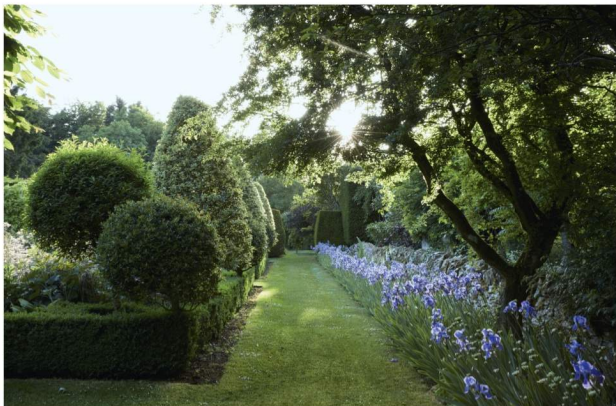
TEXT **CAROLINE DONALD** | PHOTOGRAPHS **BRITT WILLOUGHBY DYER**





ABOVE Neatly clipped yew hedges demarcate a formal area in front of the 17th-century house, where previously there was only a field.  
 BELOW The Bonds retained the sweeping open view, from the house down to the woodland in the valley below, with the help of a ha-ha





ABOVE A border of glorious *Iris germanica* edges the walled flower garden, where topiary and box hedging provide elegant formal structure.  
BELOW 'John Downie' apple trees are trained over a flagstone path in the kitchen garden. The font was found on another part of the estate





When Ian and Caroline Bond's handkerchief tree, *Davidia involucrata*, flowered for the first time in 20 years in their garden at Upton Wold in Gloucestershire, Caroline was so excited to see the first bract that she opened a bottle of Champagne.

'If you "instant garden", you don't ever get that thrill,' she says.

There is little of the 'instant' at Upton Wold. Instead, the Bonds have always been in it for the long haul. Since 1975, they have planted a huge variety of trees and shrubs, as well as creating herbaceous borders, a large kitchen garden, wildflower meadows and formal areas around the 17th-century house on their Northwick Estate near Moreton-in-Marsh. And this is all from scratch. 'There really was no garden,' recalls Caroline, as we gaze out from the York stone terrace, down the perfectly striped central lawn flanked with buttressed yew hedges, over the ha-ha and to the meadows beyond. It is a scene that seems rooted in history. In fact, she says, 'it was just rough ground right up to the house, though there was an old vegetable garden'. As for trees, there were a couple of ancient yews, a holly and some old apple trees. And that was it.

It was a case, therefore, of creating something out of nothing – and slowly, with the passage of time, leading the dance. But they did need to think about the structure upon which to hang any future garden, so they invited veteran landscape designer Brenda Colvin to come and inspect. She brought along her young business partner Hal Moggridge. Caroline remembers the elderly lady walking with the aid of two sticks. 'Brenda turned to Hal and said, "Well, dear boy, if they agree to keep that sweep down to the valley, then take the job on. If they don't, don't touch it – that is the garden." And with that she walked out, saying, "Shelter, shelter – they will need a lot of shelter."' So they did as they were told, planting a belt of cypress, holly and other stalwarts, well hidden, to add protection. Hal is still involved – more as a friend nowadays – as is Rupert Golby, the award-winning garden designer, whom they consult periodically for planting advice. There is also a team of three gardeners, led by Alex Baldwin.

Caroline confesses she was a novice when she started out, with no overall plan in mind. 'I knew absolutely nothing at all: it sort of evolved. I spent my whole time at Kiftsgate and Hidcote, making notes.' One of the first things that went in was a large greenhouse, not only for propagation but also to make sure there would always be flowers for the house. Under

Hal's instruction, a bank near the house was dug out using a JCB. 'A lot of people would have terraced it, but I thought that was too Victorian and not in keeping with the house,' says Caroline. Instead, she had four beds of shrub roses planted informally 'as if someone had thrown them onto the bank'. These have since been removed – 'They looked amazing for three weeks and, for the rest of the year, simply awful' – and the bank has been grassed over now the rest of the garden has developed sufficiently for attention to be drawn elsewhere.

While there are elements one might expect to find in a large Cotswold garden, Upton Wold is also a place of treasures and rarities. For a start, there are the tree peonies bred by the late Sir Peter Smithers, the diplomat and plantsman who was Ian's godfather. They came from Pivoines Rivière, the French nursery to which he bequeathed his collection, and among them is the lovely, pure white 'Dojean' *rockii* hybrid, with purple slashed flares – named after Peter's wife.

There is also a pale pink magnolia named after Peter himself – one of several, despite naysayers declaring that the neutral soil would not be suitable for these acid-lovers. Among the specimen trees and shrubs is the National Collection of *pterocarya* (wing nuts). But the collection Ian is most proud of is that of *juglans*, the walnut tree, which is from the same family, with about 180 cultivars planted as part of an arbo-retum on the furthest reaches of the garden. The couple reckon it is at least the most extensive collection in Europe. 'Walking round it is like walking round the world,' says Caroline.

Ian has been enamoured of the walnut from an early age. 'These trees are beautiful and there are so many things you can do with the walnut,' he explains. 'Not only is it wonderful for its wood, but the nuts provide oil and are good for you.' Importantly, they are free from most diseases. Ian's collection has been amassed with the collaboration of nurseries and plant hunters from across the globe, as well as the University of California, Davis; he has only three rare species still to find – *J. jamaicensis*, *J. steyermarkii* and *J. venezuelensis*.

At the edge of the garden is a labyrinth designed in 2013, with standing stones at its centre. Beyond is glorious Cotswold farmland. 'We wanted to put a full stop at the end of the arbo-retum,' says Caroline. But does it mark a full stop to their work? 'I don't think so,' she says, looking horrified, before telling me about their plans for introducing more autumn colour □

Upton Wold garden is open on Wednesdays 10am–4pm and on other days by appointment. Visit [uptonwold.co.uk](http://uptonwold.co.uk) for details

The labyrinth and standing stones that mark the end of the cultivated garden





ABOVE FROM LEFT The flower of the species tree peony *Paeonia rockii*. Informal woodland planting in the shady area around a dew pond.  
 BELOW FROM LEFT Caroline designed the sculpture for the walnut plantation, where a grassy path cuts through a sea of cow parsley

