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The perfect garden

The classic landscape at Rousham is full of brilliant design ideas to inspire you, no matter what size your garden, says Arne Maynard in the first of his new series on garden design

PHOTOGRAPHS BRITT WILLOUGHBY DYER



ARNE MAYNARD is a designer whose busy London practice creates gardens all over the world. He lives in Monmouthshire

I wanted to start my new series on design with Rousham, because it is a garden I go back to again and again for inspiration in my own work. It is a classic of the early landscape movement, designed by William Kent (1685-1748) in the early 18th century, and proof that the fundamentals of good design don't change.

One of the things I love most about Rousham is the sense of arrival. When you turn into the drive you know already that something is building up. You catch sight of a classical doorway in the boundary wall and spot a rusticated temple on the other side. As you approach, you drive past a field of grazing long-horn cattle, past an unpretentious lodge, and then suddenly the view opens up to an archetypal English country house scene. The ingredients are very simple: the façade of the beautiful Jacobean house and a broad swathe of velvety, striped grass, framed by huge, mature lime trees.

The value of simplicity

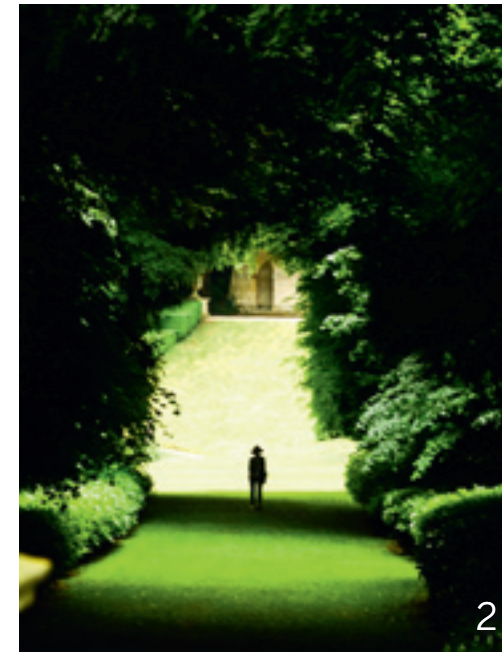
Rousham is about simplicity and quality of design. It is a big, grand garden, but every time I visit, I come away with something new that can be re-interpreted in even the smallest of gardens.

Only a few species of plant have been used to create the impact and this is something I've taken from Rousham – that a limited palette of plants can produce a very powerful effect. Two or three species of trees, or ten varieties of herbaceous plants in a border, can be more effective and elegant than creating too much of a mixture. Rousham is not a flowery garden; there are ▷

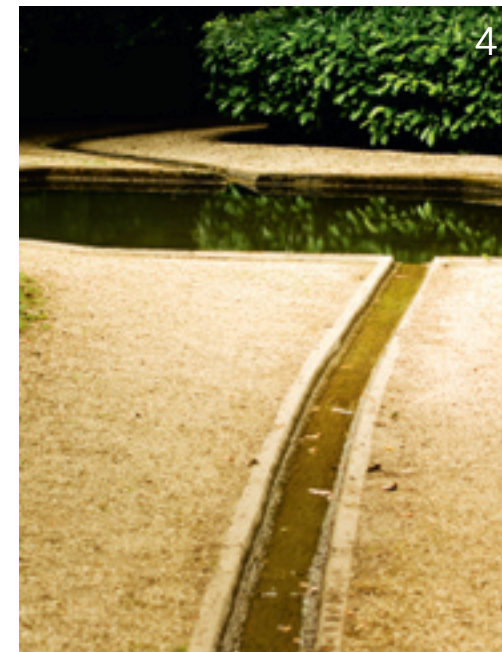
1. The Praeneste

Without knowing it, you first encounter William Kent's arcaded Praeneste from the Praeneste Terrace above. Not until you come down through the Vale of Venus do you actually see the building, which looks out on to the River Cherwell and the medieval Heyford Bridge.

“ Rousham has an invisible thread that pulls you through the garden ”



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2. Light and shadow

At Rousham darkness alternates with light and the natural with the man-made. The effect of travelling down a shadowy green tunnel towards an object in the light is intensified by the simple palette of plants and materials.

3. Temple of Echo

The interior of this beautiful pavilion is limewashed earthy ochre, and there is a charming weather-beaten seat, as well as a remarkable Roman sarcophagus. A garden building can be given this venerable look with layers of old limewash plaster that time will gradually strip away.

4. The Rill and Cold Bath

The point where the serpentine rill meets the octagonal cold bath is bathed in light before continuing its journey between the clipped laurel in the shade of the mature trees. The rill itself is made of naturally cut stone.

5. The statue of Apollo

Like all Rousham's superb sculptural pieces, Apollo is carefully placed to draw you on. He stands at the end of the Long Walk, backed by the darkness of a huge cedar, gazing out of the grounds towards the River Cherwell.

▷ flowers, but they are separate from the rest of the garden. Trees, shrubs and grass compose the structure that's there 365 days of the year and Rousham is a great demonstration of how to use structure in a garden. For instance, there are no signs and yet everybody follows the same route, because Kent uses subtle but simple devices to draw you through the garden.

The garden develops through a series of contrasts: light and shadow, sunshine and shade, cut grass and uncut grass, nature versus the man-made. So in one area you have beautifully mown lawn separated from a long grass meadow by a

ha-ha. The contrast is incredibly strong and you can use the idea even in a small cottage garden. Let's say you have a field or an orchard behind your garden. You might put in a simple estate railing that is very transparent, or allow the long field grass to come into your garden by a metre, so you're borrowing the view, holding hands with the landscape.

Grass is important at Rousham; it is the unifying surface throughout but is used in many different ways. Sometimes it's a mown edge to a border, or a simple chamfered (45°) bank around a raised rectangular lawn; long ▷

DESIGN IDEAS

6. Apple tree

We might wish for an orchard of ancient apple trees, though few of us are fortunate enough to have one. But by imitating the characteristics of these bent old trees it is possible to capture the spirit of great age.



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7. Herbaceous border

Plants such as blue *Geranium x magnificum* spill on to the path, giving the borders a wonderfully soft, relaxed look. Planting directly into paths alongside borders lends a feeling of age and an air of romance.



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8. Delphiniums

These tall flower spikes mingle with roses and other classics of the English country house border. If you have space, there is nothing more magical than a separate area that comes into its own in high summer.



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9. The Parterre and Pigeon House

Formality and abundance together create a sense of well-established order, with trained fruit trees on the walls of the Pigeon House, a fan Morello cherry (left) and an espaliered 'Conference' pear (right). The box parterre is part planted with lady's mantle, valerian, opium poppies and roses.



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10. Climbing roses

No other climber captures the essence of the English country garden like the rose. Framing an arch in the walled garden, Climbing Rosa 'Cécile Brunner', though not a repeat flowerer, reliably produces a profusion of small pink fragrant flowers at the height of summer.

Where to see

Rousham House, Rousham, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX25 4QU.
TEL 01869 347 110
WEBSITE www.rousham.org
OPEN every day from 10am.
Last entry 4.30pm.
Tickets £5 per person. No children under 15 or dogs.

Recommended stockists

Trained fruit

Branch Nurseries, The Old England, High Street, Sutton on Trent, Notts NG23 6QA.
Tel (Chris Pike) 07760 308 077., www.branchnurseries.co.uk

Roses

David Austin Roses, Bowling Green Lane, Albrighton, Wolverhampton WV7 3HB
Tel 01902 376300, www.davidaustinroses.com

Box Hedging

Ready Hedge, Court Gate Nursery, Station Road, Eckington, Worcestershire WR10 3BB. Tel 01386 750585, www.readyhedge ltd.com

▷ grass against short grass; a narrow grass path that slows you down as you walk, versus a big wide path that moves you on quickly.

Design-led

Rousham has a *thread* that pulls you through the garden. When you leave the lawn, you are drawn under the trees by the rounded shape of a clipped holly. The clipped curve is like a magnet that seems to pull you towards it, and this understated invitation could be copied in any size garden, by using a drum or cylinder of topiary to act as an entrance.

You are constantly moving from light to shade and back as the garden unfolds in a sequence of wonderful features, from Kent's seven arched Praeneste and the ponds and cascades in Venus' Vale, to the cold bath and serpentine rill. This ribbon of water snakes in and out of the light, an idea that would be wonderful in a garden of any size, for example travelling to deliver water into a dipping pool in a vegetable garden or an orchard. At Rousham, it travels up through dappled light, under overhanging lime trees and through banks of clipped Portuguese laurel. Using laurel in this way is typically 18th-century and it has a lovely

purity to it. We have used a similar idea with square or rectangular platforms of beech or box acting as an under-storey for trees. It creates weight in a garden, and makes a formal contrast with the trees growing free and wild above.

A last blaze of colour

Gradually you are led back to the lawn and delivered, through an ancient, knotty yew hedge and a wrought-iron gate, into a hidden walled garden. Now, after all that cool green, there is an amazing sensation of colour. You're in a magical garden with the ghosts of old apple trees and around the edges, a

big, blowsy Edwardian-style border. On the mellow brick walls, ancient apple trees are trained, an option for small gardens that haven't room for free-standing fruit trees. Some of the old apple trees in the centre of the garden are so bowed down they almost kiss the ground, and we can emulate this with new trees, by creating a framework to train the branches, so that in time they are drawn down.

Looking, observing, achieving – that's what it's all about. It's a question of saying "I love that look, how do I achieve it?" □

NEXT MONTH Arne Maynard's tips on making entrances – including driveways and parking areas.