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velvet*

The WALKING ON SUNSHINE Issue

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Paradises on Earth

As American writer Henry Mitchell once said: “Almost any garden, if you see it at just the right moment, can be confused with paradise.” Velvet’s Melanie Taylor invites you to explore some of the region’s most sumptuous gardens this summer

Longstowe Hall

Hidden at the end of a tree-lined drive, in the Cambridgeshire countryside near Bourn, is the beautiful Grade II listed Longstowe Hall, the family home of William and Mercedes Bevan, set amongst their 1,000-hectare estate. Built in the 16th century, Longstowe is now a popular wedding venue and it’s easy to see why. Its sweeping lawns, specimen trees, orangery and lakeside gazebo provide a spectacular backdrop to weddings and celebrations. My visit in May coincides with the rose garden and restored Edwardian borders both bursting into life.

Owner Mercedes says: “There is nothing low-maintenance about this garden – we dig up a section of the border every year in order to strengthen it – but what makes me happiest is how the self-seeders do their own thing and pop up wherever they like.” Using the original Edwardian planting plan, Mercedes and her small team of gardeners have rejuvenated the borders with what she describes as “somewhat old-fashioned” planting, in purples and white but with vibrant rudbeckia and goldenrod giving stunning colour into the autumn. Mercedes suggests we cross the bridge to enjoy the vista back to the house from the tree-lined avenue in the parkland, and it’s certainly worth the walk.

You can visit with pre-booked, timed tickets from 11am to 4pm on the following Sundays: June 29, July 13 and 27, August 10 and 24 and September 7 and 21.

See longstowe.co.uk/gardens



Top, Longstowe peonies and roses; above, aquilegia and peonies

David Parr House

If respite is needed from the hustle and bustle of Cambridge city centre, then a surprise awaits behind the doors of 184 and 186 Gwydir Street, where you’ll find the charming gardens of David Parr House. This Arts and Crafts house and museum with its hand-painted interiors has a cottage garden at 186, while local cut-flower grower Anna Taylor has recently redesigned and newly planted the garden at number 184 for visitors to enjoy.

For opening times see davidparrhouse.org/visit



Elton Hall Millennium Orangery

Elton Hall

Elton Hall is about three miles off the A1 at Peterborough. Home to the Proby family since 1660, Elton Hall is a surprising find, with a garden that doesn’t reveal itself all at once.

The walls of the estate office are cloaked in roses, and I especially like the tiny, double, lemon-yellow blooms of *Rosa banksiae* ‘Lutea’ and the underplanting of white, pink and yellow cistus. The sunken gardens and lilypond are surrounded by an abundant elegance of planting, which draws instant interest from visitors and pollinators alike. On my visit, I’m captivated by a spiky purple firework, the *Buddleja alternifolia* (fountain butterfly bush) with its arching habit of tiny, scented lilac flowers covered in bees and

Wyken Hall and Vineyards

Once occupied by the Romans, the Wyken Hall estate near Bury St Edmunds was recorded in the Domesday book. The Elizabethan manor house dates back to 1570 with further wings added in 1630 and 1680 and another makeover in 1920.

As you walk towards the hall, the delightful cottage garden and its lovely display of pink and purple lupins provides a glimpse of the pleasures to come. On entering the main garden, you're greeted by a quincunx, a striking feature of five interlocking circles full of tulips in spring and inspired by Gertrude Jekyll's herb garden design at Knebworth House in 1911.

Head Gardener Pip Green, who grew up nearby, has been at Wyken for 10 years, "coming home" she says, after 30 years gardening in the US where she described climate conditions in the northwest as being very similar to those over here. When I meet her, Pip and assistant gardener Alex are busy preparing for the garden's annual NGS opening with much watering and weeding to be done. The rose garden, one of her favourite areas, was formerly an orchard with only the pear trees remaining today.



Wyken wisteria

butterflies. Opposite, the immaculately clipped box parterre is flanked by splendid topiary – including the family dog. In May the wisteria walk is a magnificent sight, its cascading white racemes drawing you in, as they unveil the route to the hidden flower garden with its Coriolis fountain. The planting develops and evolves as the summer progresses. On the day I visit, it's a relaxed balance of alliums, roses and irises amongst topiary cones. From there, a series of seemingly secret paths weave their way to the gothic Millennium Orangery, which, with its cypress and lemon trees, immediately evokes memories of foreign holidays.

Check the website for opening dates and times. See eltonhall.com/visitor-info



Wyken rose garden

Pip loves how the rose garden and its connecting 'garden rooms' sit so comfortably within the borrowed landscape beyond. I'm filled with a sense of the relaxed informality of these 'formal' gardens; it's as if they are giving you a warm embrace, which, when I describe that feeling to Pip, she says "is exactly their intention".

On sitting down with the hall's owner, Sir Kenneth Carlisle, I'm struck by the terracotta hues of the copper limewash on the walls which Kenneth tells me is the "true Suffolk pink" of Elizabethan times. The hall was originally painted white. He explains his American wife Carla's influence on choosing the earthy colour to contrast with the vibrant peacock-blue tones of the painted gates and the rocking chairs brought over from Mississippi. The evergreen *Fremontodendron californicum* (Californian flannel bush) provides an eye-catching display with its profusion of yellow, saucer-like blooms contrasting perfectly with the delicate purple flowers of the neighbouring solanum.

"One of the luckiest things about gardening," Kenneth tells me, "is when you are able to stay in a garden long enough to see the results of your efforts. Take that



Elton Hall irises

Fuller's Mill Garden

Nestled in the woods along the banks of the River Lark at West Stow, the seven-acre garden at Fuller's Mill makes for an excellent visit on its own or enroute to Wyken Hall. Open on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays until October, the garden, which is now run by charity Perennial, was the work of the late Bernard Tickner MBE, who spent more than 50 years creating a woodland paradise.

See perennial.org.uk/gardens/gardens-menu/fullers-mill-garden

Sequoia sempervirens (coastal redwood), I planted that in 1970 when it was two feet high. So the great thing about being in the same place for a long time is that you can be patient; if you plant something, it may be five or 10 years before it really begins to show well in the garden." Wyken's four-acre gardens are open 1pm to 5pm from Wednesday to Friday and on Sundays until the end of September. The gardens are wheelchair accessible, but only assistance dogs are allowed beyond the gates; well-behaved dogs on leads can enjoy the adjoining woodland walk during the summer.

See wykenvineyards.co.uk

So whether you're looking for a relaxing Sunday afternoon stroll or planting ideas for your own garden, get out and about this summer and let the open gardens reveal the secrets to achieving a peaceful haven at home.

Photography: Melanie Taylor, Hazelwood Plantscapes

For help creating the perfect planting scheme in your own garden, contact Melanie by emailing melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk or visiting hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk