

COUNTRY LIFE®

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EVERY WEEK

Magnificent Summer Gardens

Chelsea: thrilling new ideas



David Attenborough – his next adventure

Breathtaking ballgowns

Plus: Guernsey for a less taxing life

A rosy outlook

Borde Hill, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

Steven Desmond finds scents and sensibility in a classic Sussex garden of modern shrub roses

Photographs by Julian Nieman

BORDE HILL'S lovely situation on a shallow dome overlooking the Sussex Weald would make a gardener out of anyone with a heart. From the house front, the grandstand view of the London to Brighton train passing along the long and elegant Ouse Valley Viaduct, as if it were floating on the endless crown of an oak forest, merely confirms the need to make an admirable terrace garden as a foreground.

One of the series of garden compartments made in modern times in response to this setting is the rose garden. This compact showpiece, ideally viewed with the roofscape of the handsome old house as a backdrop, was designed by Robin Williams in 1996 and later revised by his son, Robin Templar Williams, for Borde Hill's chatelaine, the enthusiastic Eleni Stephenson Clarke, whose energy continues to drive the whole project forward.

Mrs Stephenson Clarke and her head gardener, Andy Stevens, are jointly committed to the garden's well-being and progress. The framework is conventional enough, with box and lavender-framed beds lining brick paths converging on a central pool. These beds are filled with a wide range of shrub roses, mainly from the all-conquering David Austin list, grouped according to form and colour. The critical appraisal of Mrs Stephenson Clarke and Mr Stevens ensures that anything moderate soon gives way to something superior, >

Borde Hill house makes a fine backdrop to the rose garden in full sail





One of David Austin's most beautiful roses is Kathryn Morley, with full-blooming double flowers and a tea-rose fragrance, on upright growing bushes which have good disease resistance. It was named for the daughter of Eric Morley, the well-known impresario who founded the Miss World contest and *Come Dancing* BBC series



so that this is a very good place for the would-be rose grower to come and see a sort of elegant workshop of all that is best in this context.

Now that the world seems to have been converted from the hybrid Teas and Floribundas of our youth to the shrub roses of today, we half expect to see some familiar friends in such a setting. And lo, here is a universal favourite, Gertrude Jekyll. If that woman is looking down at us with her familiar attitude of stern indulgence, she will be relieved to know that the rose in her name is robustly reliable and, of course, of good habit in a conveniently moderate size. Its rosette-shaped blooms are deeply fragrant and in the pink shade Miss Jekyll herself favoured, at least in the gardens she designed for others.

Above left One of the most recognisable modern shrub roses, the multi-award-winning Graham Thomas has a strong fragrance and a long flowering season. **Above right** Fragrant, soft yellow Jayne Austin, another classic and dependable English rose

And there again, the name of one of the writers who began our conversion to improved shrub roses is properly honoured in Graham Thomas. He is a vigorously upright fellow with yellow, scented flowers, which immediately reminded me of the similar characteristics of the excellent honeysuckle of the same name. Those looking for something of the antique air of the 19th-century shrub rose but with a longer season of flowering should address themselves to Falstaff, a suitably tall and hearty rose with the required purple wine colour. On a smaller, more delicate scale, Tradescant does something similar, with quartered burgundy flowers in the manner of something with a long French surname, but with the advantage of a repeat-flowering tendency.

The garden is not simply a shrine to the Austin marque. Framing the main pattern are climbers and ramblers of yesteryear trained along conventional rope swags and up modern obelisks. They include powerful growers such as Paul's Himalayan Musk, a creation of the First World War, with yellow-centred pink flowers, and a present-day favourite, Rambling Rector, the personification of vigour, covered in semi-double white blooms in due season, a vision of carefree glory, although not for the faint-hearted.

It would be easy to run away with the idea that Borde Hill must be covered with the sort of dark, deep, fertile, free-draining, friable loam of which the rest of us can only dream, as the vegetable results are so prosperous. Nothing could be further >



from the truth. A recently fallen oak on the estate reveals a gaping hole of glutinous yellow clay from which any sensible gardener would run a mile. But anyone who has applied good husbandry and plenty of organic matter to a clay soil over a period of time knows that the rewards come surprisingly rapidly, and that the longer you do it, the better it gets.

In the rose garden, there is the additional problem of that well-known but only vaguely understood problem of rose sickness, or replant disease, if you prefer. Put simply, if you take out a rose and replace it with another, there is a noticeable failure to thrive, despite the conditions being otherwise unchanged. The policy here, as elsewhere, is to replace the topsoil to at least a spade's depth, and to indulge the roots with a mycorrhizal dip at planting time, to give the newcomer a good shove-off at the start of its new life. Any cultivar not doing its stuff is given a fair run, then shown the door in favour of something that does want to sing for its supper.

The pruning regime for modern shrub roses could hardly be simpler.

Above left **Low-growing Rose de Meaux, captivating in June, is a centifolia type from the 18th century.** *Above right* **Billowing purple hedges of Nepeta faassenii separate some of the rose beds.** *Right* **another representative from the all-conquering David Austin nurseries, Cottage Rose is dependable, very free-flowering and makes a medium-sized shrub or a short climber**



Whereas, with hybrid Teas, we are perpetually wondering just how hard to prune each shoot on a cold day at the end of February, all these plants require is a good talking-to at the onset of winter by uniformly reducing the crown by a third, for the simple purpose of reducing windrock. As the new growth progresses in spring, the visitor's attention is distracted by the outer framework of peonies,

then the serious business of flushing pinks and purples and a smattering of yellows gets into its stride for the rest of the summer. Whatever their limitations, the roses remain the big attraction for unashamed romantics. *Borde Hill Gardens, Haywards Heath, West Sussex (01444 450326; www.bordehill.co.uk). The gardens are open daily until September 9, 10am-6pm, last admissions 5pm*