



Tom Stuart-Smith's courtyard garden wraps around his converted barn, across the lane from the house in which he grew up

# A Tale of Two Gardens

THE GARDENS OF WORLD-FAMOUS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT TOM STUART-SMITH AND HIS SISTER KATE ARE THE SPECTACULAR RESULT OF THEIR FAMILY'S LONG-STANDING PASSION FOR PLANTING

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Irish yews are accents in the barn garden; *Eryngium bourgatii*; Tom's courtyard garden; a pathway leads to an arch of roses in Kate's garden; *Astrantia major* 'Claret'



The walled garden at Serge Hill is dissected by gravel paths. Wide borders allow for large blocks of planting, including *Anthemris* 'Susanna Mitchell' and the indigo spires of *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna'

**T**his is a tale of two gardens. The garden of Kate Stuart-Smith, who shares her childhood home in Hertfordshire county with her husband, David Docherty, their two children and her parents, Joan and Murray Stuart-Smith. And the garden of her brother, Tom, the internationally renowned landscape architect, who lives across the lane in a

converted barn with his psychiatrist wife, Sue, also a talented and eager gardener.

This is a family who grew up with gardening as a normal part of life – Joan wanted the children to know 'how lucky they were to live here and to show their appreciation.' So, for an hour each day in the summer, they helped her in the garden. Those hours spent within the walled garden of Serge Hill, surrounded by 101 hectares of woodlands, parks, shrubbery and rolling pastures only 40 minutes from Oxford

Circus, sowed the seeds of a spectacular horticultural talent in each.

For a while in the 1960s, the bowler-hatted barrister Murray, whose legal career earned him two knighthoods, would drive surplus produce – picked by the children – to the market in Spitalfields.

Joan was a sensational propagator and her greenhouse was like a baker's oven, yielding trays of treasures Kate remembers her mother handing out for the children to plant 'wherever you want'.

This generosity of spirit and freedom to experiment are what Kate credits with easing the transition of making her mother's garden very much her own, and providing Tom with the foundation of his career in landscape design. It is Kate, herself a graduate of garden design, who is conducting the latest renaissance of the garden that Joan set on course 60 years ago.

'I have this fabulous and well-primed canvas onto which I am placing my own patterns and pictures,' explains Kate. ▶

Framed by the surrounding woodland, the garden at Serge Hill is filled with a rich tapestry of plants  
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 CLOCKWISE FROM  
 TOP The meadow in Tom's garden; the view of the barn from the meadow is framed by hornbeam hedges and tall *Populus nigra*; opium poppy; the west terrace outside the barn



Swathes of purple sage and *Salvia sclarea* 'Turkestanica' weave through the lower end of the garden and she has also added sharp pinks among the cardoons. 'I found it created a wonderful contrast to the abundance of grey,' she comments.

The horticultural banter flows easily in this family and as a result the garden at Serge Hill is an interesting hybrid of Joan and Kate, with a few trademark additions made by Tom before he moved across the lane to The Barn in 1986. Metal

arbours and gates have Tom's signature, as does the outdoor theatre with a backdrop and wings of yew – suggested by Tom to define the view from the front door that tailed off down a track. 'It's a typical Tom stroke of genius,' says Kate.

There is an air of timelessness and ease at Serge Hill, an outdoor equivalent of shabby chic, where old and new plantings jostle with ease. It takes a deft eye to make these combinations work, and it seems that both children have inherited their

parents' blend of intelligence, creativity and open-mindedness. 'Tom was manipulating space from an early age,' says Joan. 'While the others were collecting firewood or coppicing in the woods, Tom was making clearings to see how the light fell.'

His powers of observation stored up a mine of images and knowledge that forged into place when, as a student at Cambridge, he met Lanning Roper and Geoffrey Jellicoe. 'I was captivated by them,' he says. When Tom and Sue moved out of

London, he began the transformation of the farmyard and field into The Barn Garden as it is today. His original framework of hedged enclosures, wide borders, towering perennials and columns of evergreens remain, but the boundaries are ever expanding and the ingredients ever changing.

We haven't even talked about Jeremy, the eldest, who lives up the lane with his wife, Bella, a garden designer. But that is yet another Stuart-Smith story. ■



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