

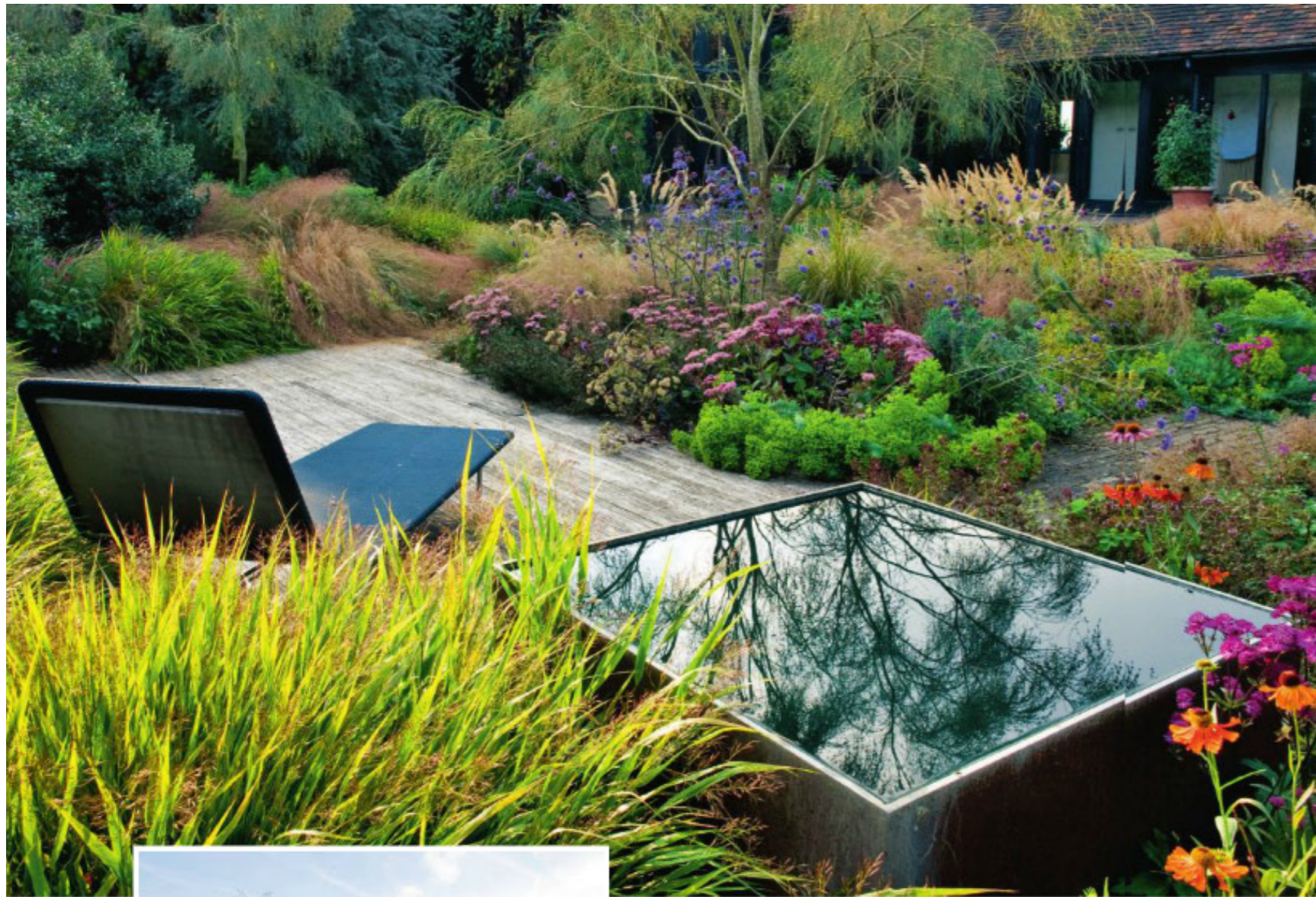
# PRIVATE VIEW

PHOTOGRAPHS MARCUS HARPUR | WORDS TAMSIN WESTHORPE

The home garden of designer Tom Stuart-Smith is a clever combination of three styles - prairie, wildflower meadow and courtyard garden



**D**esigner Tom Stuart-Smith is admired for his RHS Chelsea Flower Show gardens and private commissions, but his own home garden, The Barn in Hertfordshire, offers just as much inspiration. Tom began creating this garden on the family farm in the 1980s. It was restructured in 2007 to include some of the features from his Gold-medal 2006 *Telegraph* RHS Chelsea garden, and in more recent years a one-acre prairie and five-acre wildflower meadow have been added. The garden comprises perennials and shrubs that can cope with the dry and stony land, which was once fields. It functions as Tom's vital experiment ground. 'I would not be the garden designer I am today without having created my own garden here,' he says. ▶



private view

**TALL ORDER** ▶

The garden is home to large areas of naturalistic planting including this scheme of red-flowered grass *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus' and pink *Eupatorium maculatum* Atropurpureum Group 'Orchard Dene'. The containers of box in front offer a dramatic contrast to the dense planting. 'You must offer counterpoints to the chaos,' explains Tom.



◀ **VARIED VIEWS**

Some of the hedging planted in the 1980s has been removed to offer more than one view to the fields beyond. 'The hedging was originally planted to divide the garden from the fields, but now we have openings and diagonal vistas,' says Tom.



◀ **MIRROR IMAGE**

The courtyard garden behind the barn where Tom and his family live was created in 2007, after he and his wife Sue took the opportunity to include some features from his 2006 RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden. The Corten steel water features make stunning centrepieces, throwing up light and casting reflections into the house. Tom often uses his own garden to experiment with plants. Here a strip of *Astrantia major* 'Ruby Wedding' runs along the entire length of the water tank, while grasses such as *hakonechloa* offer texture. Pops of colour come from heleniums, sedums and verbena, and a yellow-flowering *Genista aetnensis* tree gives height.



*'I would not be the garden designer I am today without having created my own garden here'* - Tom Stuart-Smith

◀ **LASTING IMPACT**

Grasses such as *miscanthus* and *stipa* are dominant, and keep the show going all year. Tom uses a range of perennials too, such as *asters*, *persicaria*, *thalictrum* and *achillea*. ▶





▼ **GLASS ACT**

The glasshouse was put in five years ago, and is used to propagate plants bought from nurseries such as Beth Chatto's and Marchants Hardy Plants (see pg 40).



◀ **POTS IN A HOT TIN SHED**

'The tin shed is home to my wife Sue's pottery, and doubles up as a tool shed,' says Tom. This galvanised structure sits in the new prairie garden, which was sown in February 2011. 'If the ground is clean, then it is not too labour intensive to create and care for a large area of prairie planting,' he explains.

**PLANT PROFILES**



▲ **GOLDEN HAZE**

*Solidago speciosa* is a hardy perennial offering flowers from summer into autumn, and stands up well to the weather. Reaching 75cm, it can be quite invasive, so keep it in check.



▲ **SMOKY STUNNER**

Given full sun, *Cotinus coggygria*, a deciduous shrub, offers fluffy flowers in summer and striking autumn foliage. Prune mature plants in early spring. Reaches 5m.



▲ **WHITE HEIGHT**

Reaching over 1m, *Liatris scariosa* 'Alba' is the perfect specimen to add height. Late summer flowers in August and September are held on strong stems.



▲ **SOLID CHOICE**

*Rudbeckia fulgida* is a hardy perennial with late-summer flowers. Reaches 60cm and rarely needs support. Copes with most soil conditions and aspects.

*'If the ground is clean, then it is not too labour intensive to create and care for a large area of prairie planting'*



◀ **CHANGE IN STYLE**

When Tom started out, he was influenced by English style gardens like Sissinghurst and Hidcote, with roses and clipped box as feature plants. As the years have gone by, these have been replaced with more perennials. His friendship with Piet and Anja Oudolf led to his garden featuring more naturalistic planting, including the new prairie, which suits the site. 'All the plants here are able to cope with our very dry soil without additional watering,' he says.

▲ **SHARED SPACE**

Over the years, Tom has opened his garden for charity, and this year The Barn, in Bedmond, Hertfordshire, will open with Serge Hill garden for the National Gardens Scheme on 21 June, 2-5pm. For more information, visit [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk) ♦