

## GARDENING

## GARDEN FOR ALL SEASONS

From right, clockwise: red woodwork and urns by OKA liven up a winter's day; Haddonstone artichoke under willows; frost on *Viburnum tinus* 'Eve Price'



# Puns, sculpture and a friendly Scottish parrot

*Broadwoodside, with its wordplay and sculptural symbolism, may appear genial and relaxed, but has a power all its own.* By **Tim Richardson**

I confess I was slightly distracted from the matter in hand – by a parrot – when I visited Broadwoodside. This converted farm in the village of Gifford, 25 miles east of Edinburgh, is surrounded by a garden of singular style and wit. The bird in question was a beautiful African grey named William in honour of the historian brother of its owner, Robert Dalrymple. William is allowed to fly and clamber freely around the house (the parrot, that is, not the historian) and over dinner and breakfast with the family such a bond had developed between William and I – nibbled ears, nuzzled hair, lots of chat – that I was reluctant to leave the Aga-wared kitchen and its charming and talkative avian inhabitant. We seemed to be communicating



on a higher plane. Eventually the bird was taken away from me and put back in its cage and I was inveigled into some gumboots to join Robert Dalrymple outside on a chilly East Lothian January morning for a tour of the garden. Slightly disconcertingly, Dalrymple announced that giving these tours was his 'favourite activity in the world'. Despite this, he proved an entertaining guide. At many gardens the owners like to claim that the place was "completely derelict" when they took it on – which may have meant that the roof needed redoing and some buddleia uprooting. In the case of Broadwoodside, however, "derelict" is certainly an apt description: photographs of the old steading in 1999 show the disparate buildings – the oldest dated to 1680 – as roofless and in some cases wall-less shells. The house, with its two farmyards, was completely uninhabitable, though Dalrymple's wife, Anna, certainly saw the potential when she noticed the For Sale sign up while out on a walk with their young family. Dalrymple was initially less enthusiastic, but was eventually persuaded by the potential for a garden on an expansive scale.

This couple has achieved with considerable aplomb and originality. The garden consists of two inner courtyards and an east-west axis which extends from the house out into the mist-laden landscape of fields and woods.

"People often talk about starting a new garden with a blank canvas," says Dalrymple. "Broadwoodside was more like painting by numbers: the layout was determined by the footprint of the existing buildings and the many old walls that surround them. Planting the garden has been like an exercise of 'colouring in'."

This is a modest way of putting it. Certain parts of the garden – notably the courtyards – are constrained by the layout. There is an orchard, a mini arboretum (including specimens such as the elegant evergreen *Nothofagus dombeyi*) and an enclosed garden next to the house centred on a rectangular pond surrounded by clipped willows. But this is all just the framework for a wide variety of home-made and commissioned sculptural episodes that all have a specific symbolic meaning, most of them based on wordplay. As a result the overall tone of the place is set by the structure of the garden but by Dalrymple's own brand of disarming humour.

The most important thing, for Dalrymple, is not to take the garden – or himself – too seriously. One installation in the "House Field" uphill to the west is entitled "A Load of Balls" (because that is what it is) while nearby sits a slate inscription which reads: "Ore Stab Fortis Arare Placeto Restat". This, it turns out, is a wise Latin motto because if the word spaces are changed it becomes: "O Rest A Bit For The A Rare Place To Rest At" – a donnish joke, apparently borrowed from a plaque in an Oxford college quadrangle. Some



## HEART OF IT ALL

The Upper Courtyard has an iroko aviary, left; Holloway monument by sculptor Kenny Hunter, above

plants including invasive cypripediums, poppies and Japanese anemones. Clearly the main point at Broadwoodside is not the planting – Dalrymple claims to hate gardening – though there are attractive horticultural aspects, notably the Hall Garden east of the house, where a short run of pollarded limes shades a wildish garden of phloxes, catmint, inula and *Rosa rugosa*. The western side of the house is more formally organised, with a wild variety of clipped shapes in holly, laurel, yew, bay and viburnum that creates what might be called a style of berserker Arts and Crafts. A bog bed against the curving west wall contains royal ferns, gunnera, flag iris and *Primula florindae*.

It's all extremely well maintained: the Dalrymples are fortunate in being able to employ a full-time gardener, Guy Donaldson, who lives in the cottage at the end of the drive and has been battling with the badly drained, heavy clay soil here for the past 18 years.

A shiny American road sign has been customised to read: 'STOP worrying'

There is more interest in the wider estate. To the north is a woodland area open to the public, with more sculptures along the paths, including a shiny American road sign which has been customised to read 'STOP worrying'.

Southwest of the house, an impressive eye-catcher can be spied across a field. This "temple" of columns and pediment is in fact the salvaged Victorian portico of Strathleven House near Dumbarton, removed during restoration and snapped up by Dalrymple.

An old beech avenue runs north from the "temple" back towards the house and is a highly attractive feature in its own right, acting as a palate cleanser in what is potentially an intense garden. As Dalrymple observes: "The great thing about an avenue is that it is a barometer because it changes its character so completely with the seasons." Due south, screened by trees, lies a bulrush-fringed lake with a wooden pavilion which he says was inspired by the rustic temples made for Highgrove by his friends Julian and Isabel Bannerman.

But of all the influences here, the one that looms largest is Little Sparta, that great garden of poetic sculptures created by the late Ian Hamilton Finlay, which lies just 45 miles away, on the other side of Edinburgh. "Anyone who makes a garden around here has to deal with the Finlay legacy," Dalrymple admits. "You have to avoid making a schmaltzy version of that."

Broadwoodside certainly avoids schmaltz and, if anything, goes a long way in the other direction – deep into the realms of ironic artistic self-deprecation. While it is true that the garden is in many ways a satire on the urge towards the rustic, the nervous under the enterprise is what gives Broadwoodside its power, however relaxed and genial it may superficially appear.

Broadwoodside is open on Sunday July 8, 1pm-5pm for Scotland's Gardens (scotlandsgardens.org). For further information, visit [broadwoodside.co.uk](http://broadwoodside.co.uk).

wooden post, was picked up on the beach at Mull. At the heart of the garden is the Inner Courtyard, a formal grid of pollarded maples centred on a magnificent aviary which Dalrymple says was "copied from Arabella Lennox-Boyd's very grand fruitages at Ascott" (the Bothie child house in Buckinghamshire). The aviary is superplanted with a different plant, such as box, rosemary, leucurium, hakonechloa or *Verbena bonariensis*, providing great variety in colour and texture even in midwinter. The adjacent Lower Courtyard is centred on a magnificent copper urn which was opportunistically bought by Dalrymple from a design shop where it was being used to keep cushions. There are climbers on the walls and a "thug bed" of



## LOST AND FOUND

From above, clockwise: the final in the House Field came from the demolished Holyrood Brewery; kunekune pigs; a collection of found objects in A Load of Balls, far right

pieces are custom-made, while others are fashioned from items spontaneously acquired. A magnificent cast-iron finial, set amid a sea of *Alchemilla mollis* and surrounded by a clipped yew hedge, was found on the pavement outside an antiques shop in Dundas Street, Edinburgh. Dalrymple explains that it had been taken from the old Holyrood Brewery, which was being demolished to make way for the new Scottish parliament building.

Dalrymple freely admits that most of his ideas are "copied" from other gardens, though of course the new context gives them fresh and different life. In the mini-arboretum east of the house, any risk of faux-classical pomposity is undercut by a copy of the celebrated Dancing Faun statue from Pompeii –

"People talk about starting with a blank canvas. This garden was more like painting by numbers"

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Chosen by plant hunter *Lark Hanham*

Trilliums are valued for their desirable three-lobed blossoms, which are normally backed up by equally handsome and unique foliage. Their understated, sumptuous beauty makes them a choice perennial for any spring border; for me, much enjoyment comes from seeing that clump of rhizomatous roots slowly increase in size each year.

Arriving in March and continuing into April, they're happy alongside snowdrops and other quiet, unassuming woodland-dwellers. Trilliums make excellent subjects for nesting beneath specimen shrubs and trees, where they'll receive some protection from the elements. They thrive in slightly acid, humus-rich soils. Average height and spread 5x17in (15x45cm).

**T. GRANDIFLORUM AGM**  
 Also known as giant-flowered American wake-robin, *T. grandiflorum* first appears bright white, then later transforms to a dusky pink. Its large, upward-facing, solitary blooms look as though they are pushing past the simply arranged fresh green leaves. As the name suggests, this award-winning variety has a vigorous neat habit with upright stems, all topped off with exuberant flowers.

**T. ERECTUM AGM**  
 Precise and exact are words you could use to describe the upright stance of this variety. Growing to 19in (50cm) tall, the slightly recurved, claret red blooms appear above diamond-shaped glossy leaves, which provide a subtle but distinguished backdrop. Ideal for impatient gardeners, this is one of the quickest-spreading forms of trillium and, in time, it will create stunning drifts.

**T. SESSILE VAR. LUTEUM AGM**  
 Yellow wood trillium has everything you could want in a new plant. Its heavily mottled, silver and green angular leaves provide the perfect background to the acid-yellow, upright fragrant blooms. Throughout March, its tall columnar structure adds early interest to the spring garden.

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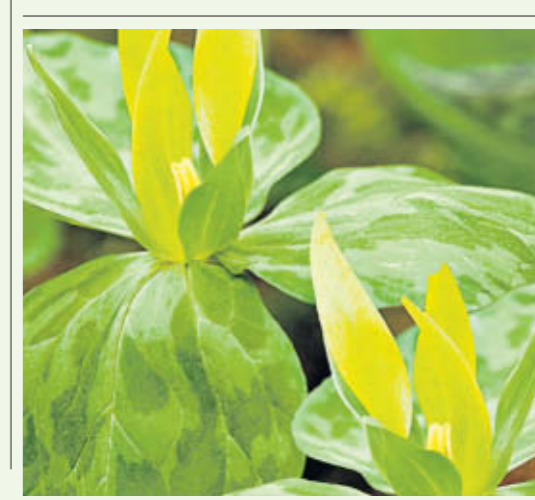
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