

gardens

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ART FOR THE GARDEN  
UPLIFT FOR THE BEHOLDER

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LATE BLOOMERS  
KATHERINE SWIFT

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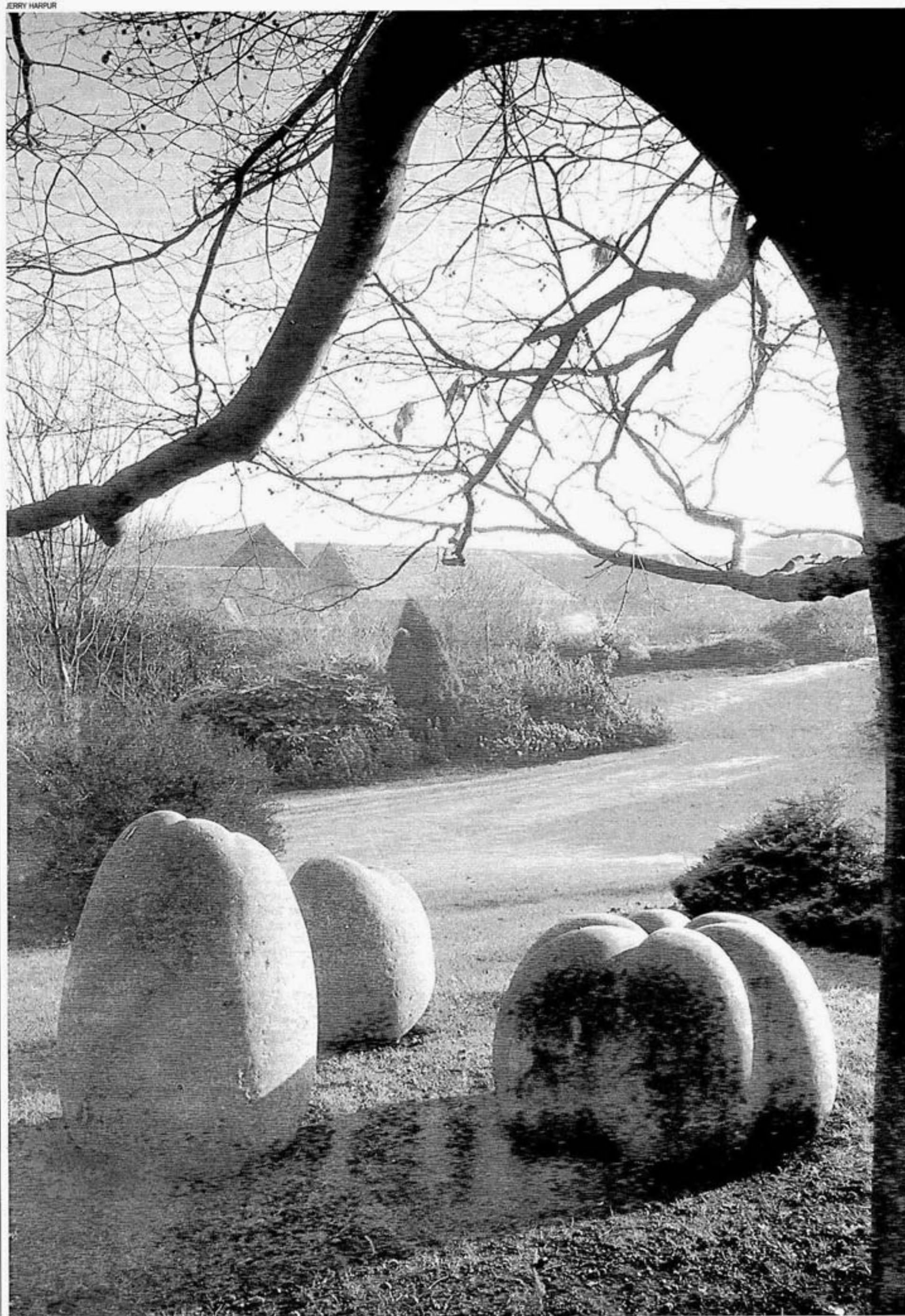
THROUGH A GLASS  
POTTING UP THE WINDOWSILL

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MEADOW SWEET  
SECRETS OF THE STARS

KITCHEN GARDEN  
A LITTLE HORSERADISH GOES A LONG WAY



JERRY HARPLER

# Spirit and place

Granite seedpods, charred eggs, plastic otters... indulge in some intellectual fun with art in the garden, says Jinny Blom

Recently I have been involved with siting art in a garden I'm designing and was reminded about how demanding it can be, and how rewarding when it works well. By "art" I mean pieces crafted with little inherent use but that spiritually, creatively or intellectually uplift the beholder, not the ornamental items — pots, urns, mirrors, gates — that adorn or embellish a garden. The gardener needs to consider what will work best — placing the piece near a building, near water, in a flowerbed, beside a wall or in a specially created location. Sometimes it ends up that the art work, while much loved for itself, simply doesn't work in the chosen space.

Unless blessed with a big garden, or a series of art works that complement one another and create a visual narrative, I would recommend working with a single piece, carefully chosen. Impulse buying is the norm for most of us, but with art, I do think a modicum of premeditation before reaching for the chequebook pays off handsomely. To start with, you should think about the type of art you want. It could be a piece of fine art, like the poems carved in stone at Little Sparta gardens in Dunsyre, South Lanarkshire. Or a sculpture, old or new. Or something made from found materials, from nature or from man-made materials.

Think also about having a piece specially created for your space. Consider, for example, the extraordinary visual resonance of Ben Nicholson's bas-relief wall sculpture at Sutton Place in Surrey. The huge pale marble rectangle with its simple geometric relief circles set within squares seems to hover over the short mown grass at the head of an angular pond that collects its reflection on the glassy surface. The deep green foliage behind the sculpture adds to the drama. This is a really exceptional composition and I feel sure that a great deal of pleasurable discussion took place between the artist and the landscape designer, Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe. So successful is the end result that it has become an icon of 1960s art and design. There are many lessons to take from this composition, particularly if you favour a formal approach. An interesting figurative piece may well benefit from a cool, controlled natural environment of clipped hedges and water which provides a contrast to the message of the artwork; a natural temple to the contemplation of the piece. A town garden could easily be recast as a green gallery, lined with yew hedges, beautifully paved and centred on an exquisite sculpture, subtly lit.

The style of art that affects and inspires you will undeniably have sympathy with your own style of gardening. Sculpture inspired by nature, as demonstrated by artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, David Nash, Peter Randall-Page and Richard Long, can sit comfortably in a range of different garden styles. Randall-Page has made an interesting series of sculptures from boulders of granite carved into seedpods. Some he set in the wilds of Dartmoor, some on the urbanised banks of the Thames in London and some in a well manicured garden. Each location has a sense of appropriateness. On the lawns of the garden the sculptures seem bovine and domesticated; by the Thames the feeling evoked is of a lost link to nature; and on the wild Dartmoor land the pieces seem primordially animal, like mating creatures of another realm. With the tactile quality of these pieces — their smooth curves act like magnets for both adult and childish hands — and their voluptuous rounded shapes, Randall-Page has incorporated two elements

COURTESY ANNELY AJDA FINE ART



Clockwise from far left: seed pods by Peter Randall-Page; David Nash's charred oak egg shapes; plastic otters; Ben Nicholson's sculpture at Sutton Place

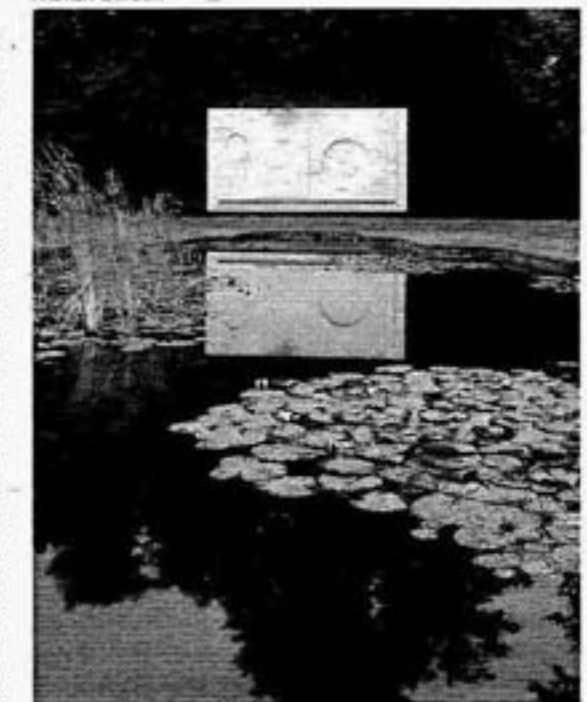
that make garden sculptures really work.

Nash's charred oak sculptures, on the other hand, demonstrate the appeal of simple materials and craft-based techniques. Giant baulks of blackened oak stand within woodland glades or mannered heaps of charred egg shapes sit in tight circles. They also serve as inspiration to those of us with time and energy to create our own versions. I would love to place a homemade Nash-style charred tree trunk series running through a field of bright cornfield annuals, to emphasise the colour contrast. Even with only 3 sqm (33sq ft) to play with, one could still do it and make it fun — just scale it to fit your garden. Similarly, Andy Goldsworthy's delectable series of dry-stone wall sheep-pen compounds has spawned a rash of comparable stony shapes in gardens. Who know if he approves. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, isn't it?

Acquiring a piece of art for the garden does not necessarily cost the earth, either. A friend spent the princely sum of £50 and created his own artwork. He bought 50 plastic otters from his local pound shop and arranged these in random formations around a small urban courtyard garden. The result is a witty, charming and entirely convincing interactive art experience.

It is worthwhile looking afresh at the garden as a location for art. Consider commissioning a piece for a birthday or commemorative gift. Visit galleries, art fairs and sculpture parks and gardens. Or, like my friend with the otters, create your own. Beauty, after all, is in the eye of the beholder.

ANDREW LAMSON



## Inspired sources

**THIS WEEKEND: Affordable Art Fair**, Battersea Park, London SW8. 11am-6pm; £8. All works less than £2,500 (0870-777 2255; www.affordableartfair.co.uk).

**UNTIL NOVEMBER 1: Sculpture at Goodwood**, Goodwood, Chichester, W. Sussex; Thurs-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm (01243 538449; www.sculpture.org.uk).

**ALL YEAR: Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden**, Black and White Cottage, Standon Lane, Ockley, Surrey; Fri, Sat, 11am-6pm, Sun 2-5pm; from Nov by appointment (01306 627269).

**Yorkshire Sculpture Park**, Bretton Hall, West Bretton, Wakefield; 10am-5pm (01924 830302; www.yssp.co.uk).

**New Art Centre Sculpture Park**, Roche Court, East Winterslow, Salisbury, Wilts, 11am-4pm (01980 862244; www.sculpture.uk.com).

**Royal Society of British Sculptors**, 108 Old Brompton Road, London SW7 (020-7244 7788; www.rbs.org.uk)

