

WAKE-UP CALL
The Link Between
Cell Phones and Cancer

VOGUE

JUL

**EAT, PRAY,
DANCE**
A Night
Out with

**OPRAH
and
LADY
GAGA**

French
Bombshell

**Marion
Cotillard**
Ignites
Hollywood

FALL FASHION PREVIEW

From Lean Lines
to Dangerous Curves

**PLUS RED LIPS
WITH EVERYTHING**

**BEAUTY
BREAKTHROUGH**
Next Generation
Sunscreens

UP IN THE AIR
The Return of High Hair

\$3.99US \$4.99FOR

07>



0 357079 1



LOVELY BONES

A view of the walled gardens designed by Blom for Temple Guiting Manor in England. "Good garden design can bring back layers of atmosphere that have been mistakenly scrubbed away," she says.

Sittings Editor:
Miranda Brooks.

A photograph of a formal garden with a stone wall, a small house, and dense trees in the background. The garden features a long, low stone wall running diagonally across the middle ground. To the left of the wall, there are several rectangular garden beds with low hedges. In the background, a small, light-colored house with a dark roof is visible, partially obscured by trees. The sky is blue and clear.

A SENSE OF PLACE

Patrick Kinmonth gets to the root of garden designer Jinny Blom's vision: She gives the landscape the first and last words. Photographed by Christopher Sturman.



If at first sight Jinny Blom's landscapes seem planted fair and square in the tradition of the English garden, they have a disarming way of creeping out of the tired undergrowth of garden design with a freshness that escapes cliché. She herself is like that. Her language is as defiantly intelligent as her work, full of spark and allusion in a way that one can only hope will become the fashion. Her gardens certainly have.

There are theories at the bottom of her gardens—she has picked thoughtfully through the mulch of garden invention. From England I detect Sissinghurst Castle, Hidcote Manor, and the work of Harold Peto and Russell Page; from France, the Château de Villandry and Courances; from Italy, an architectural atmosphere of weathered line, shade, and levels (the Villa d'Este, Villa Lante, Villa Medici)—these are surely among the seedbeds of her creations. Significantly these are all gardens with beautiful bones, where structure tells a story. They are gardens developed by imaginative, often literary people, places with the power to evoke emotions as strongly as poetry or music. To be in them is to learn by immersion and to be moved.

Her design is a resolution of the place she is working, her client's loves and longings, and Blom's instinctive but highly educated reactions. This almost psychological approach comes naturally to someone who was in fact a psychologist working with disturbed people for years before she downed tools, called a spade a spade, and made her first true love of gardens into a new career. This surely armed her for all possible collaborations, but there is a sense in which the houses for which she makes gardens and landscapes are lain down, observed, and listened to before any solution is imagined, and her work is couched (pun entirely intended) in almost analytical terms. "I learn from my clients," Blom says. "In the early days, when perhaps I was too eager to please, I was walking with one and she said, 'You know, Jinny, you must never let the client get the upper hand—it's the garden that matters.'" She has been listening to the garden first ever since.

Naturally the wishes of the client are deeply involved in her final design, but as we scan through pictures of a recent commission in England, the designer's imagination takes hold of the process. "Some places need a history written for them," she muses, "a past that may have been lost supplied

BLOOMS WITH A VIEW

FROM TOP: A topiary garden Blom created with English yew; iris and poppies within the walled garden; a rose garden against the surrounding hills in Buckinghamshire. OPPOSITE: The view through the topiary garden to the valley beyond at Temple Guiting.



WILD AT HEART

In East Sussex, a pool hidden within a meadow of wildflowers, "I love quiet things," Blom says. "It's about balancing them with the bodice rippers." OPPOSITE PAGE: Blom imported old fruit trees, including these espaliered pear trees, and installed them in what had been an empty lawn.



to them again." To this end, she bought a grove of old fruit trees in Belgium—pear trees grown into ogres and crabby goblins, witchy-gnarled old apple trees—and installed it around the house, which had stood naked on an empty lawn before Blom sorted out its identity, clothed it in romance and tangled growth, and told it who to be.

Faced with a blank "like an awkward pause" in the landscape in a recent garden, Blom peopled it with massive topiary, "as if they were having a conversation," and a bit of dud wall had to stay and be brought into the fold. "Trying to find age and patina is difficult, but without it a place has no persona. I am patina-mad, and most of the places I work with have had it all stripped out. A good garden design can bring back layers of atmosphere that have been mistakenly scrubbed away from a place. I tend to hang on to every bit of evidence." So no quick fix of silver birches, tufts of grass, and gravel for Blom. "If you have got glass as far as the eye can see, I tend to bring the trees right up to the windows rather than saying, 'Modern house means modern garden.' For me, enclosing with trees, hedges, and walls is key," she says. "It's about protection, I suppose, and memories of the medieval towns of France—that's my French side coming out."

We turn back to the lightbox. I admire a subtle hollyhock she has used, its small flowers blushing through cream and caramel and of a lovely form. "I love quiet things," says Blom, "but it's about balancing them with the bodice rippers—explosions of long-flowering roses like Mme Alfred Carrière that you just look at in wonder. Good design should be good space, even with every flower removed. I see a garden as structure—the stones and the lawns, the trees and the large planted masses, the levels and the spaces that constitute my work. Flowers are only a final set of brushstrokes that are evanescent, and while I often make planting schemes where color is highly selective, it's the bones that I set and leave behind me that really count."

Blom confides that she feels a "dreadful responsibility" not

to inflict on people something bad or transient or shocking. "I design with the fewest lines possible," she says. "I hate decoration in gardens. There is a kind of completion you get that comes only from taking away everything that is not essential. Ideally, you end up with a fluency between the materials, the craftsmen, the place, and your own invention. If the design locks properly into the space, then the client's mind won't snag on it. It's only when something is wrongly proportioned or uncomfortable that things have to be corrected or done away with."

In another recent commission, a flint bastion with no protective fences adds undeniable drama. "I love building bastions—the excitement of the sheer drop—even if it means putting in a legal waiver in case someone sleepwalks over the edge. It's like coming out onto the prow of a ship and looking down at a medieval illuminated manuscript below you, gardens you don't have to be in to enjoy." The architectural elements in her work are often collaborations with Ptolemy Dean, and in this, too, she is part of a rich tradition of architects' working shoulder-to-shoulder with gardeners, perhaps most famously in England seen in the partnership of Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll. "As long as the garden works in the end," Blom notes, "does it matter who did what?"

Blom tells me that in college she trained as a set designer, and it taught her "to ask questions—how are people going to move through the space? How is it going to feel? It's not just a matter of space; it's a matter of speed. You need to be slowed down a bit sometimes; things need to distract you, involve you, take you out of yourself. Obviously it is a luxury to have a garden designed for you. But I have noticed that if you are rich, designers often inflict richness on you. I have always understood that a rich person who commissions a garden from me might need other things—freedom, simplicity, calm, for example."

Listening and nurturing, respecting tradition but open to invention, getting thoughtfully but firmly to the heart of the matter—Jinny Blom is surely treading her way to the bottom of what a garden should be. □

