

Up on the hill, Down Under

A visit to a famous Cotswold garden inspired Jeremy Francis to create his own Arts and Crafts paradise on a hillside in southern Australia.
Words Christine Reid, photographs Claire Takacs

IN BRIEF

- **LOCATION:** A westerly-facing hillside in The Dandenong Ranges, near Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.
- **SIZE:** Two hectares.
- **CLIMATE:** Cloudehill has a temperate climate, with regular rainfall. Winter temperatures range from 5°C to 12°C with rare frost. Typical summer days range from the low 20s to, occasionally, the high 30s.
- **SOIL:** Deep and rich.
- **POINTS OF INTEREST:** Arts and Crafts influence, with some contemporary planting and an emphasis on foliage plants.

Cloudehill's long, central path is flanked with colourful planting, including the pastel flowers and graceful ornamental grasses of the Cool Borders.

Walking through the garden at Cloudehill, high in the misty hills east of Melbourne, is exactly like taking a stroll through an art gallery filled with exquisite pictures.

Here there's a picture of a formal parterre; take a wander to the left and there's a perfectly framed colour-filled perennial border; go down a couple of flights of stairs and you find a meadow filled with naturalised bulbs; turn another corner and a woodland scene greets you. A rose garden's heavenly scent fills another bay. Vistas of lawn and stone steps stretch away before you. A green 'theatre' offers a place to pause and check the catalogue.

As befits great pictures, superbly constructed frames surround each of them – from beech hedge to mellow brick wall, from an arcade of twisted trunks to clipped box, from carefully wrought iron gates to thick green screens of ivy. Embracing the entire two hectares (five acres) of garden gallery are stands of magnificent reach-for-the-sky mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) and beyond the wider view of the distant blue hills of the Great Dividing Range.

Mastermind and curator of this composition is Jeremy Francis, who moved to Victoria in southern Australia 15 years ago. Before that he lived on the family wheat and sheep farm, near New Norcia, 100km



north of Perth, Western Australia. When he lived on those dry plains, he imported perennials from the UK as a hobby but found, not surprisingly, that they struggled in the hot, dry, windy summers of that area. His interest in gardening was further piqued by visits to gardens with his English wife, whose family still live in Kent.

A wonderful site

"I spent two years looking for a 'nice' area to garden; I must have looked at 20 or 30 sites and by incredible luck found this in the early 90s," Jeremy explains. What was so 'nice' was that the Cloudehill site was formerly a working garden –

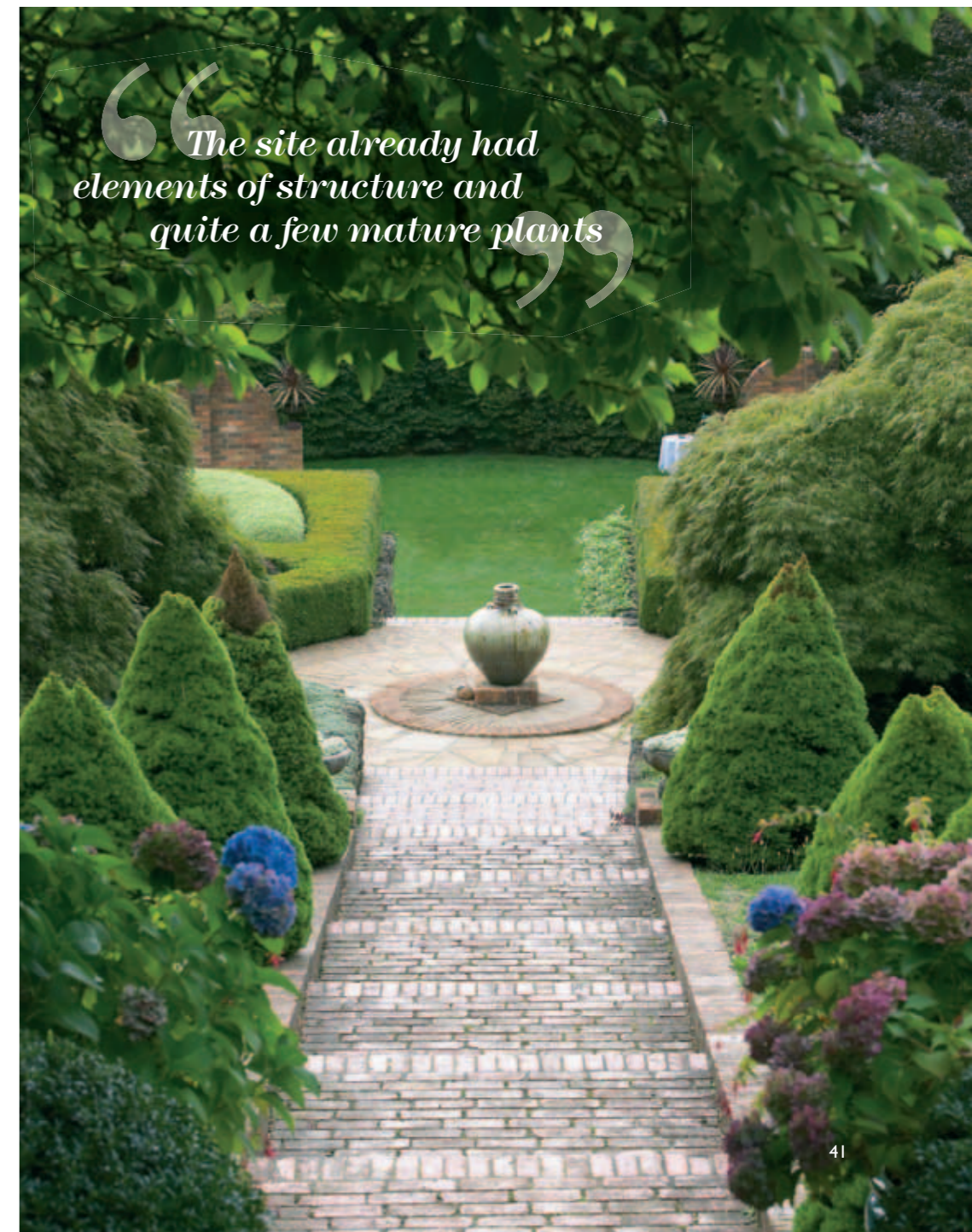
ABOVE: The parterre comprises a frame of dark green box, with purple *Berberis* and the pale green *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Argenteum Nanum'. **RIGHT:** The leaves of *Actaea simplex* Atropurpurea Group open bronze-green and eventually turn purple-brown.

part nursery and part cut-flower farm – that had been seriously neglected since the 1960s. "The weeds were truly awe-inspiring," Jeremy recalls. "So the site already had elements of structure and quite a few mature plants – some quite rare – and these were two wonderful assets to start with," he says. Other wonderful natural assets are the deep rich soil, reliable rainfall and very little frost. "It was the beginning of 15 years of obsession beyond the call of sanity," says Jeremy.

The historic plants from the time of the old nursery include bulbs from Holland as well as weeping maples, rhododendrons and *Enkianthus* imported from Japan ▷



LEFT: The simplicity of the Water Garden contrasts with the effervescent growth of the adjacent Hot and Cool Borders. **BELOW:** Flowers are the stars of the borders but elsewhere foliage is crucial, providing both form and structure.

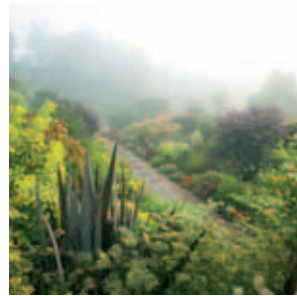


“The site already had elements of structure and quite a few mature plants”

garden guide



THE WATER GARDEN
The northern end of the long borders concludes with the green and peaceful Water Garden, whose rectangular pool is planted with irises and grasses.



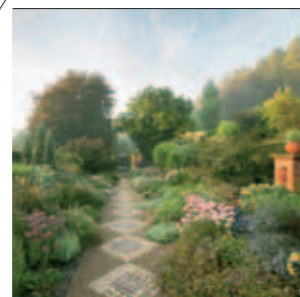
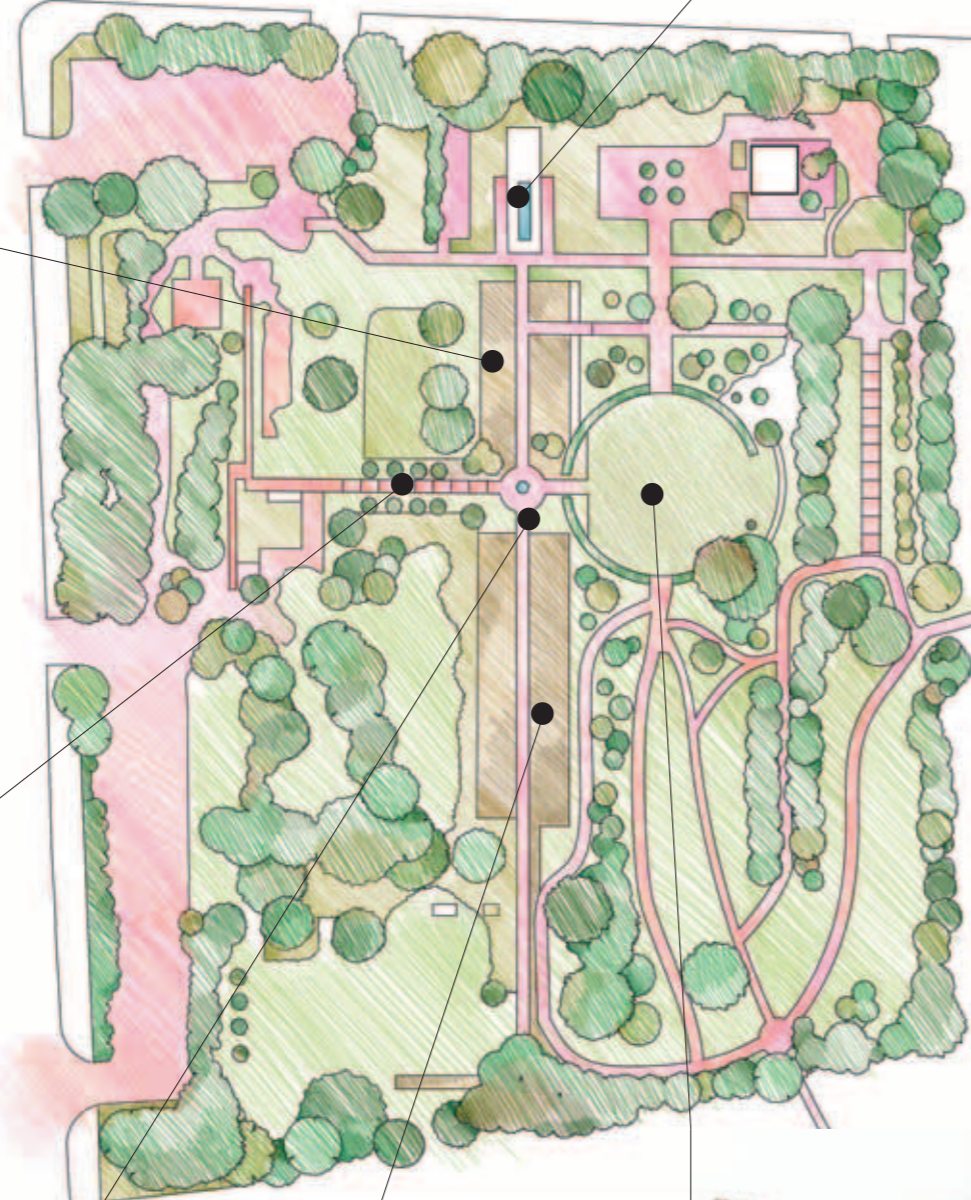
THE HOT BORDERS
Herbaceous perennials and shrubs in orange, yellow and red crowd these borders, which remain bright and colourful from spring until autumn.



THE TREE-LINED STEPS
Seen from the Maple Court in early morning mist, this path slopes gently upwards through ranks of clipped, conical conifers towards a clump of magnolias and the gardens' restaurant, Chatterley's.



THE MAPLE COURT
The garden's two major paths cross at this junction, which is paved with stone edged in brick. The parterre occupies the two easterly quadrants.



THE COOL BORDERS
Mature trees planted 80 years ago tower over the deep borders flanking Cloudehill's central path. All around this long north-south axis lie a series of 'garden rooms'.



THE THEATRE LAWN
This gently sloping circular area is surrounded by a hornbeam hedge and makes a delightful spot to rest or picnic during a visit to Cloudehill.

ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT WOTHERSPOON



▷ in the 1920s, and named forms of European beech from England, all now magnificently grown.

Arts & Crafts

The "rather strange structure" of the garden, as Jeremy describes its long straight lines, was a totally practical layout for a working nursery; for example, the rhododendrons were grown as hedgerows for easy cutting. The remnants of this structure, of lines running along the topmost ridge, inspired Jeremy to create a series of separate garden rooms, all linked by paths and steps, unfolding one after another as you walk around the hillside.

Cloudehill's ordered geometry and harmony owes a great deal to Jeremy's understanding of the Arts and Crafts movement. Immediately below the entrance gates is a long series of colour-themed borders bursting with flowers and foliage, which Jeremy freely admits was inspired by a visit to Hidcote, the great Gloucestershire garden created from 1910 by Lawrence Johnston. "These traditional borders (on each side of a wide path) are very dynamic, which is exactly what I wanted. It changes every two to three weeks; I like the idea of layer after layer of ideas in a confined area." For example, in one section, two silver pears, *Pyrus salicifolia*, are the key figures in a planting of delicate tones while further along the walk, the drama heightens with bold red, purples and plum tones. Then the wonderful colour lesson



quieters down at the end as you walk under a massive beech tree and descend to the shade of a fern gully.

Jeremy loves the tiny incidentals in each part of the garden and points out *Clematis* 'Polish Spirit', which has grabbed hold of a rose and is steadily engulfing it. "The deep purplish-blue flower of the clematis and the mahogany-red of the *Rosa sweginzowii* rose hips are superb together."

Beautiful foliage

Flower duos such as these are secondary to the main colour story of the garden. This is provided by an endless array of foliage – both for form and texture. Some of the old maples with burgundy leaves have been



ABOVE: Like many English Arts and Crafts gardens, such as William Morris's Red House, brick is widely used in Cloudehill's hard landscaping, as with the Tree-Lined Steps. **ABOVE LEFT:** *Sedum* 'Matrona' is a tough plant whose flowers are succeeded by bright seedheads. **LEFT:** Jeremy exploits the sloping ground to show off woody plants with contrasting forms and colours. **BELOW:** The woods of Range View Gardens lie beyond Cloudehill's eastern boundary.





GARDEN ROOMS
The Water Garden is one of 22 separate 'garden rooms' at Cloudehill, a feature inspired by Hidcote in Gloucestershire. Visiting gardens like this gives you a chance to pick up design and planting ideas. Other notable Arts and Crafts gardens include Standen in West Sussex and Knightshayes Court in Devon. www.nationaltrust.org.uk



ARTS & CRAFTS READING
Pick up planting and design ideas from the beautifully illustrated *Gardens of the Arts and Crafts Movement* by Judith B Tankard (Harry N Abrams, £29.95). Includes photographs, original drawings and plans from celebrated gardens such as Hestercombe, Snowhill and Folly Farm.

meet the owner



Jeremy Francis grew up in the wheatbelt of Western Australia, not far from the historic settlement of New Norcia. For 20 years he was a wheat and sheep farmer in the area and married Valerie Campbell-Wemyss. A meeting with influential British gardener Christopher Lloyd in the 1980s changed the direction of Jeremy's life. A member of Valerie's family lived next door to Great Dixter and Lloyd helped Jeremy put together a collection of plants to bring back to Australia, thus sparking an interest in cool climate plants. Jeremy's search for the right place to grow them ended 15 years ago when he and Valerie bought Cloudehill in the hills outside Melbourne. His interest in the many facets of international garden design, particularly ornamental grasses, is reflected in the garden.

ABOVE: A gap in the hornbeam hedge leads to the Shrub Walk, which actually contains perennials such as roses and *Agapanthus*, as well as woody plants. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The prickly pom-poms of a globe thistle or *Echinops* in the Cool Border. **BELOW:** The Russian sage or *Perovskia* bears clouds of lavender-blue flowers on silver stems from late summer until early autumn.

▷ re-sited to create a mellow marriage between brick path and wonderful plant form. Dwarf spruces are lined up along a flight of steps and direct the eye to the sweep of the theatre lawn. A hedge of neat green box frames clipped mounds of a pale green *Pittosporum tenuifolium* cultivar; golden hops trail over an archway leading to a stairway; and a wall of heart-shaped ivy leaves makes an relaxed contrast to another box hedge, where topiary spirals also make a point at another change in the garden levels.

Cloudehill in winter

Spring, summer and autumn all bring their seasonal excitement to this garden but winter at Cloudehill has a



special magic. At this time, the building blocks of the garden have most clarity. The physical structure of the hard landscaping and the architectural beauties of both evergreen and deciduous plants are clear. "I have spent some time perfecting the winter display on the theatre lawn," Jeremy says. "The beech hedge, which is the backdrop, holds its dry, brown leaves for most of the winter before they eventually drop. To offset this, I have planted a *Salix acutifolia* 'Blue Streak' in one corner. This has wonderful silver catkins that stand out against the beech hedge, creating a picture that is quite spectacular. That's the thing about winter: simple combinations can make all the difference.

"We are so lucky in Victoria that we get such different seasons. It opens up such a range of planting possibilities, allowing us to bring something special to each month."

Jeremy has added another element to surprise the visitor to Cloudehill – sculpture. The artworks – a bowl, a statue or an urn, placed at judicious intervals around the garden – add a further dynamic and enhance the sense of the garden as a gallery. Just as it is with a major art gallery, Cloudehill is a garden to visit again and again and find something special at every season. □

• Cloudehill garden and nursery, 89 Olinda-Monbulk Road, Olinda, Victoria, Australia 3788. Open daily 10-5. Tel +613 9751 1009, www.cloudehill.com.au

be inspired

Get the look from Cloudehill for your own slice of Arts and Crafts style

DOORWAYS & ENTRANCES
Carefully designed arches, gateways and other openings can add to the fun of exploring a garden. For more advice see *Design Solutions*, issue 131, page 86.



FOCAL POINTS ▷
Long, straight pathways exploit lines of perspective and draw the eye to urns, sculptures, benches, pavilions and other objects.



TEXTURE & FORM
Jeremy grows many plants for their foliage, often to provide height and structure. Foliage plants can also have pleasing forms and textures – for example, the parterre looks as soft and springy as a feather bed.