



The floral dance

As florist to the stars Paul Hawkins knows just how to arrange flowers and his Cotswold garden demonstrates the same skill. Words and pictures by Mandy Bradshaw

IT SEEMS hard to believe that when Paul Hawkins first made a garden it was in garish colours. Admittedly it was in a tin bath and he was a young child but nothing could be further from the controlled symphony of pastel shades that constitutes his current plot. Today the leading florist favours muted shades and his garden, far from being discordant, is a romantic retreat.

He remembers his early days with fondness, growing plants in the old bath in a corner of his parents' former vicarage garden.

"I've always been passionate about plants and flowers," he says. "I had swathes of yellow and peach – fearful!"

Such colours are banned from his garden now: the only yellow tolerated is from self-sown mulleins while an inherited clump of yellow

alstroemeria was removed. "I've always been passionate about plants and flowers," he says. "I had swathes of yellow and peach – fearful!"

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Paul has been in the Cotswold cottage for six years, taking over a garden that had been well loved but which had become somewhat overgrown.

"It was quite good planting but it had all gone a bit mad."

Many of the original plants survive – albeit in different places – and the basic structure of the main area, which slopes down to the cottage, has been kept. Cotswold stone walls divide it into different levels, with paved paths



offering several routes through, while old apple trees and a magnificent clipped mop-head box give height, which is reinforced by rose and sweet pea-covered obelisks dotted throughout the borders.

To one side what was an old piggery and outside toilet has been transformed into a pot-filled patio and sheltered terrace that makes the most of views across the village.

"We took 42 skips of soil out of

there," recalls Paul.

New Cotswold stone retaining walls are already ageing to blend in with the originals and repeating plants, such as *Rosa 'Iceberg'*, which are found in the main borders, strengthens the sense of unity.

Indeed, roses are one of Paul's favourites and form a backbone to the planting, framing a seat, scrambling over an arch, or grown as bushes and climbers in the box-edged borders. Here

they mingle with inky blue aconitum, clouds of nepeta, blue spires of delphinium and anchusa, all set off by limey euphorbia. There's white phlox and leucanthemum, and a purple salvia that Paul admits is a "bit of a bully".

"I keep it in check," he comments.

Teasels self-seed and are allowed to remain, while 'Miss Wilmot's Ghost' is also given a free rein.

"It comes up every year somewhere else, which I love."

It's these small acts of rebellion that stop the garden becoming sterile and over-controlled, as do the wild field poppies that turn up occasionally and the scarlet oriental poppies that have been allowed to stay – despite their colour.

Surprisingly what is now an area of lawn was originally one massive herbaceous border.

"I lived here for a year without touching it and it was absolutely stunning but I just couldn't manage it." ►

Today the lawn and a second at the top of the garden provide a calm, green foil to the packed borders in the rest of the garden.

The herbaceous plants, meanwhile, were divided and reused, many of them in the long, narrow border that Paul laughingly calls 'The Lime Walk', due to the pleached limes that provide privacy without screening the stone boundary wall. Again the colours are restricted, this time to green, white and mauve, with foxgloves, aconitum, silver *Stachys byzantinus* and *Alchemilla mollis*. At one end what was an overgrown laurel is gradually being shaped into a square. Meanwhile, a new border edging the other side of the path repeats these colours with euphorbia and *Crambe cordifolia* among the summer stars.

☞ Sometimes I think what is nice is to have a vase of green with no flowers. I think all greens go together.

By the terrace there is a Mediterranean feel to the planting. One new bed has *Rosa 'Gertrude Jekyll'* teamed with silver helichrysum alongside banks of lavender and pots of thyme that flank the steps, while on the terrace itself white pelargoniums add a note of cool in summer sunshine. Pots of box balls form a protective barrier along the drop to the patio below.

While Paul refers to himself as "an amateur gardener" when it comes to arranging plants in a more formal setting he is anything but a beginner. Although he was a child actor – appearing on stage alongside people such as Yul Brynner, Kenneth Branagh and Helen Mirren – his childhood love of plants led him towards floristry. He trained with leading florists Moyses Stevens and 17 years ago he set up his own company, based in London and the Cotswolds. Today his client list is impressive, ranging from The Queen and Michael Caine to Ivana Trump and The Savoy. He has arranged



flowers for St Paul's Cathedral and St James' Palace and appeared frequently on TV.

The crossover between his work for corporate and private clients and his own garden is strong. When starting an arrangement, he explains, you first put in the green and if you get the shape of that right, the flowers will just follow. In the same way, his garden is built on a strong green structure – clipped box

and yew, topiary trees and obelisks.

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In his garden he describes his style as "heavy grouping with a bit of chaos as well" and he also limits the number of different flowers in his arrangements, with maybe one or two stars, such as peonies or roses, and a supporting cast of alstroemeria, for example.



"I group them heavily for maximum impact – like a border. That is how flowers grow."

As with his garden, he favours pastel shades – blue, pink and white – and likes to use seasonal flowers only.

Passionate about buying British where he can, he enjoys his early morning trips to London's flower market.

"I like going to the market. I see all my competitors there and the porters are singing songs and telling jokes. There are yummy mummies and crusty old duchesses. It's a great mix of people.

"I get up very early to go there – about 3.30 in the morning. The smell of it just hits you. It's so evocative. It reminds me of when I first started doing flowers."

The garden is regularly used by Paul and his partner for entertaining. Seats filled with soft cushions are placed to

make the most of views and a large table complete with glass candelabra speaks of many an alfresco meal.

Yet it is as a place of retreat from work and the bustle of London that he values it most and often it is the first place he heads on returning home.

"Sometimes I don't go in for a couple of hours.

I'm outside thinking: "I've got to dead-head that".

It's obsessive but I think in a good way." ■

For more information about Paul Hawkins Flowers, visit www.paulhawkinsflowers.co.uk

