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GARDEN DESIGN

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY DESIGN WITHIN REACH; TEICHMANN/LAIF; PHOTOS: MICHAEL KRANZ; MARTIN RODRIGUEZ-JONES/ALAMY; MICHAEL KRANZ/ID



A boat landing at the Scottish estate Corroun. The modern kick of wild Highlands grass combined with a breathtaking vista make this scene a signature Jenny Blom scheme.

In a gardening-crazed nation that loves to talk, read, and gather about the national hobby, the British landscape architect Jinny Blom has no blog and no television show. She is famously tight-lipped about who her clients are, and stays in close touch with her designs: in her London office, Blom employs a staff of just five, counting the person who answers the phone. Nobody who knows Blom's work, however, would call it reticent. She's prolific, with two dozen projects going at once (including, currently, a private garden in the States), and wildly variable: she moves from neotraditional schemes, with walled gardens and giant topiary, to installations that are nervily contemporary. At last year's "Jardins, Jardin," Paris's hip urban-garden exhibition, she combined the forbidding masses of giant stone seedpods with romantic grasses and dark purple salvias. Blom has the sweeping vision, and the management skills, to transform entire landscapes, delivering large-scale drama while getting the details precisely right.

The gardening public might be surprised, then, to find that Blom is rather fun to be around. Witty, with a broad, easy smile, she is a sharply intelligent woman who quotes Balzac while remaining comfortably down-to-earth. Before starting work on a project, she diligently bones up on the site's history, and once the planting is under way, happily picks up a spade and digs in alongside her crew. Andrew Wilson, chief assessor at the Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Flower Show, calls her "a refreshingly different kettle of fish."

It is this human sympathy, as much as her indomitable talent, that has made Blom one of a handful of women at the top of her profession. "I like people," she says. "I want them to feel like their garden belongs to them. I get a great deal of pleasure from giving them that."

No obstacle to that pleasure is too big. Corrou, a 57,000-acre estate in the Scottish Highlands, is a landscape of hills, moorland and loch so harsh and the possibility of sitting outside so occasional (when it stops raining in summer, the midges will eat you), there was little point in planting a traditional garden. And unless Corrou's owner, packaging heiress Lisbet Rausing, likes moss and rough grasses, anything Blom planted would have been eaten by marauding deer. Blom's first step was to erect 11 miles of deer-proof metal-mesh fence. Within that vast perimeter, she established what she calls an "antigarden"—an enhancement of the stark natural environment, rather than ornaments designed to distract from it. Thousands of trees and a woodland of natives—rowan, birch, alder, and Scots pine—now grow up to the modern lodge designed by Moshe Safdie. A mix of wildflowers, studded with panther lilies and giant Himalayan cowslip, not only reflect the estate's Victorian legacy but thrive in the Highlands dampness.

Blom's skill as a plantswoman shines, too, in urban situations, where she can let her hair down. "You can't plant exotics, such as phormiums, in the countryside. They just jar," she says. "But in a town, where there are no points of reference, you can get away with all sorts."

Blom's French mother was raised in Madagascar. Her late father was an inventor and agricultural engineer. On both sides she is descended

from artists, scientists, and writers, which perhaps explains her ease in working in a multiplicity of modes. Her design philosophy, however, derives directly from her formal education. Blom studied drama and theater design, then trained as a psychotherapist before joining designer Dan Pearson's firm in 1996, when she was in her mid-30s.

Blom never shies away from showing a human imprint. She's an avid builder of permanent structures: flowering plants may come and go, but the bones of her gardens—walls, hedges, well-proportioned spaces and vistas—must look good, whatever the season. "I like to build something that looks as good falling down as when it went up," she says.

In 2007, she won a gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show, the top prize at the world's top garden show. She is as proud of the dry-stone walls she commissioned at Temple Guiting, a privately owned 15th-century manor in Gloucestershire, that won her a Pinnacle Award in 2006. Her prizewinning walls divide the 14-acre site into 18 "rooms," each with a distinct style and a story to tell. Blom, who grew up in Gloucestershire, likely took inspiration from Hidcote, a nearby estate that is one of England's most spectacular examples of this approach. (Vita Sackville-West's Sissinghurst is the other). She understands, at any rate, the power of a formal structure to outlast the tastes of the

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moment. "Human lives are so fleeting," she says. "A garden should have a longer life."

On a rural hilltop southwest of London, Blom recently made another series of garden rooms, this time for Lady Getty, widow of Sir Paul. (The Internet is less discreet than Blom about naming her clients.) Blom filled the raw space with a 45-meter cloud-pruned boxwood hedge, an avenue of box-headed limes, and added yew topiary for an instant sense of history. Everything in the garden takes its place in the built environment. "There are minimal amounts [of flowering plants] that work very hard," Blom points out, "such as chalk-tolerant, long-flowering roses and a huge *Magnolia grandiflora* against the barn."

The pièce de résistance is a curved bastion, which juts out from the hillside to reveal the beautiful valley beyond. "It's a real showstopper. People gasp when the final door is opened," she says proudly.

Most gardeners won't ever deal in the grand scale of Blom's projects, but Blom says her approach translates to any garden, however small. "Take risks. If someone tells you something is impossible, see if you can do it. Gardening is a knife edge between disaster and serendipity." ●



Framing the View

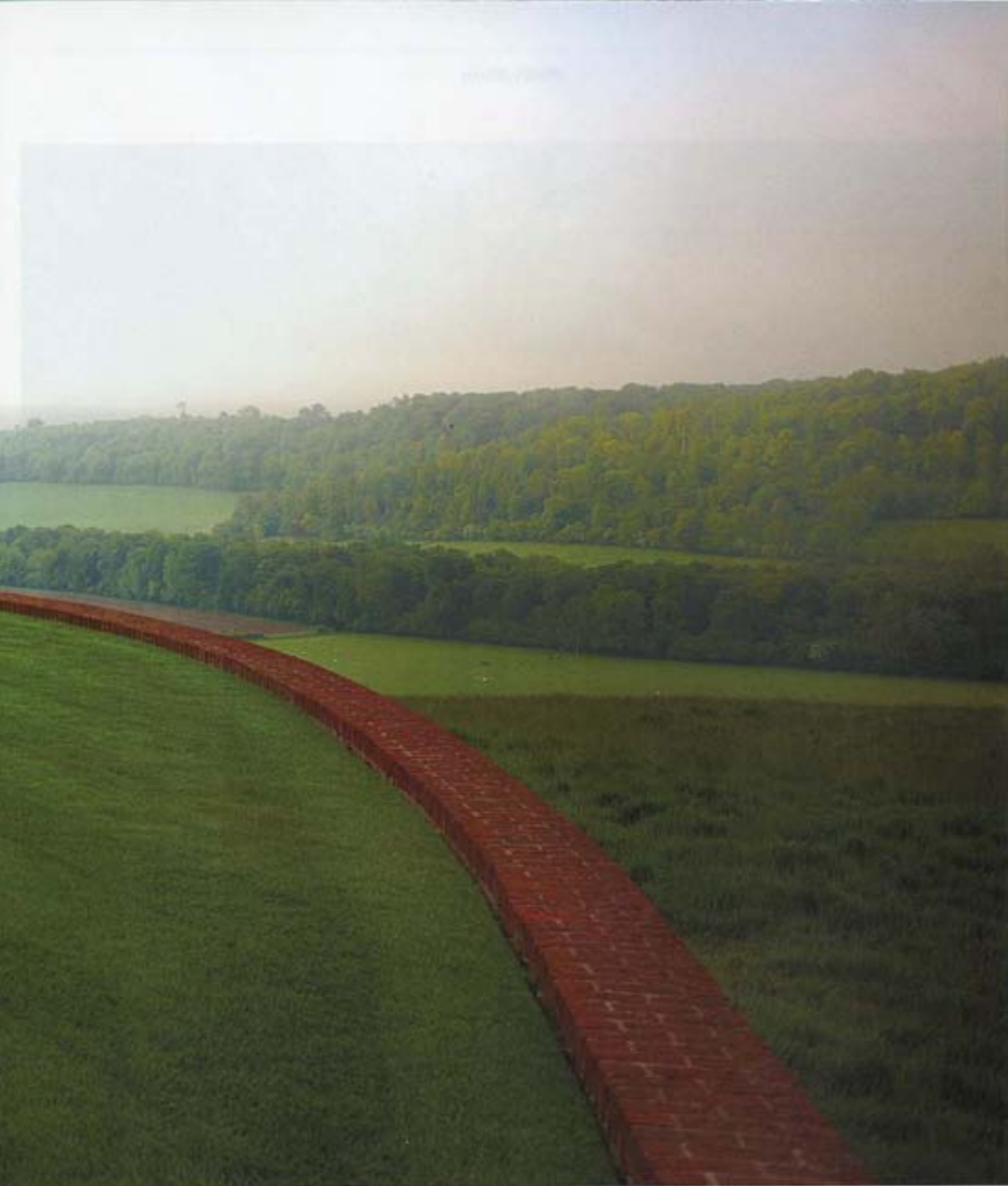
At the manor farm at Temple Guiting in Gloucestershire, Blom turned a former vegetable garden into a terraced area that both plays up the farm's spectacular views and distracts from a neighboring home in the distance. Hornbeams, pleached (trimmed to create a hedge-like effect) help to enclose the space while creating a firm sense of perspective. Below them, the bowy shapes and delicate colors of *Iris germanica* 'Jane Phillips' and *Iris sibirica* 'White Swan,' along with pink dianthus 'Mrs Simkins' and lavender at the front, contrast the rigor of the traditional Cotswold dry-stone walls (visible on the far side of the yew, left).

A formal water element runs down the center of the garden.



Showstopper

Blom is known for her hands-off approach, grounded in her belief that sometimes the best a landscape designer can do is to create a venue where the land's natural beauty can be seen. In this garden, which is just 40 minutes from London, Blom converted a neglected hilltop farm into a garden of exquisitely designed rooms with this astonishing grand finale, overlooking a wide valley in the high chalklands. No flowers or other plantings compete with the view, and though the lawn can accommodate parties, Blom's purpose was to give the farm's owner a place to interact with the environment. The bastion is so high up that the owner often uses it as a platform from which to feed and watch red kites—native birds of prey that she reintroduced to the area.



Midwest

Midwest



The Way Out

Garden rooms are designed to establish a particular mood; sunny areas that cheer with bright, hot plantings; those with less sun will use a cooler palette. The quietly dressy room above is Blom's way of setting up the chalkland farm's sucker punch—the view over the valley that is visible through the door. "For visitors, this is the last thing you come to," says Blom. With the door closed, this corner feels neutral and intimate, with its sober 'Dusky Challenger' iris— "a proper navy blue," says Blom—allium and Blom's favorite rose, the apricot-colored 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher.' Blom built up the garden wall and established vines that in time will cloak the door in greenery, further disguising the impact of what lies behind it.



Modern Moment

In the days when visitors to Corroon came up the loch by paddle steamer, the original approach to the lodge was through this avenue of spruce, which had become so overgrown with dead growth that the water was no longer visible from this vantage. Blom limbed the spruces to the height shown here, and placed this 2001 sculpture by Antony Gormley, *Here and There*, in the cathedral-like grove, not far from a rusted winch that once served the steamer landing. The work is one of several pieces of modern sculpture studding the grounds, juxtaposed with craggy boulders and remnant buildings. This one exhibits Blom's penchant for sudden drama and her ability to work in traditional and contemporary modes.



Firework Suite

When Blom visited Temple Guiting as a child, llamas ran in the fields and peacocks lived in the shed at the top left of this walled garden. When she was given the commission to restore the manor farm, Blom duly dubbed this space the Peacock Garden and designed it to spread gradually into spectacular bloom. It's pictured here in June, when the white *Eremurus himalaicus* open the show like fireworks snaking skyward above the blue gladiolus, salvia, thistle, and aster. (The orange *eremurus* are just getting started.) By September, when the garden is peaking, says Blom, "you feel like Alice in Wonderland. Everything is very spirally and wandlike, and it's all above you. I love to mess with scale in a small space."





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Meadow with a Method

The lodge at Corroun, with its fractured shapes of stone and expanses of glass, rises up like a ghost on the footprint of a lodge that burned down in the 1940s. Blom worked to restore the forests established by the previous owner, industrialist and plant collector Sir John Stirling Maxwell, whose birches can be seen here, towering over the estate's chapel. The clump of rowan, birch, and Scots pine growing at the chapel's corner to the right are among the 3,000 native trees Blom planted to complement Maxwell's scheme. When construction on Moshe Safdie's lodge was finished, Blom foraged for seeds in the surrounding hills to sow the local grasses that crowd its walls today, supporting the impression of the house as a revenant adrift in overgrown meadows.