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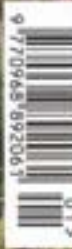
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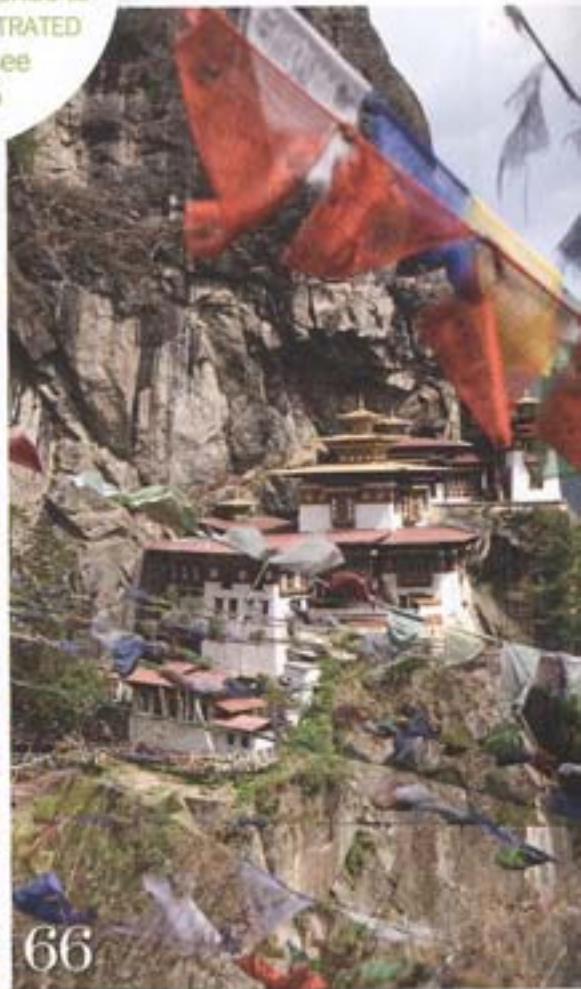
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In brief

NAME The Gardens at Corrou.

WHAT Wild-looking lakeside landscape merging into woodlands.

Designed by Jinny Blom.

WHERE A remote Highland location in Inverness-shire.

SIZE About 60 acres.

SOIL Acid, with some added topsoil.

CLIMATE High rainfall; winter snow; strong winds; altitude 411m.

SPECIAL FEATURES Repetition of native trees and shrubs with robust perennials and wildflowers.

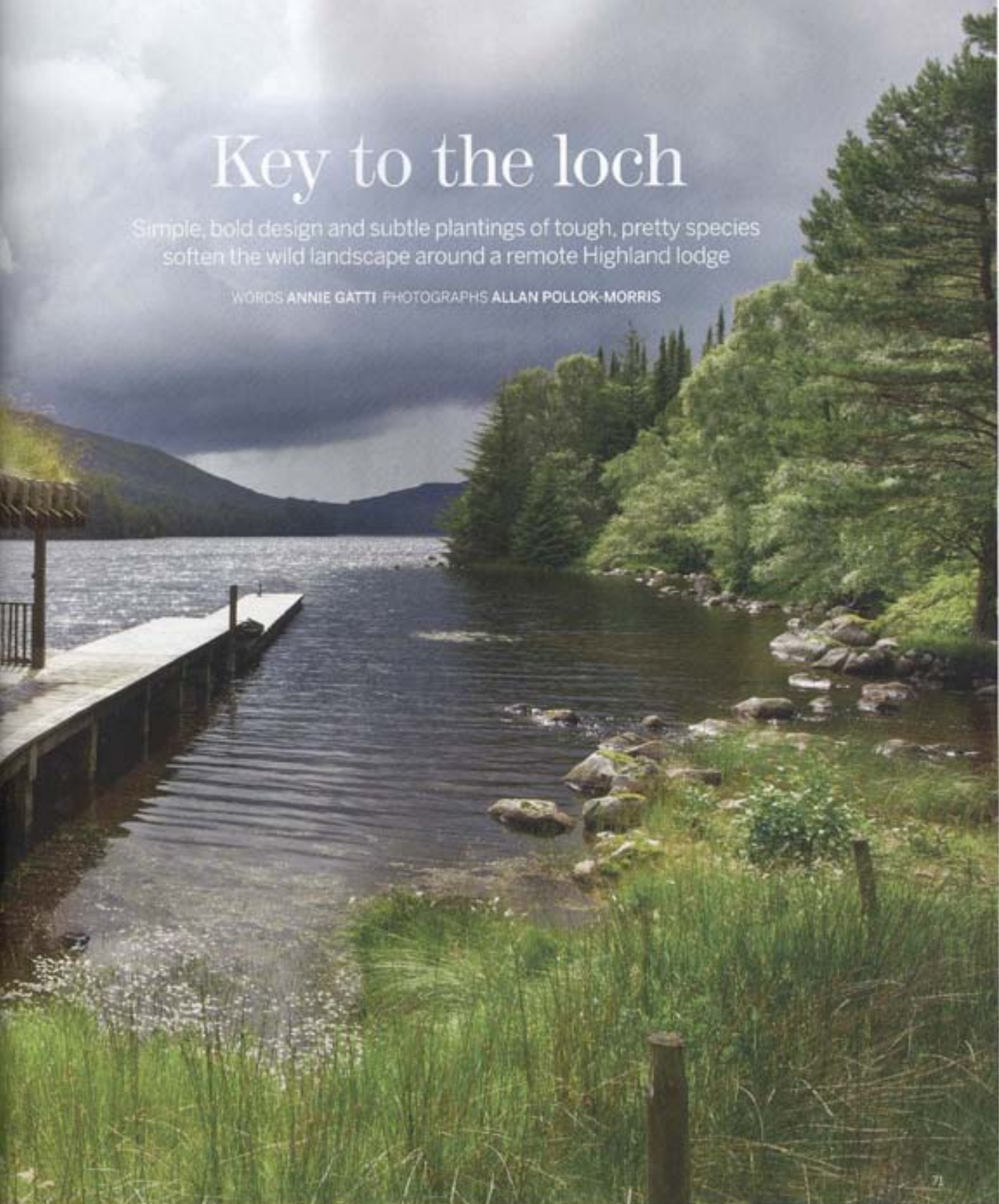
GARDEN PLAN See page 74.

The garden's margins blur into the wild landscape. Here at the edge of Loch Ossian, for example, a turf roof keeps the sauna snug in winter.

Key to the loch

Simple, bold design and subtle plantings of tough, pretty species soften the wild landscape around a remote Highland lodge

WORDS ANNIE GATTI PHOTOGRAPHS ALLAN POLLOK-MORRIS





A still, circular pool softly fringed with willflowers is the centrepiece of the restored Victorian terrace.

There are two ways to approach Corroul Lodge, which sits at the heart of its own 57,000-acre estate in Inverness-shire: by train, disembarking at the highest station on the West Highland Railway Line and skirting Loch Ossian for 4½ miles along a forest track; or 30 miles by road from Fort William, following the twisting drive across moorland until you glimpse the trees that cradle the lodge. Either way, you cannot visualise a garden at the end of your journey. And although the grounds around the imposing granite lodge are referred to as 'the garden', they form what designer Jinny Blom calls an 'anti garden', a restful, naturalistic-looking transition between the dark grey building, the surrounding forest and the dramatic, glacier-scoured open moorland.

The bold decision to allow the planting to sweep right up to the façade of the lodge creates a feeling that the building has just risen up out of the trees. The view down the lake, framed by mature beeches, seems to have been enjoyed for hundreds of years. In fact, when the original lodge was built by philanthropist Sir John Stirling Maxwell in the 1880s it stood among bare bog.

The current owner, who built on the footprint of Sir John's lodge, wanted a low-maintenance, wild-looking garden that would naturalise. But, as with all successful ecological projects, the garden's creation required meticulous planning and a willingness to try different planting techniques.

For the trees, the best solution proved to be cell-grown young plants with strong root systems and reduced top growth. The conditions – a short growing season, up to 2.3m of rain a year (in England the average is 84cm), thick snow in winter, buffeting winds and acid soil – were challenging in the extreme.

Preparing the ground

Before any planting could begin, Jinny installed an 11-mile fence to keep the deer out. She started a regime of tree-thinning, especially of Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), to open up views. This allowed her to create a more natural woodland habitat with an understorey of shrubs such as rhododendrons, azaleas, holly and fruit bushes and ground cover of grasses, ferns and herbaceous plants. Her plant palette – a mixture of natives and robust perennials – was influenced by the

list of species that Sir John, who became an avid plant collector, had used in the stone terrace below the lodge. "I wanted to have huge naturalised clumps of species that harked back to that period of Victorian plant collecting, things like leopard lilies, giant cowslips, cardiocrinums and exotic ferns that would pop up haphazardly through the birch and rowan copses."

The Victorian terrace, with a circular pool flanked by semi-circular beds and two beautifully crafted alpine beds, is the only formal part of the grounds. Buried under a mat of moor grass, the lattice-pattern stonework was painstakingly restored, and replanted with tougher examples of the alpine plants originally there. A phalanx of gloriously scented yellow azaleas (*Rhododendron luteum*) frames the granite steps up from the jetty, creating a fiery contrast to the soaring grey lodge in autumn. Seeing how well they survived the battering winds, Jinny introduced them along the iron railings that mark the new entrance to the lodge. It is this repetition of key trees, shrubs and perennials and of stone and wood that gives the garden a remarkable and relaxing cohesion that



Conifer woods protect the lodge from the winds that sweep up the valley towards the 1,148m peak of Ben Alder.
RIGHT Long grasses and wildflowers lap up to the walls of the lodge.



Scottish garden



The glass and granite lodge, designed by Boston-based architect Moshe Safdie, replaces the Victorian lodge, which was destroyed by fire in 1942.

LEFT A lichen-speckled statue dating from the 1920s takes his place in the Victorian Terrace, flanked by naturalised campanulas.



Hundreds of acres of old Sitka spruce plantations grow on the shores of the loch.
RIGHT Jinny was keen to keep the granite boulders near the lodge, including this huge mossy one – and even added more to replicate the rocky landscape.





The River Ossian flows northward out of the loch, past drifts of foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) and a solitary goat willow (*Salix caprea*).

▷ extends to the outbuildings and cottages down the drive, where plantings of native species continue. One of the most successful combinations is found here: a meadow where lupins in shades of dark red, blue and white have naturalised alongside leopard lilies and clusters of downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) and broom (*Cytisus scoparius*).

For the first few years the planting was allowed to establish itself with little maintenance. But by last summer some areas had become too wild, with dominant species such as ox-eye daisies taking over. The original contractors restored the balance and now an experienced gardener has been taken on who is sympathetic to the ethos of this landscape.

For Jinny, the pleasure now comes from seeing moisture-lovers such as Silckim cowslip (*Primula sikkimensis*) growing like weeds. "What a treat," she says. "You can't grow those in many places. I am really pleased to see the landscape springing back to life because it confounds the theory that nothing would grow there." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

The garden at Corroul is private, but is open to paying guests at the lodge.

WEBSITE www.corroul.co.uk

DESIGNER For more examples of Jinny Blom's work visit www.jinnyblom.com



Garden plan

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1 Loch Ossian | 6 River Ossian |
| 2 Sauna | 7 Chapel |
| 3 Woods | 8 Circular pool |
| 4 Lodge | 9 Jetty |
| 5 Garden | |

PLAN BY JINNY BLOM

Wild planting

Jinny Blom names nine favourites from Corroul, for that natural look

1 *Lychnis flos-cuculi*

Ragged robin has thin stems and sprays of pink flowers with raggedy petals.

2 *Cirsium rivulare*

Spectacular, deep crimson thistles atop erect stems and dark green leaves.

3 *Pilosella aurantiaca*

Known as fox and cubs because of the way the flowers grow in a cluster.

4 *Campanula latifolia* var. *alba*

This beautiful plant has erect stems with pendulous flower bells.

5 *Primula florindae*

Giant cowslip is one of the most striking wild primulas, and sweetly fragrant too.

6 *Aconitum napellus* Anglicum Group

Blue flowers between May and July, and lovely soft winter foliage.

7 *Vicia cracca*

Tufted vetch bears densely packed flowers on one side of a long, bare stalk.

8 *Lilium x dalthansonii*

'Mrs R O Backhouse'

This cultivar has rich orange-yellow blooms spotted with purple.

9 *Dianthus deltoides*

A mat-forming species, this is one of the easiest wildflowers to grow.

Where to buy tough plants & seed for exposed gardens

Ardfean Nursery

Alpines, herbaceous plants, trees and shrubs. Bunchrew, Inverness IV3 8RH. Tel 01463 243250. www.ardfean-nursery.co.uk

Glendoick Gardens and Nursery

Specialises in rhododendrons and ornamental fruit trees. Perth PH2 7NS. Tel 01738 860205. www.glendoick.com

Scotia Seeds

Producers of Scottish wildflower seeds. Mavisbank, Farnell, Brechin, Angus DD9 6TR. Tel 01356 626425; www.scotiaseeds.co.uk

