

GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED

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PAGE 9

PERFECT PUMPKINS

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CAROL KLEIN

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Star performers to keep your
autumn garden looking lovely

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READER OFFERS

- Subscribe to GARDENS ILLUSTRATED now and SAVE 30% on the shop price – plus FREE BOOK worth £20*. See page 28 for details.
- Explore the gardens of Sicily on our READER HOLIDAY with expert guide Helena Attlee – see page 9.
- Turn to page 102 for further tempting offers and a competition for RHS show tickets*.

* Applies to UK readers only

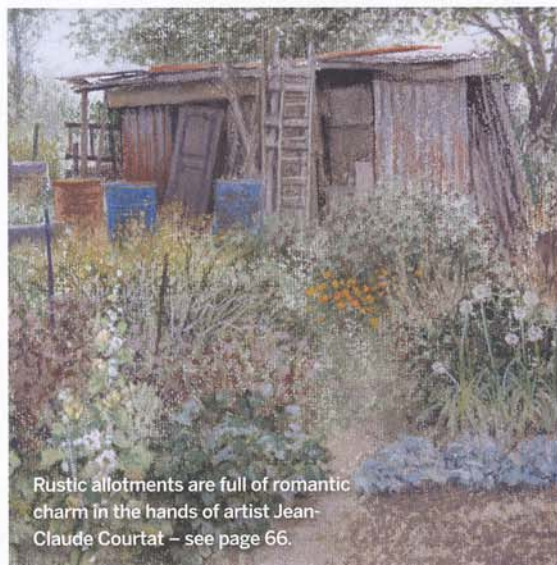
editor's letter



Over the eight or so years I've worked on the magazine, I've noticed a steady increase in the number of stunning autumn gardens that are suggested to us by photographers and writers. The feature on a private garden in Shropshire (page 30) is a perfect example. And it's not just the chocolately browns, fiery reds and oranges that make it so delicious, but the wonderful array of late-flowering perennials and carefully put-together compositions that keep the interest high. Nerines are some of the brightest blooms at this time of year, and their lipstick-pink flowers are enough to dispel any thoughts of winter gloom. On page 46 Carol Klein reveals which new varieties to look out for. Carol also explains how to recreate her favourite seasonal plant combination at Glebe Cottage, her home in Devon (page 56). In addition, we give a step-by-step guide to some pretty autumn decorations (page 42) and meet the French artist Jean-Claude Courtat, who uses pastels to capture the quiet charm of allotments (page 66). Finally, we look at the key players in the 'new perennial' movement and assess the influence they've had on today's planting styles (page 76). I can't help wondering if they are the driving forces behind the increase in lovely late-season gardens mentioned earlier.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Juliet



Rustic allotments are full of romantic charm in the hands of artist Jean-Claude Courtat – see page 66.



Forage for wild berries, flowers and nuts to make your own autumnal decorations – see page 42.

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Informal workers' allotments and the crops grown there inspire many of Jean-Claude's works.

Quietly charismatic

Peaceful allotment scenes become remarkably poetic in the hands of Jean-Claude Courtat

WORDS JINNY BLOM PHOTOGRAPHS CHARLIE HOPKINSON

Jean-Claude Courtat is a man of immense charm. Like his pastels he gradually casts a spell that draws one in. It is rare to find figurative painters these days, and especially one openly committed to such modest subject matter.

I first saw his work at Courson, the 'French Chelsea', where he regularly has a stand in the old stable block. Along one wall I became aware of a series of subtle pastel drawings. A vast Savoy cabbage, intact with all its outer leaves painstakingly reproduced, tinged with yellow and holey from strong-stomached slugs. Next to this a beautiful, tender branch of a pear tree, a ripe 'Bon Chrétien' showing the slight bruising and mottling that makes these fruit so beautiful. I could almost smell it. A pollarded willow with a bit of old chestnut paling fence at the base and a dark and brooding sky behind.

I wandered off. Five minutes later I was back. The willow wouldn't leave me alone. I began to look properly at the pastels. Allotments, rows of cabbages, corrugated tin sheds with bits of polythene tied on

with string, old recycled wine crates as seed boxes. Rendered poetically in soft, muted colours, the evidence of uncomplicated domestic lives.

The urge to buy the willow became stronger, the show was closing and no one was to be seen near the stand. I finally unearthed Jean-Claude in a crepuscular recess in the stables, smiling quietly when I said I'd like to buy the willow and agreeing I could collect it later in the year from his studio in Boulogne, Paris.

A born artist

Jean-Claude studied fine art and was a professor of painting throughout his adult life, citing his heroes as Braques, Rembrandt and Claude Lorraine. He drew almost constantly as a child. His acute eye for detail is apparent everywhere in the home and studio he shares with his partner of many years, Annick Bienvenu, also an artist.

Beginning as a figurative painter, from the early 1960s Jean-Claude moved into abstraction. His works from this period are



Jean-Claude says he loves using pastels and watercolours because they allow him to work quickly.



The artist keeps his Paris studio immaculately tidy. LEFT His huge collection of *objets* includes these framed vintage seed packets.



“ Jean-Claude starts each work with a faint sketch in charcoal and then builds layer upon layer of colour. He says that’s why he chooses pastels – he can work quickly without waiting for layers to dry ”

▷ exquisite and with a palpable reverence for nature. Using sand and earth mixed with pigment, he created textural yet subtle and serene works. Serenity is a mark of the man and permeates all he touches.

By the early 1970s Jean-Claude was struggling with abstraction. He entered what he charmingly refers to, with a twinkling smile, as his “*époque de doute*”. One can safely assume that this was a difficult time creatively. He assuaged the discomfort by collecting, and now has the most covetable collection of ‘objects’ I’ve ever seen. Toy trains, enamel seed labels, seed packets, chickens (lots of chickens), die-cast cars, photographs of disappearing French heritage such as fishermen’s huts and billboards. And he is an incredibly good photographer.

Fresh inspiration

In the early 1980s Jean-Claude gradually returned to watercolours and pastels, encouraged by Annick. He felt a compulsive pull towards the intimate life of villages, workers’ allotments, the small and necessary creations of ordinary lives and, of course, nature.

Jean-Claude’s colour sense is calm. He has the full collection of dry pastels but finds he just can’t use the “*couleurs vif*” – strong blues, greens and reds – erring towards the dusty shades instead. He starts each work with a faint sketch in charcoal and then builds

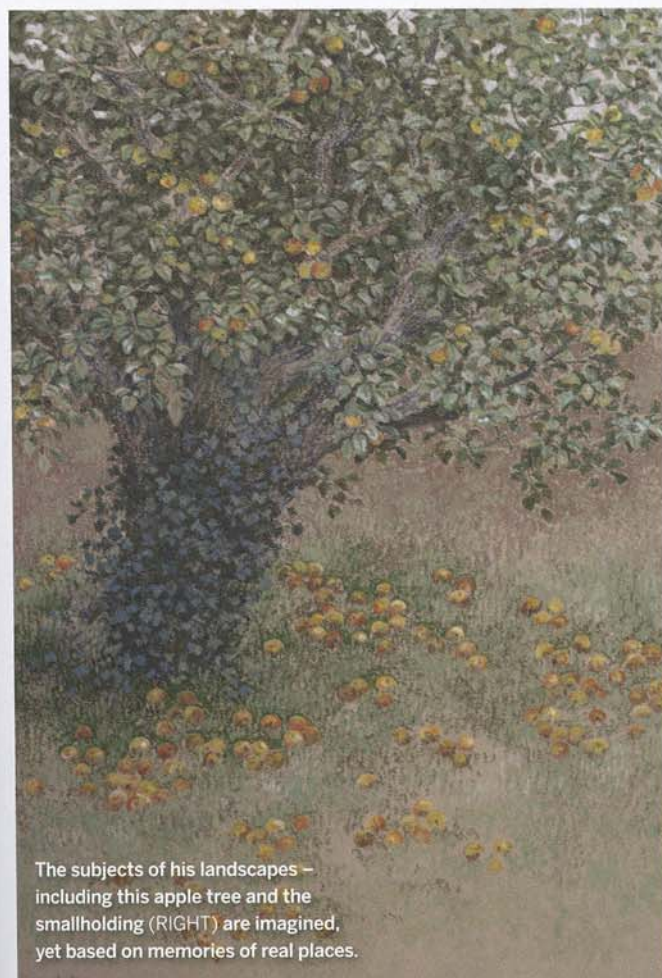
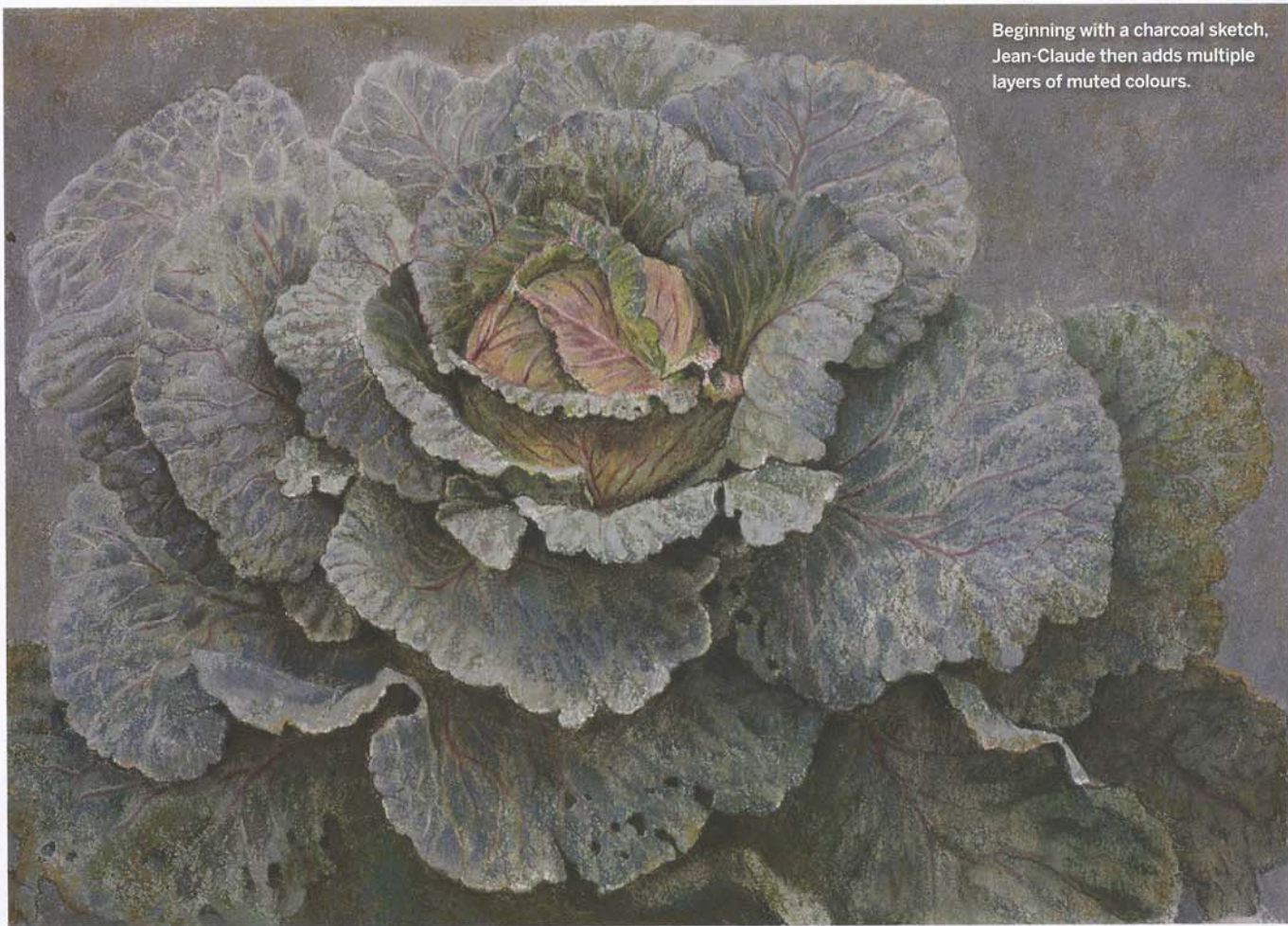
layer upon layer of colour. He says that’s why he chooses pastels – he can work quickly without waiting for layers to dry. His compositions are just that. He doesn’t make portraits of existing places but blends fragments he has seen and remembered together, like collage. This is perhaps where his work gains its ethereal quality, slightly out of time yet completely believable.

Jean-Claude has a committed following and his works are not long on show before being snapped up at quite grown-up prices. He works to commission but prefers, quite understandably, some liberty in choosing what he draws. One gets the impression he likes to be left to his own devices. He is currently working on a long folding work that he calls “*an accordion book*” of his willow pollards. The length of the river? I ask, and he nods, laughing. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Jean-Claude Courtat can be contacted by email at jccourtat@orange.fr. He will be displaying some of his latest works at Les Journées des Plantes, at Courson, about 25 miles southwest of Paris, on 15-17 October. Domaine de Courson, 91680 Courson-Monteloup, France. Tel +33 1 64 58 90 1, www.domaine-de-courson.fr/

Beginning with a charcoal sketch, Jean-Claude then adds multiple layers of muted colours.



The subjects of his landscapes – including this apple tree and the smallholding (RIGHT) are imagined, yet based on memories of real places.

