

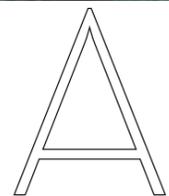
IN THE GARDEN

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Form and FERVOUR

A cliff-hanger garden brimming with colour-coded planting and striking hard-scaping provides an impressive foreground for one of Cape Town's most iconic backdrops

TEXT KARIEN SLABBERT PHOTOGRAPHS MICHAEL HALL



magnificently positioned house, with panoramic vistas over Constantia's vineyards, called for a garden to complement its grandstand location. Idyllic, no? But, ask any garden designer and they will attest to how challenging it is to marry a striking view with a garden's layout. In most cases, this marriage is not as clear-cut as it may seem. And, in this case, it had its ups and downs, so to speak.

Mary Maurel, who was commissioned to remodel Diane and Alistair Armstrong of Out of the Blue's garden, worked with the existing steeply sloped landscape, rather than trying to overpower the garden's panoramic backdrop. 'I tried to acknowledge the backdrop by

keeping the general layout simple. By virtue that one looks down on the garden, it required a dramatic focal point in the foreground to offset the view,' notes Maurel.

The owner's brief was to create a more accessible garden that drew one's eye from the house level, right down to the lowest reaches. 'We spoke about creating a "route" through the garden, which Diane could walk without tracing her steps, immersing herself in the garden,' explains Maurel. It was to be filled with attractive planting and an abundance of picking flowers – Armstrong dreamt of picking bunches of Pennygum among layers of foliage. 'I was given a wish list of plants – roses, hydrangeas, jasmine, ornamental grasses –

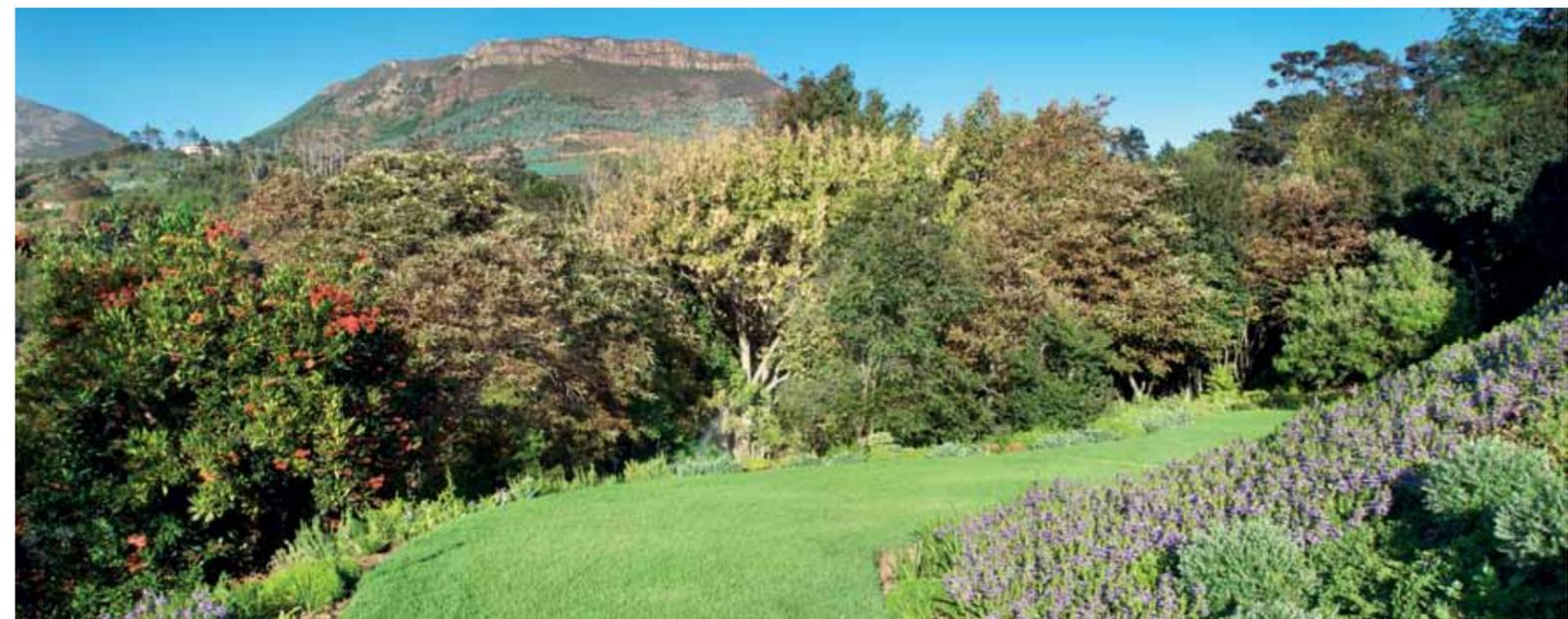
that helped me to envision what Diane was after,' states Maurel.

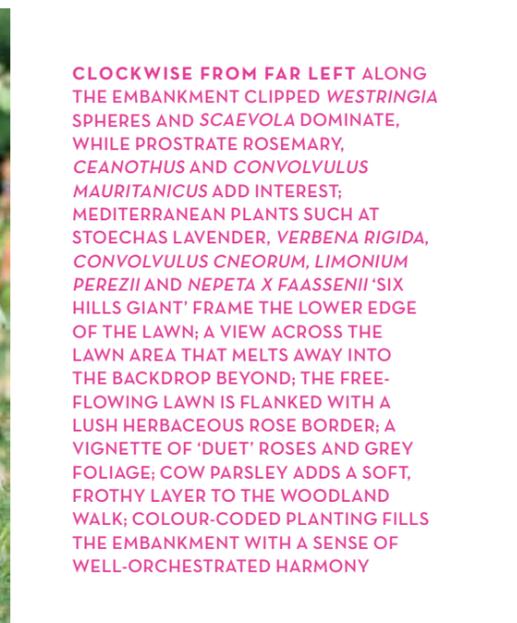
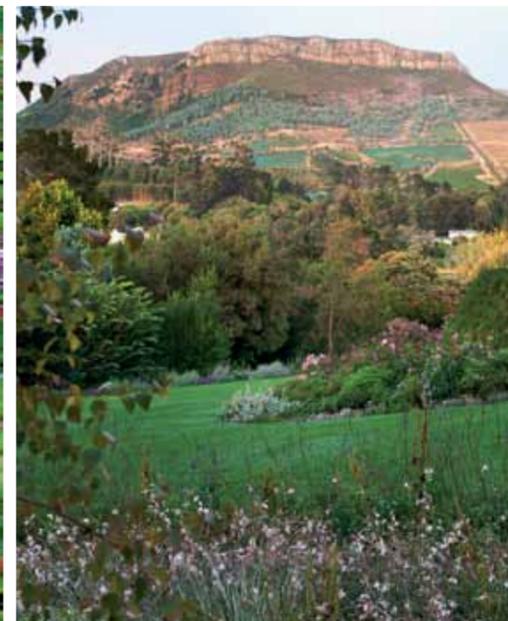
Much of the success is due to the level of trust between owner and client, which gave Maurel the freedom to follow her instinct. From a technical perspective, landscape contractor Heimo Schulzer played a pivotal role in implementing the design on this tricky site. 'It is one thing designing the garden on paper and quite another to execute it. Schulzer's expertise was key to getting the shaping of the ground right, so that the garden looks effortless,' says Maurel.

This collaborative spirit helped create a lush, unexpectedly mature landscape. A well-orchestrated ensemble of plants, picked and curated to fill every section of the ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT LOOKING DOWN FROM THE HOUSE, THE OVAL WATER FEATURE IS THE KEY FOCAL POINT IN THIS SLOPED GARDEN. EACH PIECE OF SLATE COPING WAS HAND-SHAPED INTO THE SAME SEMI-CIRCULAR FORM AND LAID EQUALLY SPACED; THE GRASSLAND SECTION AT ONE END OF THE WOODLAND WALK ABOUNDS WITH FROTHY GRASSES AND SOFT PLANTING; THE OVAL WATER FEATURE IS FRAMED WITH *SALVIA LEUCANTHA* 'MIDNIGHT'; A VIEW OF THE WOODLAND AREA STRADDLING THE LOWER PERIMETER OF THE PROPERTY; THE EMBANKMENT LEADS DOWN FROM THE HOUSE TO THE WATER FEATURE





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT ALONG THE EMBANKMENT CLIPPED *WESTRINGIA* SPHERES AND *SCAEVOLA* DOMINATE, WHILE PROSTRATE ROSEMARY, *CEANOTHUS* AND *CONVOLVULUS MAURITANICUS* ADD INTEREST; MEDITERRANEAN PLANTS SUCH AS *STOECHAS* LAVENDER, *VERBENA RIGIDA*, *CONVOLVULUS CNEORUM*, *LIMONIUM PEREZII* AND *NEPETA X FAASSENII* 'SIX HILLS GIANT' FRAME THE LOWER EDGE OF THE LAWN; A VIEW ACROSS THE LAWN AREA THAT MELTS AWAY INTO THE BACKDROP BEYOND; THE FREE-FLOWING LAWN IS FLANKED WITH A LUSH HERBACEOUS ROSE BORDER; A VIGNETTE OF 'DUET' ROSES AND GREY FOLIAGE; COW PARSLEY ADDS A SOFT, FROTHY LAYER TO THE WOODLAND WALK; COLOUR-CODED PLANTING FILLS THE EMBANKMENT WITH A SENSE OF WELL-ORCHESTRATED HARMONY

THE FREE-FLOWING LAWN AREA SERVES AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT AND WINDS ITS WAY DOWN THROUGH THE GARDEN WITH A MANAGEABLE, GENTLE GRADIENT

garden with a unique character, terraced levels offset by an ensemble of clipped plants, and an ingeniously-designed flower-bordered water feature sit comfortably – almost effortlessly – within its context. There now exists strong symbiosis between house and garden, which was lacking in the former layout.

Initially, the landscapers had explored the idea of increasing the size of the level upper terrace – fortunately, as it turned out, this proved to be too costly. Instead, they decided to work with the terrain – a more subtle and site-responsive approach. The garden was shaped into

a series of level terraces with interconnecting landscaped steps, while the lawn was gently graded so that it flowed from the upper level to the lower reaches, and ultimately into a woodland pathway.

The upper level had been created in the existing garden, with a crescent-shaped Terraforce retaining wall that curved away from the house. The ends of the wall were widened on the upper pool terrace, allowing for access points into the garden at each end. To the edge of the Terraforce, planting – heliotropes, *Stachys byzantina* and 'BellaRosa' roses – was kept narrow and low to give the

pool space to nestle comfortably and to provide minimal distraction from the view beyond.

At one end, the lawn flows into the graded garden that winds its way down to the lower level. At the other end, steps trickle down from the house's elevated position to the next terrace, which then connects down via the landscaped steps to the garden's design trompe d'oeil – the oval water feature, which forms the garden's main focal point.

'As it is the point where the eye converges, it needed to be dramatic,' says Maurel. The supporting planting is strong, with a backdrop of semi-oval planted *Viburnum* ▶

LOCAL GARDEN



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A COOL VIEW ACROSS ONE OF THE MANY COLOUR-CODED HERBACEOUS BORDERS; THE GARDEN IS CHARACTERISED BY A COHESIVE PLANTING PALETTE; IN THE LOWER SECTION THE LAWN IS EDGED BY CLIPPED PLANTS WITH A CANOPY OF TREES AS BACKGROUND

odoratissimum; the foreground features *Salvia*, while the randomly placed sandstone paving is inter-planted with silver *Dymondia*. A thin strip of *Sisyrinchium* around the water feature adds to this textured effect.

On the embankment, wide landscaped steps interspersed with groundcovers are an integral part of the garden's backbone. Clipped spheres were added as the view down the slope lent itself to a symmetrical, graphic style of planting.

The free-flowing lawn area serves as a unifying element and winds its way down through the garden with a manageable, gentle gradient. 'En route, we exposed a copse of poplars which now straddle the edge of the lawn. The rock that is positioned under the trees was moved from elsewhere in the garden to provide a seat on the edge of the lawn,' says Maurel.

The lawn cuts through the embankment, providing a landing between stairs. Thereafter it widens and then narrows at its lowest point to become the woodland path through the garden periphery. This tree-enveloped pathway allows one to complete the circular route through the garden.

At the end of the woodland walk is an ornamental grass garden. 'This area needed to be "punchy" as the path emerges, on axis with the bedroom wing,' notes Maurel.

When visiting the property, one is amazed at how such a relatively young garden manages its mature, well-established green haven. A contributing factor is that, while the garden was almost entirely remodelled, with extensive earthworks and new planting, the periphery remained largely intact. Here, some good tree specimens – several beautiful mature *Diospyros whyteana*, poplars, an *Alberta magma*, various *Acers* and a pin oak – benefitted from being shaped after being cleared of the choking undergrowth.

Ultimately, the landscape team has managed to weave together a cool, cohesive planting palette and perfectly orchestrated hard landscaping elements, creating a free-flowing lush haven filled with pockets of interest.

■ Mary Maurel ☎ 084 600 2636;
marymaurelgardens@gmail.com

