

The garden gallery

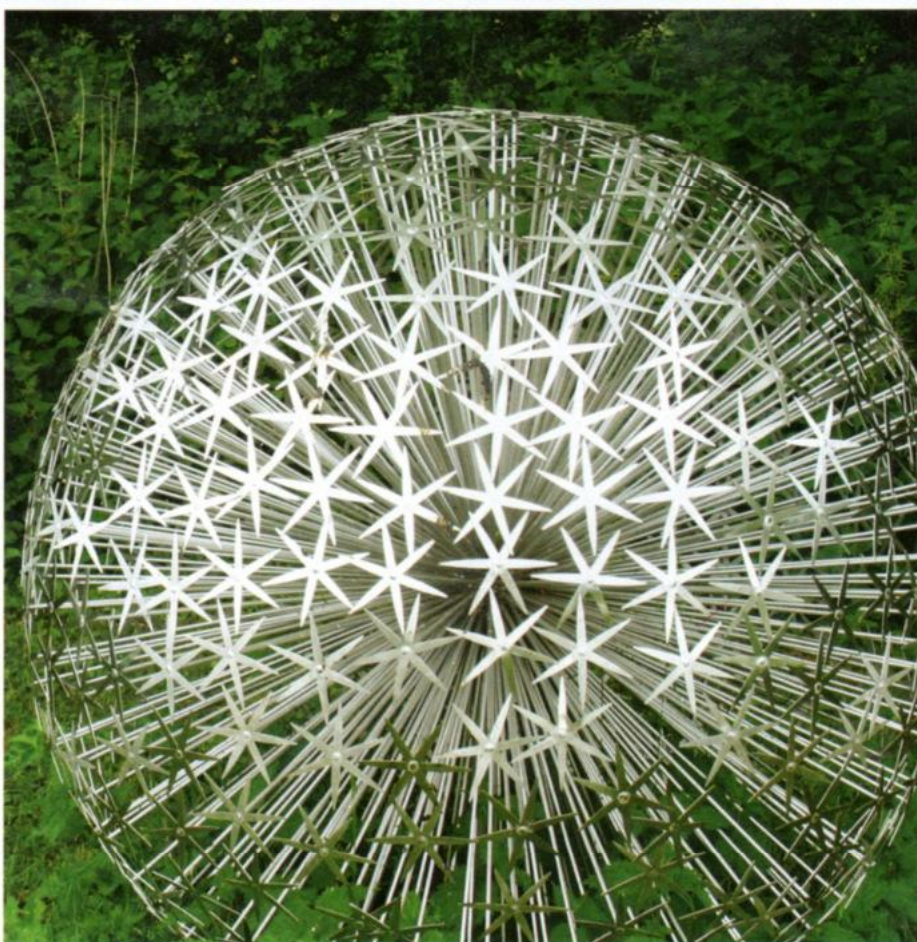
Deep in the Rutland countryside, horticulturist and landscape architect duo Rose Dejardin and her husband John have created a unique 'garden gallery' that draws visitors – and artists – from far and wide

FEATURE NATASHA GOODFELLOW
PHOTOGRAPHS JOHN GILBOY

The rural county of Rutland is not known as a cultural centre. There's majestic Rutland Water, which attracts flocks of twitchers, and the charming market towns of Oakham and Uppingham for a spot of gentle shopping, but opportunities to engage with top-end art or contemporary craft are, shall we say, sparse. Which makes it all the more surprising to stumble across Artdejardin in the tiny village of Wing.

Here, dotted through a magical garden, woodland and meadow setting created by horticulturist and landscape designers Rose and John Dejardin, you'll find around 50 works by a roll call of Britain's top designer-makers. As the bees buzz, the pigeons coo and the clouds sketch ever-changing patterns with the light, the artworks come alive in a way they never could indoors. Ruth Moilliet's steel *Allium* sparkles against an herbaceous border of purple bergamot and tall, raspberry-coloured *Persicaria*; Neil Wilkin's glass works glint seductively on the pond and Andrew Trotman's exquisite wooden bench nestles next to an enormous, butterfly-covered buddleia 'White Splendour', just begging to be sat upon.

The garden hasn't always looked like this. When





Clockwise from left **The marriage of plant and art is carefully thought out** – Nigel Edmondson's *Planted Monolith* matches the habits of the red hot poker; pieces with strong colour, such as Neil Wilkin's *Lily*, can be a challenge to place; Ruth Moilliet's steel *Seedheads* and *Allium* nestle in borders

the Dejardins moved here 25 years ago, planning to open a plant nursery, there was nothing. Armed with a spade and a soil auger, John and Rose had gone looking for one to two acres with good soil, a stream and a low-maintenance property attached. What they ended up with was rather different: eight windswept acres of a pig and chicken farm with a virtually derelict thatched cottage and only a tiny patch of nettle-smothered lawn. 'But the soil was fantastic!' laughs John.

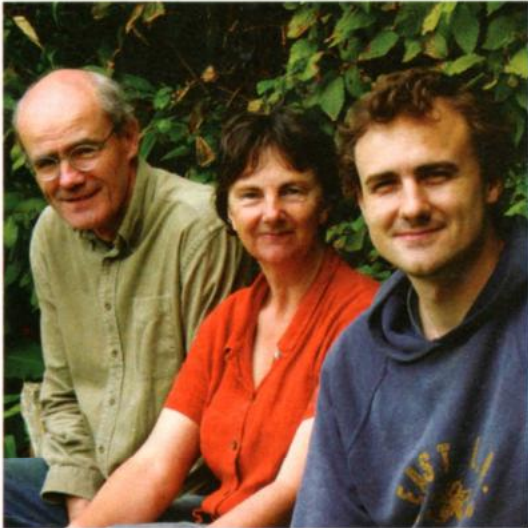
Having planted a sheltering tree belt of mixed indigenous species – oak, ash and wild cherry – to help create a micro-climate in the garden, Rose and John set about developing the front garden with its fabulous 'bumpy' lawn so their children Rowan (now 27); Anna (24), Joseph (21) and Oscar (18) had somewhere to play. 'They had fun there,' says Rose. 'It was a fantasy world for them.'

From little acorns

Their own dreams took root rather more slowly, as they worked tirelessly to establish the nursery and to fashion a mixture of different types of garden to showcase the plants Rose sold. From the start, contemporary art was a focal point. Terry Slade's (Rose's brother-in-law) striking bronze angel *Free at Last* stands at the entrance to the garden, while a small, rusty wirework bird picked up at a Red Cross fair seems to drink from the rill John built.

'We'd always thought it'd be nice to show art in the garden,' says Rose. 'As sales began to plateau in the nursery, it seemed a good way of bringing more people in.' Teaming up with a friend of a friend, art consultant Nicola Elstone, *Artde Jardin* opened for the first time in the summer of 2005 with about 20 pieces by seven different artists. 'Thanks to Nicky's experience and connections, we were able to get national artists straightaway,' says Rose. As it turned out, many of the artists enjoyed the venue so much (ceramicist Peter Beard commented: 'I thought you displayed my pieces so beautifully, I was even impressed by my own work!'), that they have requested to return





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every year since, many of them making site-specific pieces. Ruth Moilliet's seedheads rolled around the bumpy lawn in the debut show – 'They looked fantastic,' says John 'but made mowing the lawn a devil of a job!' Rebecca Newnham, whose glittering mosaic pieces annually illuminate unexpected corners of the woodland, was so taken with the garden she helped them win their first Arts Council grant last year.

The secret of success

The Dejadins were smitten too. 'Even though it didn't make any difference at all to the sales of the nursery, which I eventually closed in 2007, we both found we really enjoyed it,' says Rose. 'Some of the pieces are just fabulous,' John agrees. 'Neil Wilkin left a piece of his glass here with us over the winter and the way it animated the landscape through the seasons was absolutely brilliant.' Rose also found year-round pleasure when she bought Christopher Marvell's *Birdman* – a bronze head with a bird perched quixotically atop it. 'He's so serene. I just couldn't let him go,' she says. Willow sculptor Laura Ellen Bacon felt something similar. Deciding her piece *Outgrown* was so right for the garden it belonged there, she gave it to the Dejadins, much to their delight.

Since 2007, the pair have had the confidence to run the exhibition without Nicky's help and it continues to go from strength to strength. Rose puts much of their success down to the very



domestic scale of the settings. 'This isn't a huge piece of parkland or Capability Brown-designed grounds,' she says. 'We have lots of different sized spaces – a patio, a gravel garden, a meadow, lawns, even a vegetable patch – and we think very carefully about where to place pieces. We want to inspire visitors to consider what might work in their own gardens.'

Of course, though Rose and John are far too modest to say, their success also stems from the extraordinary beauty of the garden they have created, from the lush hostas and ferns of the rill

This page, from top left **The Dejadins**, left to right **John, Rose and eldest son Rowan**; **Robert Fogell's *Bird 3***, carved from limestone, sits at the edge of the meadow




This page, clockwise from top left Christopher Marvell's *Woman* keeps watch over the woodland path; Rose loved Marvell's *Birdman* so much she couldn't bear to part with him; dense planting keeps down the amount of work, claims Rose, although she loves a spot of weeding; Rebecca Newnham's mirror mosaic *Ginkgo*



garden to the silvery, drought-resistant plants of the walled garden. Maintaining such a wide diversity of spaces over such a large area seems like a lot of work, but Rose claims it's deceptive. 'The borders are fairly low-maintenance because I plant so densely,' she says. 'Come spring, I do a weed through and mulch any bare soil with mushroom compost, which suppresses the weeds, improves the soil and helps retain moisture. Then it's just a bit of pruning, maintaining the lawn and the hedges, deadheading and pulling a few weeds – I love a spot of weeding,' she laughs.

While Rose busies herself with the plants, John and now Rowan too, do the structural work, often with the aim of creating new environments for sculpture, be it on mounds, among copses or in mysterious-sounding 'earthworks'. 'John's never happier than when he's hired a digger,' says Rose. One of his chief pleasures, however, is much simpler: his early morning 'health and safety walk' where he checks the paths are safe, cuts

back brambles and cleans up sculptures splattered with bird poo – a perennial problem. 'At that time of day, I have all this art to myself – it's such a privilege,' he says.

Given the garden's out-of-the-way location, many visitors are also lucky enough to have the garden to themselves, and Rose and John both agree that hearing their reactions is the most rewarding aspect of their life as gallery owners. 'Children often turn up looking rather bored and, as they walk around, you see them getting more and more excited, dragging their parents to come and look at this and that. One year we had a stunning work by Emily Young in our meadow – a bronze head on a plinth of oak with the hair flowing across the landscape. One child who saw it came to me and said, "I saw God in the field." I thought that was lovely.' 

Artde Jardin, 5 Top Street, Wing, Oakham, Rutland. 01572 737727; artde Jardin.co.uk

TRAVELLERS' NOTES

GETTING THERE

- Roughly halfway between London and York, Rutland is just off the A1. Midland Trains runs regular services to Oakham from Leicester, Peterborough and Nottingham.

WHERE TO STAY

- **The Coach House Inn**, 01780 720166; coachhouserutland.co.uk
- **Shaklewell Lodge**, 01780 460646
- **Teigh Old Rectory**, 01572 787681

WHERE TO EAT

- **The Olive Branch**, Clipsham. This traditional village pub offers some of the best food in the area, and has been Michelin starred since 2002.

ANTIQUING

- **Rutland Antiques Centre** is home to over 100 dealers. And when you tire of shopping, there's a tearoom, too.

For more information visit discover-rutland.co.uk