

A stainless-steel
Allium by
Ruth Moilliet is
just one of many
sculptures that
grace art collector
Richard Szpiro's
Gloucestershire
garden, on page 118.

H&G GARDENS

ICED MAGIC

Intriguing sculptures dusted with snow turn a Cotswold garden into an ethereal wonderland.

IN SEASON: TREES

Celebrate the essence of these natural beauties in all their stark winter glory.

KEYNOTES: GARDEN SCULPTURE

Our experts advise what and where to buy.

DESIGNER SECRETS

Landscape architect Ulf Nordfjell discusses one of his serene water garden designs.





ICED MAGIC

At every turn, Richard Szpiro's Cotswold garden offers an exquisite wintry view, each enlivened by one of his collection of sculptures

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At this time of year, box hedging comes into its own; its neatly clipped forms giving structure and interest, while the outline of the statue of bronze acrobats echoes that of the bare trees beyond. This area is enclosed by beech hedging planted by designer Tim Rees in the 1980s. A lower hedge and the yew pyramids have been added more recently.



Ruth Moilliet's snow-clad *Allium* is situated to the left of the drive, which runs up to the house past one of two rows of yew drums.

For the past nine years or so, collector Richard Szpiro has been creating an outdoor sculpture gallery in his garden set on a Gloucestershire hillside. He had originally intended to display 20th-century British art inside his Cotswold home, a 15th-century property with seamless modern additions, but the ceilings were too low to accommodate it. So he turned his attention outside and began to commission pieces for the garden instead.

The site is irregularly shaped, with formal terraces to one side of the house. From here, the ground drops away steeply to a meadow that widens out towards the boundary perimeter of beech trees. When Richard arrived, there was already a structure of beech hedging and grass terraces. But excessive tree planting had made the formal garden feel enclosed, cutting it off from the meadow below and wasting what Richard felt was valuable ground. "It seemed right to use those magical spaces for sculptures," he explains.

Needing help with his ambitious project, Richard contacted Tim Rees, whose designs he had admired in a magazine. By chance, Tim had previously worked on the garden in the 1980s, but had not seen it for 20 years. "I told Tim I intended to take down 38 trees," laughs Richard. "His reaction was, 'I don't remember there being that many trees'."

Richard loved the elegant front garden, with yew drums centred on the house, but decided on radical measures for the rest. Tree felling opened up the grass terraces and connected them with wilder areas beyond. Clearing, wall-building and planting transformed a vegetable garden into a more formal



Joe Smith's *Slate Pot* makes an ideal focal point. Set back from the sorbus avenue, its positioning leads the eye along the path.



Pleached hornbeams have been planted along the garden's boundaries to give privacy, as well as to provide the backdrop for sculptures such as Richard Harding's zinc *Eve's Leaf*.



Steps lead down from an ornamental pool (formerly a swimming pool), giving a view of the landscape beyond.

affair. Here, bronze acrobats now turn somersaults amid box-edged beds filled in summer with 'Moonlight' and 'Yvonne Rabier' roses, astrantias, *Viola cornuta*, willow gentian and alliums.

More recently, Tim has worked on the meadow, crucial to Richard's artistic conception and now fully integrated into the rest of the garden. An existing sorbus avenue was realigned to relate to the cobweb of paths leading through the meadow, in which camassias, *Tulipa sylvestris*, knautias, geraniums and centaureas have been naturalised. These provide constant interest as, in 18th-century style, the visitor is led on, catching sight of one sculpture at a time, chancing upon each as a mystery.

Richard has specially commissioned most of the sculptures and their placement is bold, cheating the eye and distorting symmetry. A pair of stone rectangles by Simon Hitchens, one representing the moon, the other the sun, face one another across a grass terrace. To the side, almost haphazardly, is a ceramic pot by Philip Simmonds, while a bronze woman (*On Tears and Pain* by Helen Sinclair) is set at an angle on the lawn, invisible from the garden above. "I haven't done the obvious," explains Richard. "She looks far more interesting because she doesn't face you straight on."

The different areas are linked, flowing on from one another and making the two-acre garden seem larger. Each sculpture reflects its setting: strong, architectural shapes and bold figures are placed in formal areas near the house and along the grass terraces, while in the meadow the sculptures are more elemental, emerging apparently organically. "It's a quiet garden," says Richard, "with a great feeling of serenity." That is never more true than on a winter's day, when the silence seems absolute. ■



The vertical line of the stem of Sally Fawkes' glass sculpture is repeated in the slender trunks of whitebeam.



The three slumped figures by a boundary wall are *Veilleurs* by Jean-Michel Solves. They are made of cement coloured with natural soil pigment. "They are organic," says Richard, "and seem to come out of the ground."



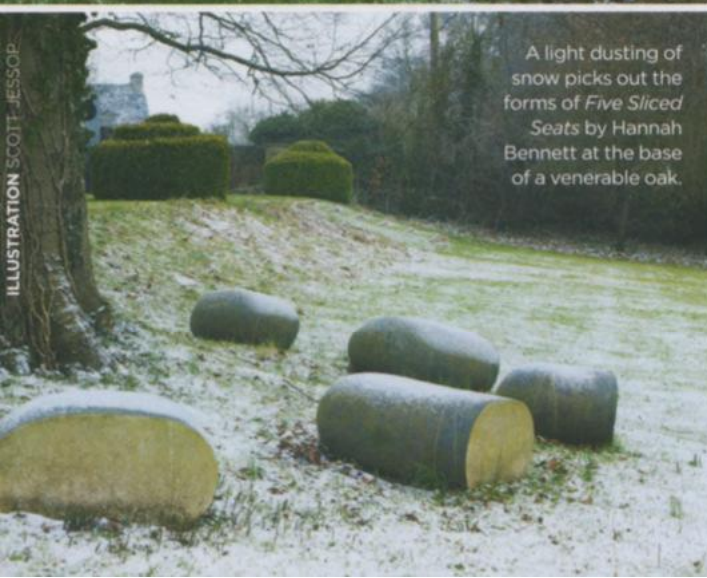
Arches cut into the burnished beech hedging to the left of the ornamental pool frame a view of the rose garden.

H&G GLOUCESTERSHIRE GARDEN

Set at an angle on the edge of a grass terrace, Helen Sinclair's bronze figure, *On Tears and Pain*, appears to glide between roundels of box.



Described by Richard as "just a bit of fun", some pigs and their piglets scratch their way across a sloping lawn.



A light dusting of snow picks out the forms of *Five Sliced Seats* by Hannah Bennett at the base of a venerable oak.



GARDEN GUIDE

GARDEN ORIENTATION

North-east facing.

SOIL TYPE

Cotswold brash.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Yew and beech hedging. Commissioned sculptures. Pleached hornbeams and an avenue of sorbus. Wild meadow area.

GARDEN DESIGN

Tim Rees, 020 8965 7085, treesassociates.com.

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