

# LINES *of* SEPARATION

Two very different gardens have grown together under the watchful eyes of Jan and Jo de Heerenhof, who have created an enchanting collection of garden rooms that surprise at every turn

WORDS AMANDA PATTON PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

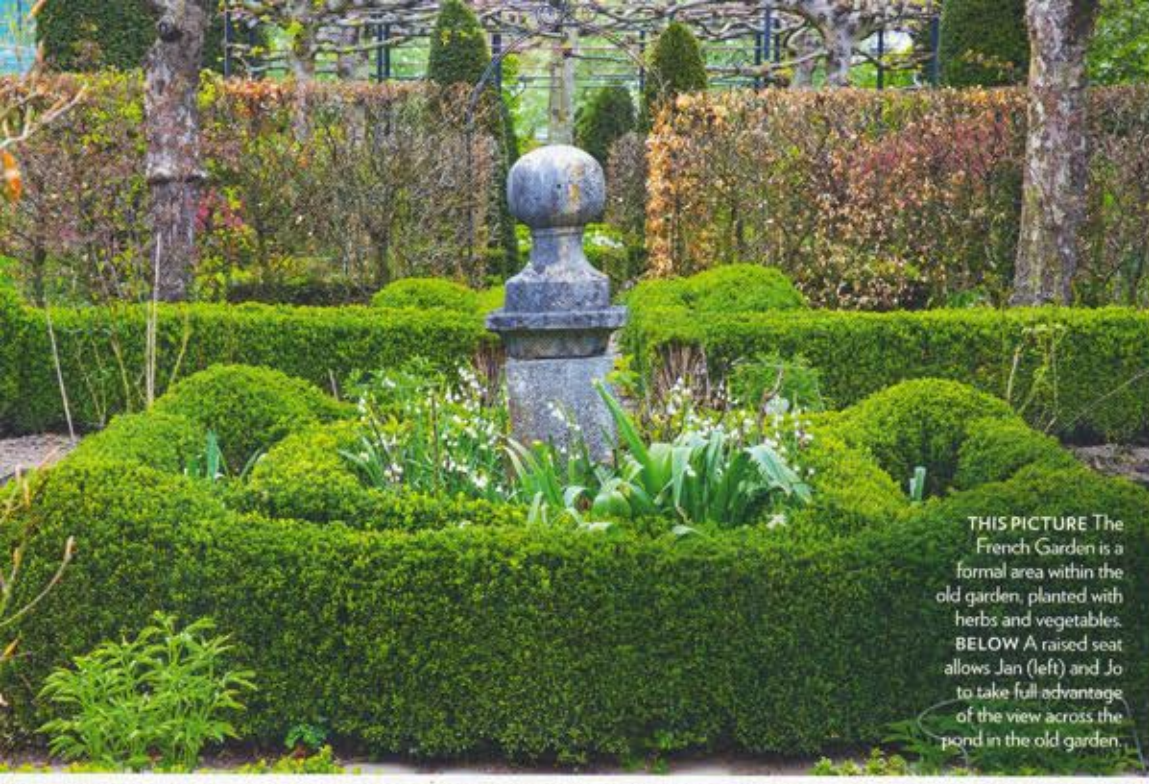
For most people, creating one garden from scratch is challenging enough, but when Jan and Jo de Heerenhof were given the chance to buy their neighbour's plot for a second garden, it proved too tempting to resist.

Twenty-seven years ago, they started what they now refer to as the "old garden" from a long, thin, neglected patch of ground in suburban Maastricht, in southern Holland. They had never gardened before, but their combined theatrical backgrounds (Jan is a choreographer and Jo a drama teacher) meant that what was important to them was not so much how the garden looked, but how they

would experience the space. Jan likens the design process to that of choreographing a theatre piece, with an entrance, the introduction of a new idea to create conflict, followed by a resolution.

This idea of progression, in drama using time, in a garden using space, is evident in their design, which sees a meandering path taking a carefully directed course. "By walking through the garden," Jan explains, "you experience changes in mood. This they have created by varying the degree of enclosure, contrasting the balance between paving and planting, and manipulating the emotional effects of colour and light throughout

The distinction between the old and the new gardens is most apparent when viewed from above



**THIS PICTURE** The French Garden is a formal area within the old garden, planted with herbs and vegetables. **BELOW** A raised seat allows Jan (left) and Jo to take full advantage of the view across the pond in the old garden.



In the auditorium of the pair's small garden theatre, bright tulips create a bold contrast.



Jo decided to plant the soft orange tulips, *Tulipa* 'Orange Emperor' (also left), to mark the coronation of King Willem-Alexander in 2013.



**OPPOSITE, BELOW LEFT** This area is called the Green Room, an allusion to the place where actors wait for their cues. Here it is interpreted as a simple, calming space, where a double circle of loosely clipped box is filled with the shiny leaves of *Asarum europaeum* and fresh white *Narcissus* 'Petrel'. A ring of *Tilia cordata* (small leaved lime) is being trained over a metal frame to form a roof over the plants below.



The new garden is a play on form and space created through interlocking horizontal and vertical elements of clipped yew, box and beech. The metal pergola serves to define the composition.

the space. While they were confident in designing the structural elements of the garden, they knew nothing about plants, so they visited a number of others for inspiration.

Their resulting influences are surprisingly diverse: Margery Fish's cottage garden at East Lambrook Manor, Somerset; the colour-themed gardens at Hadspen, also Somerset, which Jan describes as "a bit brutal"; and the New Perennial planting of Piet Oudolf. By absorbing these differing approaches, they have developed their own style. "In the beginning, we followed the rules," Jan explains, "especially when it came to using colour,

but we began to think that it was boring. Now, we don't pay any attention to rules."

When Jan and Jo bought their neighbour's house ten years ago, it gave them an opportunity to create a totally different kind of garden, this time inspired by combining Italian geometry with a flowing informality. Contrasts form the essence of this new area; framed by thin metal girders, tightly clipped dark yew hedges enclose gnarled apple trees, while a sinuous ribbon of white tulips bisects a bright sliver of water and vivid green cloud-pruned box. Although it was not in their original plan, the couple has subsequently built a new house with glass walls



**THIS PICTURE**

The new garden is more formal than the old, with intersecting textures from clipped yew, apple trees and reflective water.

**BELOW** Flowers snaking through the box create the effect of a flowing stream. The peacock is a special visitor who likes to strut around by the lap pool.



to maximise their enjoyment of their new creation. Enterprisingly, they grew all the plants for the old garden themselves, devoting part of the acreage to a nursery that now supplies other gardens as well as their own, which, Jan says, "made us learn about plants". However, they now generally content themselves with planting fresh tulips every year, as they lose about half their stock to water voles, which find the tasty bulbs irresistible.

"We plant a few thousand new tulip bulbs each year," says Jan; "well, we are Dutch after all," he adds. And in an effort to preserve as many as possible from the voles, which even eat roses and tree roots, they plant the precious specimens in

pots. Their favourites are the black and blue parrot varieties, but the selection is Jo's; "I'm not allowed to interfere," says Jan.

Initially, the two gardens were separated by a large mixed hedge, but five years ago Jan and Jo decided to break through to allow a glimpse of each garden from the other. However, the two domains retain their distinct and different moods. "People ask us which is our favourite," says Jan, "but we don't have a favourite; we're lucky we can have a choice, depending on how we feel, or the season. In spring, the old garden is much more exciting because it changes every day, but if you don't want to work, you visit the new garden." ■

## GARDEN GUIDE

**ORIENTATION** South facing.

**SOIL TYPE** Heavy alkaline clay.

**SPECIAL FEATURES** Two gardens in one; a contemporary formal space influenced by Tuscan traditions, and a fluid garden walk inspired by choreography.

**VISIT** The garden is open every weekend in June and groups are welcome by appointment all year round; for details, visit [heerenhof.nl](http://heerenhof.nl).