

The old stone path to the loggia is lined with alliums and irises, as well as box balls for extra shape and rhythm.

# PERSONAL STYLE

The fanciful taste of Sir Bertram Clough Williams-Ellis is unmistakable in this Welsh garden. Now, 90 years after it was designed, a new owner is restoring it with an individual touch

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**Above** The south-facing sunken garden is divided by stone paths into six flower beds, with the central sundial drawing the eye along its main vista.

**A** CHANCE MEETING ON A TRAIN WAS THE starting point for an Italianate-style garden near Presteigne that remains true to the vision of its designer some 90 years after it was conceived.

Architect Sir Bertram Clough Williams-Ellis was yet to find fame as the man responsible for creating Portmeirion when he encountered some of the Coates sisters of Broadheath House in 1925 – the same year he acquired the neglected wilderness on the north west coast of Wales that would become the site for his magical Mediterranean-style village.

Nevertheless the women were suitably impressed by their fellow passenger and commissioned him to create a two-storey extension for their Georgian home and remodel their garden.

The resulting design, which suggests some of the features found at Portmeirion, makes much of the Arts and Crafts concept of the garden acting as an

extension of the house, with the creation of long vistas to be enjoyed from both indoors and out.

At the same time, the outside space is divided into a series of rooms that eventually give way to the natural landscape beyond.

A rustic-looking loggia bridges the house and garden and looks onto a south-facing, walled sunken area into which Williams-Ellis set six flower beds, surrounded by paved pathways, with long borders running the length of the section, and a stone sundial providing a focal point.

A metal gate painted in the architect's signature shade of peacock blue leads from this room to the next, the centrepiece of which is a stone well head mounted on a hexagonal plinth above a circular stone patio, from which four paths radiate.

Less formal than the area closest to the house, this area contains a *Magnolia* and various specimen trees and shrubs. It is bounded by a tall yew hedges.

Other rooms within the two-acre garden include a kitchen garden with a peach house, fruit and cobnut

**Clockwise from top left** Variegated *Weigela florida*; a glimpse of the house through original yew hedging; the rows of fastigate yews are a later addition; oriental poppies in bright red add bursts of cheerful border colour.



orchards and a small lawn leading from a south-facing stone terrace.

Broadheath House has changed hands several times since the days of the Coates sisters, yet while its various inhabitants have made their mark in particular ways – such as replacing two flower beds with ponds in the sunken garden, and planting rows of fastigate yews and an *Amelanchier* walkway – the overall impact of the original designer’s vision happily remains intact.

Andrea and Steve Jude knew little of the history of the property when they first came across it in 2004, but instinctively knew it was a special place, even though they would be the first to admit they had little experience of gardening.

That is not to say they were not prepared to learn, however, and after discovering more about the link to Williams-Ellis, Andrea set about returning the garden to its former glory.

“When we realised the link, we felt a real sense of responsibility to bring the garden back to how he would have wanted it to be,” she says.

The biggest project was to revamp the sunken area, which involved improving the soil with compost and well-rotted manure and devising a planting scheme that would combine a sense of formality with bold splashes of colour.

Key to the success of this garden room is the use of zigzag-shaped

**Left** The bottlebrush (*Callistemon*) is one of few exotics grown here.

**Bottom left** The garden featuring the well head is surrounded by walls of clipped yew.

**Below** *Aquilegia* self-seeds for a natural feel.

## BROADHEATH HOUSE NOTEBOOK

Sensitive restoration is returning this enchanting garden to its Arts and Crafts heyday



### BOX CLEVER

Box hedges grown in a zigzag help contain the exuberant planting within the sunken garden. This provides a hint of formality without making the area feel unduly constrained. The feature, the points of which are punctuated with box balls, also looks fabulous during winter. “I think using straight rows of low box hedging to define the beds would have made the garden look narrower,” says Andrea. “The zigzags seem to deceive the eye into seeing the garden as being wider than it actually is.”



### AGEING GRACEFULLY

Scour reclamation yards and antiques shops for items that complement the overall feel of an old garden. Andrea decided early on that a plastic water butt would be out of keeping at Broadheath House and was delighted to find this old wooden barrel in Burford, Gloucestershire. “It looks as though it has occupied its spot by the loggia for decades,” says Andrea.



### ALLIUMS EN MASSE

Massed plantings create blocks of colour that really draw the eye. *Allium* ‘Purple Sensation’, *Geranium renardii*, *Iris pallida* subsp. *dalmatica* and *Astrantia* are among the plants that Andrea has used to great effect. The geraniums, planted in partial shade beneath a tree, bring the additional advantage of suppressing weeds.



### CAREFUL CHOICES

Make an impact with shrubs such as *Choisya x dewitteana* ‘White Dazzler’, which produces a profusion of snowy white and scented blooms in spring, with a second flush during summer and autumn, a time when other flowers are starting to fade. This shrub has a neat, rounded habit that makes it ideal for smaller gardens. Andrea has two planted on opposite sides of the sunken garden.



### ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Keep gaps between paving stones looking smart and free from weeds so that the eye is always drawn to the flowers. “I weed the gaps by hand; I don’t like using chemicals unless I have to,” says Andrea. “Sometimes I go out at night with a torch to do it.”



sections of box that provide year-round structure and interest in the company of more ephemeral plants.

“I wasn’t keen on the idea of long, thin beds enclosed by low box hedging and some friends helped me come up with the zigzag design, which is different, looks great in the winter and makes the garden feel wider,” explains Andrea.

“At the same time I’ve stuck to a small palette of colours to give a sense of cohesion to the garden,” Andrea adds. “I didn’t want it to be overly chaotic with too many different colours.”

Following in the tradition of the Arts and Crafts movement, Andrea has eschewed exotic plants in favour of species that are more commonly available, such as roses, alliums and hardy geraniums.

Looking after the grounds of Broadheath House is an endless task, help for which comes from a team of part-time gardeners. “I am passionate about it: we do work hard and I am proof that gardening is for everyone,” says Andrea, who previously worked in marketing and research.

“When we started, we wanted to do things for

**Above** The peacock-blue painted gate draws the eye to the far end of the sunken garden.

**Left** Alliums are a key plant at Broadheath.

**Below** Bold hydrangea flowers.  
**Bottom left** Yellow dots of *Meconopsis cambrica* in borders.  
**Bottom right** Violet-veined blooms of *Geranium renardii*.

immediate effect but we have had to learn to stop thinking like that. We have had to realise bringing this garden back to life is more a case of long term planning, which takes time.

“I am quite relaxed about how the garden looks. I just enjoy it and don’t get uptight about things that shouldn’t really be there, such as ground elder. The garden is all about the overall impression.

“We are very lucky to have the beautiful structure that Williams-Ellis put in place – it does not really matter what was put in afterwards. He is still very much the main event.” ■

*The garden opens for the NGS on Sunday 22 May, Sunday 29 May, Saturday 4 June, Sunday 5 June and Sunday 28 August, from 10am to 6pm. Broadheath House, Presteigne, LD8 2HG. See [www.broadheathhousegardens.co.uk](http://www.broadheathhousegardens.co.uk)*



## ANDREA'S SAGE ADVICE

How to breathe life into an older garden

■ Do not be in a hurry to change things: live with the garden for a year or more to get a feel for the space and see what has already been planted. Divide perennials and clumps of bulbs in order to multiply stocks and add to the sense of cohesion in the garden.

■ It is worth visiting similar properties or even gardens linked to the individuals who have shaped your own garden. Clough Williams-Ellis is known for Portmeirion, the village in north-west Wales, but his home at Plas Brondanw is also open to the public.

■ Become a garden detective: seek old

photographs of the garden to establish how it looked in the past. Take a close look at existing original features to see exactly what they reveal. Scratching through layers of old paint showed us that Clough Williams-Ellis’s signature shade of peacock blue – said to have been inspired by a cigarette packet – was used extensively in the garden. That was very insightful.

■ Accept that some weeds have had many years to gain a stronghold in some areas of the garden, especially when they are growing among established shrubs and trees. These can either be dealt with using weedkillers (take care chemicals do not spread to other plants), or removed as far as possible by hand. Wild flowers did have a place within the gardens of the Arts and Crafts period.

■ Seek out good craftsmanship: look for garden furniture that is well made from quality materials. In our garden, this reflects the desire of the Arts and Crafts movement to steer away from mass-produced items and celebrate unique handmade or gently worn pieces for the garden in their place.

