



To help sort out the garden's different levels, Chris called in garden designer Ian Kitson. Planting then took the form of three *Crataegus x lavalleei* 'Carrierei' and stands of *Stipa gigantea* 'Gold Fontaine', with hedges providing a loose, natural framework.



Curved Corten steel walls, echoing the colour of the brickwork behind, edge a decked area where loungers have been set for the Huttis to enjoy the view. Swathes of shrubby *Pinus mugo* var *mughus* provide rich texture which contrasts well with the neatly cut grass.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

# Natural CURVES

*With not a straight line in sight, Chris and Robin Huti's garden flows seamlessly into the countryside beyond*

WORDS VANESSA BERRIDGE PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS



The view from the guest room window takes in the newly created curving gravel paths that lead to the vegetable garden. Planting, supported by three bespoke Corten steel structures, includes white willow herb, *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant', honeysuckle, *Humulus lupulus* 'Aureus' and *Gaura lindheimeri*.





The garden at Fairlight End slopes away steeply from the 18th-century redbrick farmhouse to a large pond with two seats, a perfect spot for relaxed contemplation.



Below the terrace of the house, foxgloves, buddleia, eryngium, euphorbia, Geranium Rozanne and Verbascum chaixii 'Album' provide an informal feel.



Raised beds filled with vegetables and flowers surround the Victorian-style greenhouse in the kitchen garden.

When Chris Hutt and his wife, Robin, moved to Fairlight End, 11 years ago, he laid out an orchard at the bottom of the garden. He planted three rows of ten trees, but that was the last straight line that would ever be drawn in the three-acre plot, which drops steeply away from the house towards Rye Bay. Since then, the garden has been developed to follow the contours of the land.

The couple originally had a holiday home on the East Sussex coast but, when they decided to settle there permanently, they knew they would need a larger house. A mile inland, they found exactly what they were looking for in the shape of an 18th-century redbrick farmhouse. "We were bowled over by the view to the sea," explains Chris, "but we also liked the fact that the house is in the middle of the village of Pett."

The gardens at Sissinghurst and Great Dixter, both nearby, were Chris's reference points. He admired the style of the planting common to both, but knew he would have to adapt them to make them work at Fairlight End. "We are extremely exposed to high winds here, which affects how I garden. I don't like staking, tying and supporting, which is done very labour intensively at Sissinghurst and Dixter, so I've chosen tough plants capable of withstanding the wind on their own. Grasses, for instance, wave happily, bending and shimmering in the wind."

For some years, Chris worked on the garden alone, planting wall-backed borders, wildflower meadows, an extensive vegetable garden and a wide lawn beneath a mature cherry tree. Yet he continued to be troubled by the steep gradient below the house and how to incorporate the surrounding countryside into the garden view. Eventually, he realised he needed outside help and, having read how the garden designer Ian Kitson had dealt with a similar problem of creating a

garden on different levels in London, he decided to contact him. As Ian says, "We talked on and off for a couple of years before Chris plucked up the courage to make some decisive changes." In return, Chris explains, "Ian has become an integral part of what we are trying to do here. There isn't a straight line in the place now." The fact that Ian loves curves is abundantly obvious from the sinuous mown paths that flow down through long grass, uniting the garden seamlessly with the hay meadows beyond, while three 20-year-old clipped mophead *Crataegus x lavalleyi* 'Carrierei' link the near and far views in a pleasing way.

The scene manages to be timeless and yet strikingly contemporary. The cherry tree has been kept, but the sloping ground was remodelled and retained by a Corten steel wall, while a new decked seating area, created to take advantage of the view, is planted with more than 50 tightly clipped Alpine *Pinus mugo* var. *mughus*, as an effective alternative to blight-prone box.

Other parts of the garden have been remodelled, too, with steps cutting through herbaceous planting. "I'm not keen on borders that you stand back to admire," says Chris. "I like to be able to walk through planting." Even in the more formal areas near the house, straight lines have been eschewed. Existing paths and borders linking the house to the vegetable garden have been replaced by brick-edged gravel paths, which snake through planting backed by clipped and curving yew hedges.

Although the question of how to integrate the countryside has been resolved, the garden continues to develop: the front garden is currently under consideration, while Chris's orchard has also undergone the curvaceous treatment. Some trees have been taken out, others have been moved, and curved hedging planted to bring it into line, if you will pardon the pun, with the rest of this extraordinary garden. □



Near the house, a gravel path edged with brick swirls past a vigorous profusion of white *Gaura lindheimeri*.



A hammock hangs at the point where the naturalistic planting of the garden, with grasses and corncockles, fades naturally out into the meadow area.

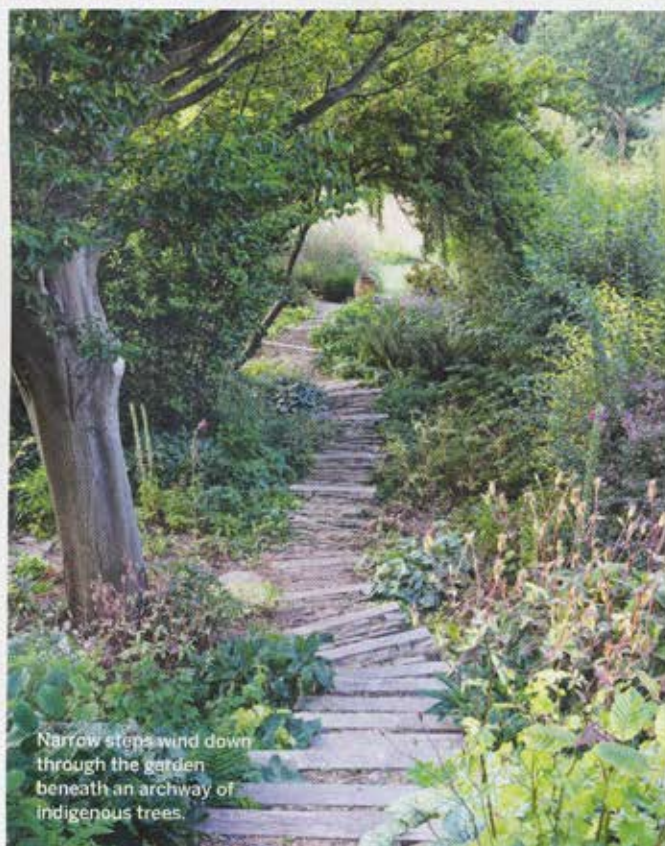




One of the hooped steel figures designed by Ian Kitson stands amid white willow herb, *Allium sphaerocephalon* and *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant'.



The boundary wall frames what the family calls the Beech Tree garden because of the *Fagus sylvatica* in one corner. The planting here picks up on the tree's silver trunk, with *Lychnis coronaria*, corncockles and nigella.



Narrow steps wind down through the garden beneath an archway of indigenous trees.

#### GARDEN GUIDE

**Garden orientation** South-easterly. **Soil** Clay. **Special features** Mature trees, including an old cherry, a silver-stemmed *Fagus sylvatica* and three *Crataegus x lavalleei* 'Carrierei'; plantings of *Pinus mugo* var. *mughus* and *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum'; and grasses, including *Stipa gigantea* 'Gold Fontaine'. **Design** Ian Kitson FSGD, 020 7723 0043, [iankitson.com](http://iankitson.com). **To visit** Fairlight End, Pett Road, Pett, Hastings, East Sussex TN35 4HB, 07774 863750, [chrishutt@btopenworld.com](mailto:chrishutt@btopenworld.com), is open to groups of ten or more people, by arrangement, until the end of September 2015.



ILLUSTRATION SCOTT JESSOP