

# BLURRED LINES

Inheriting an angular layout full of quirky touches from the previous owners, garden designer Graham Lloyd-Brunt set about softening the structure of his Kent garden and giving it a more intimate feel

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The topiary that looks like four chess pieces on the edge of the middle terrace was planted in the Fifties by the previous Dutch owners. Graham has also kept the terraced lawns, which were laid in the Twenties by the De Laune family







**C**alico House, a modest-size, timber-framed farmhouse with ochre and white sgraffito walls, has been an eye-catcher in the village of Newnham, Kent, for more than 300 years. In its early days, the only garden was a small, low-walled patch to the side of the house, but in the Twenties the grounds were developed by the De Laune family of nearby Sharsted Court, who bought Calico for a son returning from war. The De Launes laid the sloping land to three extensive grass terraces, around which they planted a framework of now towering yew hedges, topped with a collection of topiary hats and spheres. In the Fifties, Dutch owners added a line of topiary like four chess pieces balancing tipsily on the edge of the middle terrace. It was this theatrical patchwork layout that lawyer-turned-garden designer Graham Lloyd-Brunt inherited when he bought the property in 2007.

Graham knew that he wanted to make the garden – which spans 1.5 acres north and west of the house – more intimate, with new views within the garden and out to the surrounding valley. His first action was to draw up a plan. 'I worked outwards from the house, keeping the terraced lawns and yew hedges, because it would have been sacrilege not to, but other areas were more of a blank canvas.' Two lines of mature Lawson's cypress running towards the house and along a boundary were taken out, freeing up space for a couple of contained pebbled walkways. One, framed by hornbeam hedging, leads through simple planting of yew cones in meadow grass, studded with narcissi in spring, to an elegant timber greenhouse at the top of the garden. The other runs up from the kitchen door, cutting through a romantic planting of blues, purples and pinks in the dappled shade of two cherry trees to a fountain inset in a laurel hedge.

A sandstone terrace was created at the back door, contained within a low-walled border of shrubs, perennials and bulbs, with views across the lower lawn to the western boundary. Here, Graham softened the



rectilinear framework of the boundary hedge by layering copper beeches with a box-edged border filled with dogwood and hazel for winter interest, and hollyhocks and foxtail lilies for summer accents.

Four large flower beds dominated the middle terrace, enclosed by a topiarised yew hedge. To make this a place to linger, Graham reconfigured the space, reducing the planted area to one flat-topped V-shape, with seating areas at each end. In summer, the area is a medley of rich colours and vertical drama from shrubs and perennials such as *Sambucus nigra*, *Angelica gigas*, cotinus, lupins and fennel. Graham explains his use of the unusual V-shape: 'It allows you to walk into the deep planting, be surrounded and lose yourself in it.'

The lawned upper terrace, formerly a tennis court with a swimming pool, can be glimpsed from the middle terrace through organically shaped portholes in the hedge, and accessed through an archway. This leads to a sandstone-paved allée punctuated at each end by a contemporary stone obelisk, and edged on the lawn side by stilted hornbeams, which create a peaceful cloister around the open green space. Beyond the lawn, at the top end of the garden, oak and silver birch create a bridge between the formality of the framed lawn and the woodland beyond.

The journey round the garden continues from the greenhouse to a fruit cage and stock beds, past a renovated dairy on the drive and back to the house. A low gate opens onto the original garden, now a circular herb garden with an outer border of cottage plants. The front of the house also has a cottage garden feel, with white irises, alliums, ceanothus and roses, and terracotta pots spilling on to the pavement filled with tulips, dahlias and grasses. It's this interweaving of softer, more intimate elements that makes the garden at Calico House, with its striking topiary, such a comfortable place to be in □

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**OPPOSITE ANTICLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT** Grassed steps between the terraces. Yew cones planted in meadow grass line a pebbled path leading from the back of the house. Another path from the kitchen door cuts through the pinks and blues of peonies, lupins and irises. **THIS PAGE** FROM TOP A view into the middle terrace from the lower terrace, where Graham has planted colourful lupins, cotinus and *Angelica gigas* in a V-shape border (also centre). A sandstone-tile allée into the upper terrace is edged by hornbeams

