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CUTTINGS What to do this week

■ Plant evergreen trees and shrubs so they can get established while the soil is still warm. Water well and, should the weather turn dry, water once a week.

■ Collect ripe seeds on a dry day as soon as the seedheads ripen and turn brown. Leave to dry out and store in a labelled envelope somewhere cool and dry. They should last for a couple of years.

■ Cover ponds with netting before leaf fall gets under way.

■ Early September is your final chance to sow crops such as mustard and rocket outdoors.

■ For more tips, seasonal recipes and advice on transforming your shed's roof into a thriving green space, see our gardener's calendar; sundaytimes.co.uk/home

WE DIG THIS

George Plumtre's new book, *The English Country House Garden*, looks at gorgeous examples of the genre, admired throughout

the world. They range from historic to contemporary, including Piet Oudolf's designs at Scampston Hall, North Yorkshire. £25; Frances Lincoln

Dates for the diary

■ There's a plant-hunters' fair today at Ness Botanic Gardens, South Wirral, 10am-4pm. Admission costs £1 (planthuntersfairs.co.uk).

■ The landscape designer Cieve West gives a talk at Alltex, in South Harting, West Sussex, on Thursday at 8pm. Tickets £10 (01730 826900).

■ The gardens at Dunsborough Park, in Ripley, Surrey, are open on Saturday, 1pm-5.30pm, for the NGS. Entry £5 (dunsboroughpark.com).

■ The Harrogate Autumn Flower Show runs from Friday until next Sunday at the Great Yorkshire Showground. Tickets from £12 (flowershow.org.uk).

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The most keenly awaited garden to be created in Britain in several years opens to the public next Sunday. The setting is rural Somerset, the man responsible is Piet Oudolf — the world's most celebrated planting designer — and the client is Hauser & Wirth, a leading contemporary art gallery with branches in London, Zurich and New York. Things will take a while to fill out, but it is already an extravaganza of naturalistic planting design that will, in time, create a transcendent space for visitors. Indeed, it makes you wonder whether a garden can be a work of art in itself.

So how did this cutting-edge design by a Dutchman pop up at an old farm in Somerset, on the edge of the small — albeit increasingly fashionable — town of Bruton? The story goes that Iwan Wirth, the Swiss co-owner and founder of the gallery (he's ranked number three in Art Review's power list), was so enthused by a visit to the High Line, in New York, that he decided he wanted something similar to adorn his new Somerset base, on land near his family home.

The High Line, in case you don't know, is an extraordinary linear park, opened in 2009, that snakes its way across and above Manhattan's Lower West Side, following the tracks of a former freight railway line. Oudolf was brought in to create naturalistic planting zones and episodes that evoke mood changes as the visitor walks its length. The effect is mesmeric.

Nothing quite like that can be achieved at Durslade, where Oudolf was given free rein when it came to design. It's an attractive ensemble of 18th-century farm buildings set around a large yard, which Hauser & Wirth has sensitively converted into a series of rather glamorous gallery spaces (along with a restaurant and bar). But the 1½-acre field rising on a gentle slope directly behind the farm has been made into something that will potentially create an atmosphere as compellingly otherworldly as the High Line's — once the planting has bedded in, that is. "It's even bigger than Chicago," Oudolf comments, referring to his renowned work at the city's Millennium Park, lest one should feel like being patronising about the Somerset location.

I first visited the site in the spring of 2013, when it was a bare field bounded by a neat hedgerow. As we walked around, Oudolf told me about his concept and showed me his hand-drawn, distinctive planting plans. (These are now on show in one of the galleries.) Though a genial figure, the Dutchman is not very forthcoming when it comes to describing his work. His planting is often described as "naturalistic", yet he declares: "We don't try to create nature or re-create nature."

At the time, it was difficult to see how it was going to work. The plans showed a series of symmetrically arranged planting beds around a central pathway that ran almost the length of the space, interrupted by raised discs of grass — but it looked as if there was going to be nothing to anchor the scheme to the place it occupied. Returning to the gallery for an exclusive sneak preview last month, however, just a few weeks after planting was completed — about 26,000 plants in 175 varieties, grown at the Orchard Dene nursery, in Oxfordshire — it's clear

that, despite the difficulties of working through the wettest winter on record, my fears have been allayed.

The central sandy gravel pathway that carves through the planting beds still feels too wide, but the scaling should sort itself out as the plants bulk up. At the bottom of the slope lies an irregular rectangle of a pond, about 50ft wide, fed naturally by a "perched" spring further up the hillside. The pond is invisible until you start to climb the

hill into the garden, subtly and effectively creating a sense of a threshold or gateway into the space.

Yet the key to this garden, despite my initial doubts, is the way that it is framed in its setting — rather like a picture in a gallery, in fact — by means of the existing hedgerow and the addition of a series of trees at the foot of the garden by the gallery, where a row of columns forms a covered terrace with the character of a classical loggia.

Dutch master

Can a garden be a work of art? Piet Oudolf, the star designer who landscaped New York's High Line, has created a modern backdrop to a gallery in rural Somerset, says **Tim Richardson**



SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL
See more of Piet Oudolf's designs, including his drawings for Durslade, in a video documentary thesundaytimes.co.uk/gardening



Helenium 'Maerheim Beauty' in the foreground; main picture: Sanguisorba and Filipendula, inset: Art and garden meet with Louise Bourgeois's sculptures, right

It's like a set-piece vision, almost an abstract quotation from Oudolf's imagination inserted into the landscape

The rare Kentucky coffee tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*), for example, has been chosen partly because of its spreading horizontal habit. In a few years, it will provide a canopy beneath which views of the meadow-like garden on the slope will open up.

The angle of the hillside — the way it seems to be propped up — only enhances the sense of looking at a set-piece vision, almost an abstract quotation from Oudolf's imagination inserted into the Somerset landscape. As with the "hortus conclusus" he created for the centre of Peter Zumthor's 2011 pavilion at the Serpentine Gallery, in London, Oudolf says: "It's a real garden — a space enclosed from the landscape — so you feel free to do what you like in there."

At Durslade, it doesn't seem to matter that there is no end point to the vista from the gallery end of the space. The strident horizontality of Oudolf's scheme draws you in hypnotically, and I understand why the head gardener, Mark Dumbleton, says his favourite way of experiencing the space is from here.

Oudolf has specified that few of the plants will grow taller than 5ft, and that there is to be a general sense of uniformity to the level of planting. Rather than creating monotony, this only serves to emphasise the horizontality of the picture he has created, optically foreshortening the view. It enhances the sense that one is seeing the entire composition in one marvellous gulp. This is exactly the technique deployed in the greatest formal baroque gardens, including Versailles, though it may seem surprising to see the technique used in a "naturalistic" planting scheme such as this.

As always with Oudolf's gardens, the plants are the stars. His palette favours strong-formed perennials and grasses in drifts or — as is the case at Durslade — clumps, with repeat plantings creating rhythm and unity. The plants are mainly spires such as white persicaria, daisy forms, including rudbeckias, and flat-topped umbellifers like sedums and achillea. "Romantic, nostalgic, not wild, organic, spontaneous," is how the designer describes his style.

There are several hundred varieties here, but among the most striking are orange *Helenium* 'Maerheim Beauty',

yellow *Achillea* 'Feuerland', *Echinacea pallida* 'Hula Dancer' in pale pink, pink *Lythrum salicaria* 'Swift', *Nepeta gowandiana* and the dusky pink *Sedum* 'Matrona'.

The work of Oudolf and his disciples is sometimes criticised for its lack of horticultural interest in the period before September, and a concerted effort has been made to allay this with planned mass bulb plantings for spring, featuring alliums in almost every species available, dramatic *chusiana* tulips and more delicate species such as *leucojum*, *Crocus thomasi* and *chionodoxa*.

This being an art gallery, the plan has always been to sprinkle sculptures across the site, including the garden areas. By and large, this works well — Subodh Gupta's gigantic metal bucket, which greets visitors in the farmyard and has already become a local landmark, is extremely effective. As Oudolf says modestly: "My garden is there to serve the art."

The cloister created between the farm buildings is a triumphal marriage of sculpture and Oudolf's planting design. The grasses *Sesleria autumnalis* and *Molinia* 'Moorhexe', along with cimicifugas and euphorbias, rise out of a rough grey aggregate — so suitable to the farmyard setting — that surrounds one of Louise Bourgeois's famous spider sculptures. Another unusual tree has been used here: the paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*), an elegant multi-stemmed tree with black fruits that turn bright orange in autumn.

Yet I was not persuaded by the decision to place Anri Sala's giant clock face in the middle of the design. As I (perhaps rather rudely) observed to Alice Workman, the gallery's director: "Would you plant sedums and grasses on top of a Louise Bourgeois piece? Surely Oudolf's garden is an artwork in its own right?"

The Dutch designer describes his work at Durslade as "a simple garden", referring to the relatively restrained (for him) range of plants. Perhaps it is simple from his point of view, but I expect visitors will come to see it as something of a treasure trove. And, yes, in time it will surely come to be considered an artwork in its own right.

■ The garden at Durslade opens next Sunday. The gallery and garden will be open daily, except Mondays, and admission is free. Events include *Art of the Garden*, a series of talks organised by The Sunday Times's gardening editor, Caroline Donald; for details, visit hauserwirthsomerset.com



Eupatorium frame the view down the hill, below left, as does a paper mulberry in the cloister, below

