

A photograph of a garden featuring a central topiary maze made of green hedges. In the middle of the maze sits a large, dark, rounded terracotta urn. The garden is filled with various plants, including white flowers and purple foliage. In the background, there is a dense forest of tall trees. The scene is captured in a soft, natural light.

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American dream

Inspired by Sissinghurst, the owners of Hollister House were determined to make their garden dreams come true

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If you cross the stream in Nettleton Hollow and climb the hillside opposite George Schoellkopf's Hollister House, then turn and look down, you have a view reminiscent of an American folk art picture, painted in oils or stitched on a canvas. It is a New England scene, a gathering of old buildings – the 18th-century farmhouse surrounded by barns and sheds – nestled in a clearing of a lush and wild landscape. To one side you notice a series of formal gardens that perhaps would not have been there 200 years ago.

When George bought the property in the picturesque hills of northwestern Connecticut 35 years ago, no garden existed. What caught his eye was the beauty of the setting and the good proportions of the old house. "I'm in love with the 18th century in America," George admits, which is not surprising for a man who spent his professional life as a collector and dealer of 18th- and 19th-century furniture and folk art. An interest in gardens was soon ignited, however, when he and his then-partner, artist Ron Johnson, went to visit Gregory Long, director of the New York Botanical Garden, at his country home in upstate New York. They were enchanted by the garden there, with formal axes and framing stone walls, designed by their mutual friend, artist and plantsman Hitch Lyman. Gregory, noting their interest, presented them with a book on Sissinghurst, which prompted a trip to England to see gardens.

"Do you remember, in Julia Child's memoirs, when she ate her first meal in France and it was as if she'd never eaten before? That's how I felt about Sissinghurst," George confesses.

Back from England, George and Ron began plotting an American interpretation of the formal English garden they wanted but knew was too elaborate for their simple rural house. After drawing many plans, they settled on what seems today a fortuitous solution – a series of small walled and hedged garden rooms terraced into the sloping landscape, diagonal to the house so that the clapboard saltbox, painted purple-brown, is merely glimpsed in the background as you walk along the paths. And yet the presence of the old farmhouse off to the side, remains essential to the character of the garden.

The Gray Garden is the first section you enter south of the farmhouse, a diagonal pattern of brick paths and box-edged beds filled with white (and sometimes blue) flowers and silver foliage, framed by a row of quince trees. *Tulipa* 'White Triumphator' and *Paeonia lactiflora* 'Festiva Maxima' flower above a carpet of *Anemone canadensis*. Sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* plays against globe alliums and later, *Lilium speciosum* var. *album*.

From here, you descend granite steps to the heart of the garden, an enclosure with high brick walls and yew hedging. The west

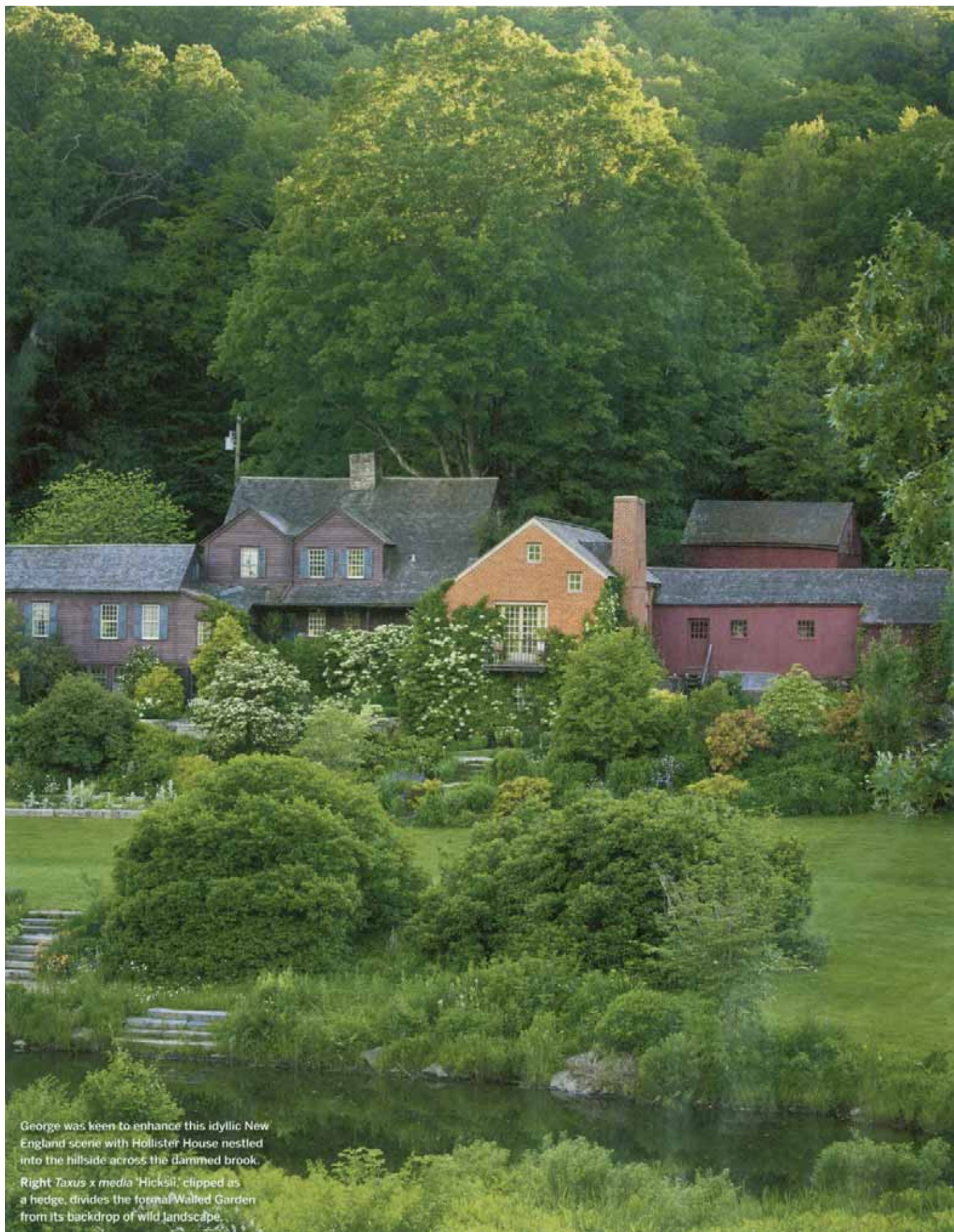
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Top left The striking sang-de-boeuf water jar leads your eye to the archway in the wall.

Top right *Paeonia lactiflora* 'Jan van Leeuwen' flowers next to the long, narrow pool in the Walled Garden, where a gothic teak table and bench provide the perfect place to pause.

Bottom left An informal path follows a stream downhill past the dark-foliaged Japanese maple *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood'.

Bottom right *Rosa moyesii* colours the Walled Garden in late May. *Iris pseudocarus* flowers along the stream, while an enormous sugar maple *Acer saccharum* looms above the farmhouse.



George was keen to enhance this idyllic New England scene with Hollister House nestled into the hillside across the dammed brook.

Right *Taxus x media* 'Hicksii', clipped as a hedge, divides the formal Walled Garden from its backdrop of wild landscape.



9 of George's favourite plants



Geranium 'Johnson's Blue', Iris sibirica and Nepeta x faassenii jostle at the edge of the pool.

▷ wall, barely visible beneath rose ramblers, holds the steep grade of the land; the north wall serves as an entrance with an archway cut in its façade, its soft old bricks draped in green and pink *Actinidia kolomikta* leaves. Inside, a long narrow pool of water is bordered by exuberant beds of brilliant flowers and dark foliage. "I am crazy for red flowers," George says. *Rosa moyesii* is here and *Rosa* 'Grootendorst Supreme,' along with tall *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Llandaff,' started in pots in April under glass and in flower in the borders by June. Burgundy-leaved *cotinus*, plume poppies, and *Sanguisorba canadensis* are a foil to later red daylilies, phlox and hibiscus. Dwarf purple barberry edges the beds, as well as bronze-leaved hybrids of *Heuchera villosa*. An antique *sang-de-boeuf* water jar at the end of the pool echoes the dusky leaf colours.

From the walled garden, a gravel walk leads down to the brook, bordered by a bold gathering of yellow flowers and foliage. Yellow tulips and intersectional peonies in spring and tall silphiums and sunflowers in summer are complemented by the golden foliage of *Ptelea trifoliata*

'Aurea,' and *Cotinus coggygria* Golden Spirit (= 'Ancot').

George and his partner Gerald Incandela continue to add rooms and refine plantings with the help of their gardener Krista Adams. The latest creation is a kitchen garden, more architectural than productive. Rows of cabbages, chard and leeks alternate with lines of boxwood and alliums in stone-edged beds. Circles of cut granite decorate the gravel path like old millstones. Johnny-jump-ups (*Viola tricolor*) and gaillardias already seed in the gravel, disturbing the strict order. What George loves most, as evidenced everywhere in his charming garden, is "architecture, almost but not quite overwhelmed by plants." □

FURTHER INFORMATION

ADDRESS 294 Nettleton Hollow Road, Washington, Connecticut, USA.

TEL +1 860 868 2200.

WEBSITE www.hollisterhousegarden.org

OPEN The garden is open to the public every Saturday from 27 April to 28 September and to groups by appointment.

Actinidia kolomikta

This hardy vine creates a spectacle as its green leaves are chalk white when first open, then flushed pink.

Onopordum acanthium

The Scottish thistle seeds in the gravel at Hollister House and is an architectural showstopper.

Dictamnus albus

A handsome vertical in the Gray Garden. "I love the lemony scent when you rub its stems and leaves," says George.

Paeonia lactiflora 'Festiva Maxima'

Fat white double blooms flecked with red. "An old hybrid that is still one of the best," in George's opinion.

Symphytum x uplandicum

'Axminster Gold'

This comfrey has bold, paddle-shaped basal leaves edged with yellow. "Like a hosta for the sun," says George. Flowers are a beautiful lavender colour.

Magnolia macrophylla subsp. *ashei*

The undersides of the large tropical-looking leaves are greyish blue, the flowers huge, creamy white, and wonderfully fragrant.

Rosa Clair Matin (= 'Meimont')

A rose from the 1920s with pink flowers that are slightly salmon and so complement a brick wall. Does well in a cold situation and re-blooms come September time.


Anemone canadensis

A lovely invader, happier in the garden than in the woodland where it is native. George pulls out half of it after it blooms.

Euonymus fortunei 'Silver Queen'

"A permanent splash of white and green on the brick wall," says George.





Here the formal parterre of the Gray Garden is framed by quince trees forming a terrace that looks down on to the heart of the garden.

In brief

WHAT An American interpretation of a classic English garden such as Sissinghurst.

WHERE In the Litchfield Hills of northwestern Connecticut, USA.

SIZE Six acres of garden in a 25-acre property.

CLIMATE Cold winters, hot summers.

HARDINESS RATING RHS H7, USDA 5b.

SOIL Acid loam.

POINTS OF INTEREST In an agreement with the Garden Conservancy, the property is owned jointly by George Schoellkopf and Hollister House Garden Inc, a non-profit organisation dedicated to preserving the house and garden.