

SCIENCE & NATURE

Art meets science at Throughham Court

WORDS AND PHOTOS: Mandy Bradshaw

You can tell a lot about a person from their garden. Collectors have crammed borders, control freaks plant in straight lines, while those with a more relaxed view of life have untamed roses and a tolerance of weeds.

At Throughham Court, thanks to its history and the interests of its creator, there's an unusual mix of art and science.

This juxtaposition is clear from the outset. True, the entrance is framed by a beautiful Cotswold stone wall, but the wrought iron gate is a curious mix of symbols and shapes, while alongside a carved sign declares 'Anatomy of The Black Swan'.

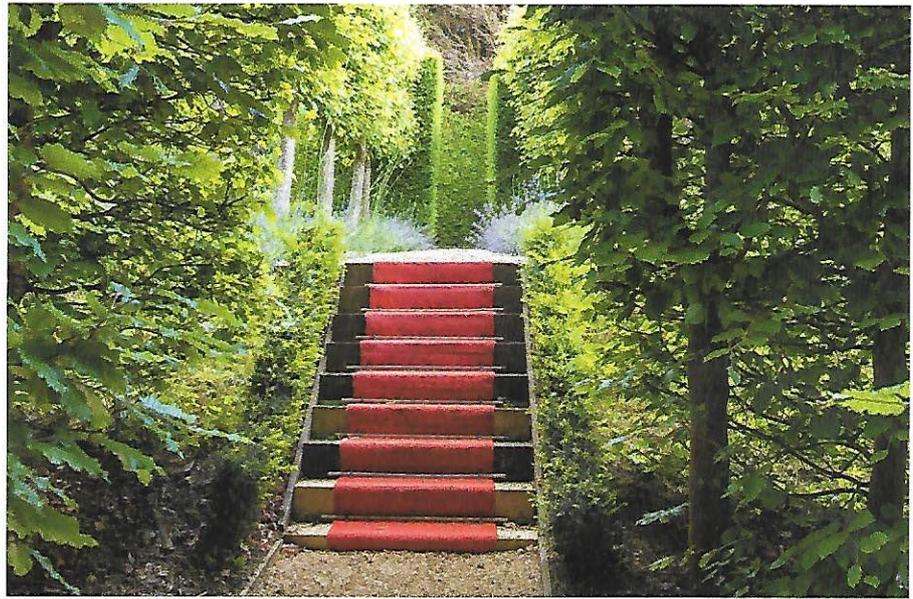
'You know it's not going to be the usual garden full of plants and trees,' admits owner Dr Christine Facer Hoffman who explains the Black Swan Theory is about rare and unpredictable events that have huge consequences – she cites the 2008 financial crash, Covid and Brexit as examples.

The gate, which she designed, references this idea of risk and probability with the stock market at the bottom and a dice to suggest games of chance. Elsewhere in the garden, there's the Fractal Valley Gate and the Entry into Chaos Gate.

Christine is a former consultant haematologist turned landscape architect, and her garden near Stroud reflects this dual identity. 'I didn't want to leave science behind,' she says.

'I wanted to put some of my previous career into my new career.'

Although now retired, both the science and love of landscape design remain with many references to scientific theories and unusual plants, including varieties of Mexican



Red astroturf steps started as a practical solution to a problem

philadelphus sourced from Gloucestershire's Pan Global Plants nursery.

Christine moved to Throughham in 1995, attracted by its position overlooking a Cotswold valley and the Arts and Crafts garden, built in the 1930s by Norman Jewson. It has his hallmark features: Cotswold stone walls, terraces and topiary birds.

Work on developing the garden didn't start until five years later when the commute to her London hospital job became too much and she changed careers.

The one-and-a-half-acre Arts and Crafts section sits at the garden's entrance, an area of lawns, beautiful old paving, topiary and

borders brimming with perennials, including astrantia and *Alchemilla mollis*, that replace the annuals of the 1930s.

A sunny lower terrace has *Phuopsis stylosa* and *Cerastium tomentosum* in planting pockets and a long ribbon of lavender. Nearby, a row of *Cornus* 'Norman Haddon' has a magnificent display of creamy white bracts.

Even here there is some science: the Chiral Terrace at the top of the sloping plot, which replaced a flower border where weeds had gained the upper hand. It explores the idea of mirror images be it in molecules, neurons, 'identical' twins or mirror writing where words are written backwards. >

‘About one in 640,000 people can mirror-write spontaneously,’ explains Christine.

Norman Jewson’s sunken garden no longer has box – a victim of blight – with yew now providing structure. Christine has planted *Stipa gigantea*, *Rosa* ‘Iceberg’ and dahlias for late colour. White digitalis is being encouraged to spread – ‘I love them. They’re wonderfully statuesque.’

Deciding the area behind the house needed height, Christine installed traditional six stone pillars but gave a scientific twist by topping them with symbols representing major biological discoveries of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as Dolly the sheep, DNA and penicillin. The pillars also support blousy David Austin roses.

black hole and nothing can escape,’ explains Christine. ‘People love it because I get them to sit in the Black Hole Seat and I tell them it’s very difficult to get out.’

‘Gardens should be interactive and playful.’

A dramatic feature is The Royal Steps, red astroturf steps that lead into a lime walk underplanted with tulips, nepeta and different varieties of allium ending with the architectural ‘Summer Drummer’.

The red covering started as a practical solution to the slipperiness of wood in winter that avoided putting what Christine describes as ‘ghastly chicken wire’ on the treads. ‘It’s a design feature as well because the red colour attracts attention and enquiry,’ she says. The lime walk ends in a slate starburst pool while

‘It intrigues people, they ask questions and it engages them’

‘I quite like the idea of old-fashioned English roses contrasting with cutting edge science,’ she says.

Alongside the Arts and Crafts area, Christine has developed a further two acres, putting in hedges and several garden rooms.

The universe is explored in the Cosmic Evolution Garden where six stone spheres represent the planets.

They’re engraved with numbers governing how the universe is growing based on the book *Just Six Numbers* written by Astronomer Royal, Lord Martin Rees.

Planting is chosen to echo the cosmos theme – *Cosmos bipinnatus* ‘Cosmonaut’, *Ligularia* ‘The Rocket’ and *Actaea simplex* ‘Brunette’ whose white flowers resemble shooting stars. Around it all, dark *Ophiopogon planiscapus* ‘Nigrescens’ creates an eclipse shadow.

Visitors are encouraged to try the Black Hole Seat: ‘When a star dies, it forms a

to one side is a geometric box parterre and the sunken croquet lawn, reached by Origami Steps made from salvaged limestone and white marble.

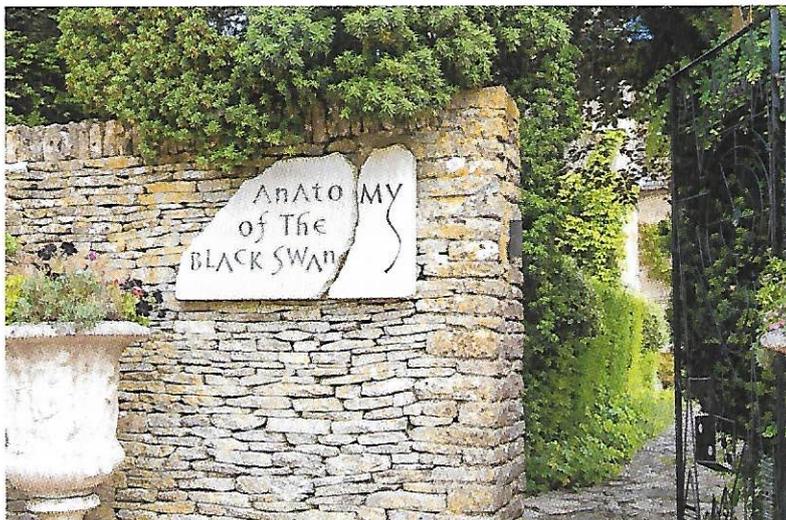
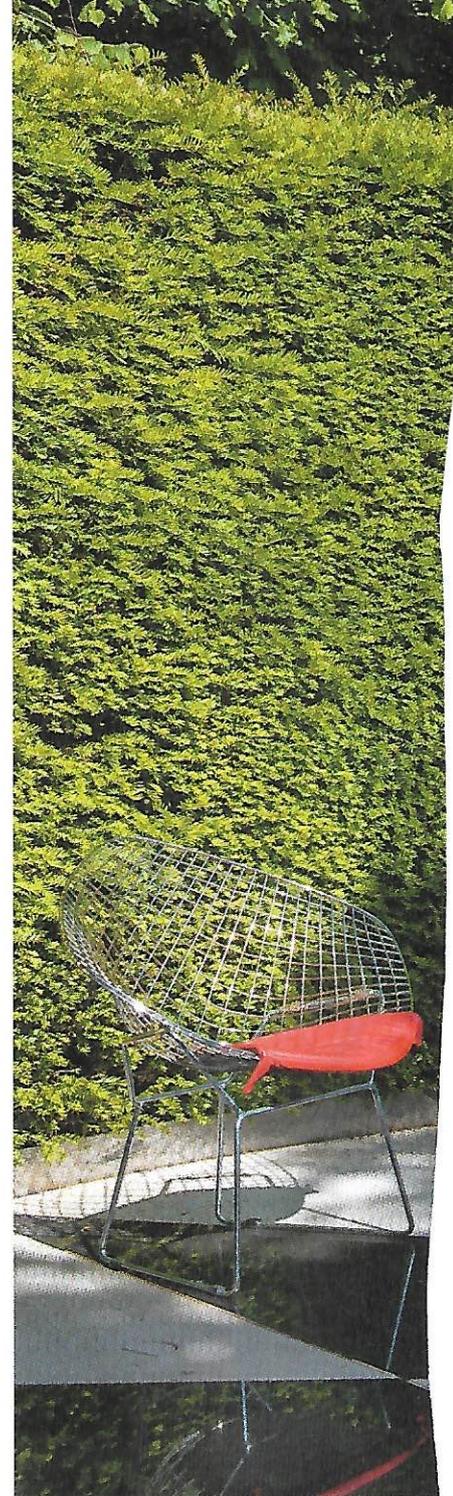
The bamboo grove has three species with their canopy raised to reveal the beauty of the canes.

‘It’s an atmospheric little area. You can walk in there on a summer’s day with dappled sunlight coming through and it’s a couple of degrees cooler.’

The Zig-Zag Arboretum has some of Christine’s favourite trees, including *Davidii involucrata*, set into zig-zag beds.

Here, she has been experimenting with shade-loving planting including ferns, *Lilium martagon* ‘Marmalade’ and ground covering *Cornus canadensis*.

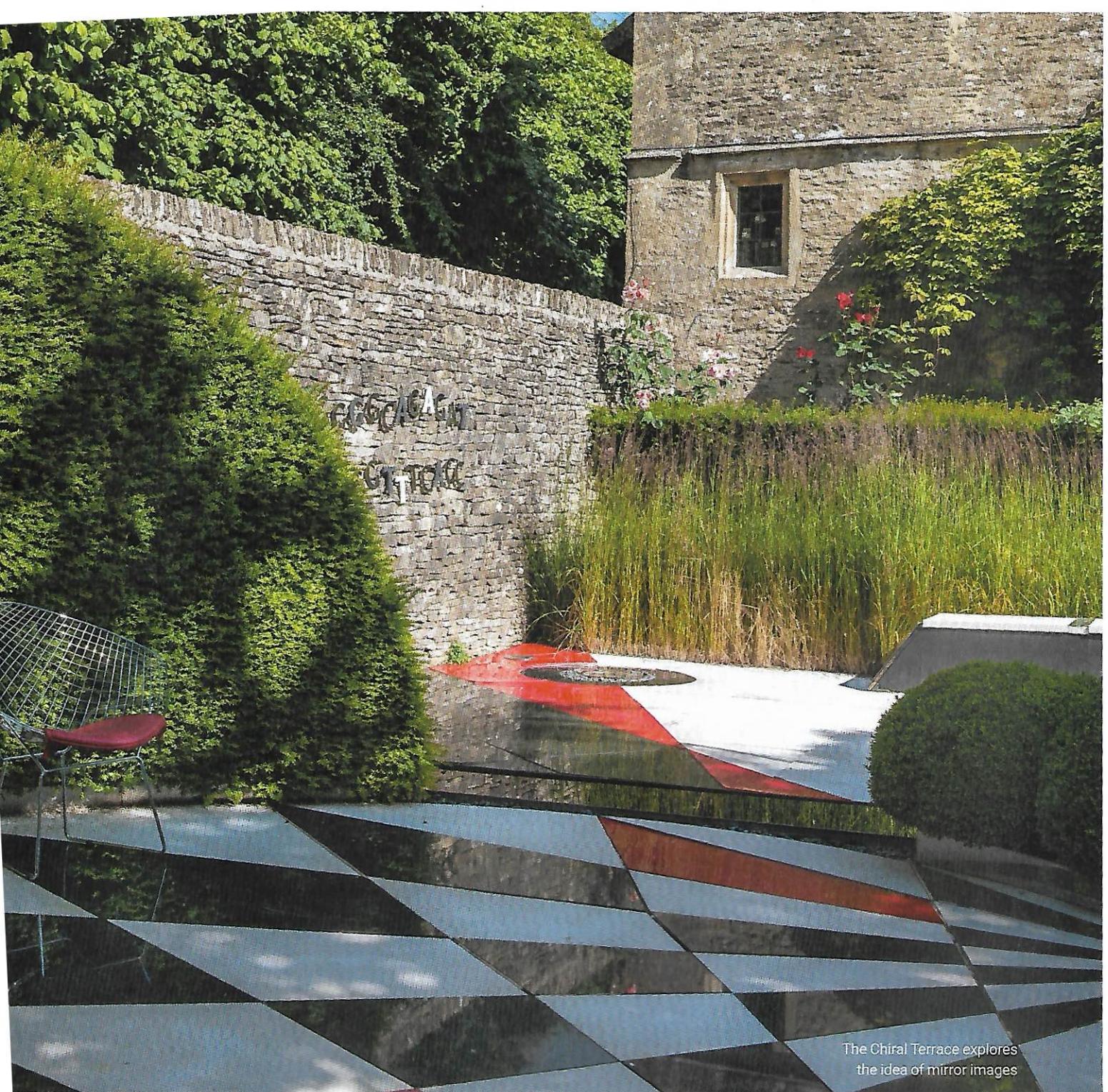
Trees are used as a feature in the wildflower meadow where a mown path runs alongside birch trees planted in accord



From the start, it’s clear Througham Court is no ordinary garden



Phuopsis stylosa softens a terrace alongside *Cornus* ‘Norman Haddon’



The Chiral Terrace explores the idea of mirror images

with the Fibonacci sequence. 'It shortens the perspective so it looks as if the trees at the end are much further away than they really are,' she says.

A white line draws the eye along the path, which in spring has a mass of camassia, while flags made by artist Shona Watt are added in summer for colour.

More traditional planting is found in the South Border, which moves through colour themes from early purple and white early through to pink, purple and red in summer before yellow and orange take hold in autumn.

The Kitchen Garden is a productive area of fruit, vegetables and flowers and also houses Christine's greenhouse with a large collection of tropical plants including the unusual jade vine. Even here, science has a place with another blight-hit box hedge

replaced by 1,500 decimal places of Pi on a Corton steel edge, which runs around the garden, a reference to her West Highland terrier named Pi who did just that: 'She's immortalised in the garden.'

It's part of what Christine describes as a 'narrative garden'.

'Visitors come to the garden and leave having learned some science. It's certainly not difficult,' she says. 'It intrigues people, they ask questions and it engages them. One of the most important aspects in any garden is to engage curiosity and inquiry.' ●

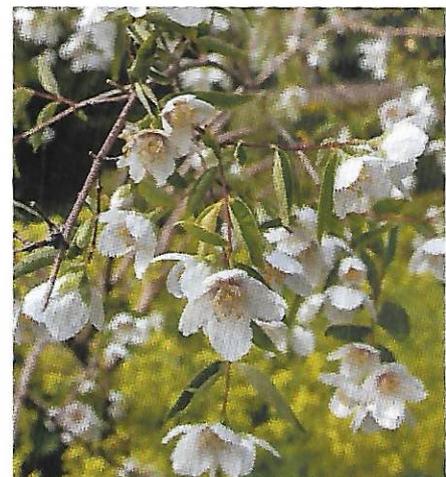
Througham Court Garden is open for group visits. Details at:

christinefacer.com

Facebook: [The Chatty Gardener](#)

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The perfume of philadelphus is an early summer highlight

Science meets tradition on stone pillars at the rear of the house

