

An Eclipse Shadow bed contains what she describes as “cosmic planting”, including black-leaved *Ophiopogon planiscapus Nigrescens*; *Ligularia stenoccephala* The Rocket; and *Cosmos bipinnatus* Cosmonaut.

Facer Hoffman says her garden reflects her own personality, but she also wants to make visitors think. She acknowledges that visitors come to see the hard landscaping design, but says that plantings play an important role.

“A garden can’t be a garden unless it has got plants in it. Otherwise it would just be like an art installation in the Tate.”

Plantings act as interludes of normality, such as in the original Arts & Crafts part of the garden, and in a pleached lime walk with seasonal displays of tulips, alliums, agapanthus and nepeta. They also play supporting roles, as with the roses and clematis entwining the Six Pillars of (Scientific) Wisdom that are topped by resin models that document significant moments in the history of biology. Models include giant pills,

‘Each area of my garden tells a story. A garden should be a voyage for the mind as well as the feet’

representing the discovery of penicillin; and a sheep that symbolises Dolly, the first cloned mammal.

In another part of the garden, entering the densely planted Black Bamboo Grove feels like stepping into an eerie fairy tale. A starburst pool is lined with slate as if to mimic the dark sky.

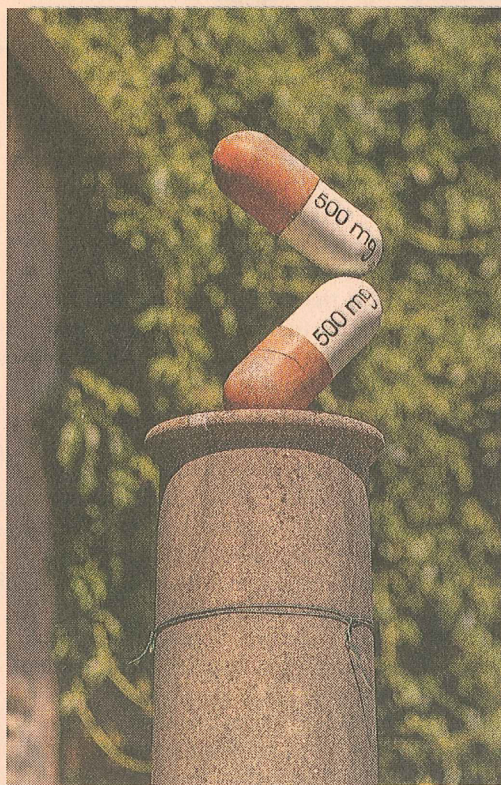
Along Fibonacci’s Walk, a winding path of short grass cut through a field, birch trees are planted at distances according to the Fibonacci sequence, whereby each number is the sum of the preceding two, a pattern found in nature: 1 metre, 2 metres, 3 metres, 5 metres, 8 metres and so on.

The asymmetrical red, black and white polygons that Facer Hoffman has added alongside the Arts & Crafts part of the garden form her Chiral Terrace. In medical science, chirality is a property of asymmetry, used to describe a structure that cannot be superimposed on its mirror image. A chiral quality can have far-reaching consequences, affecting how a drug affects our bodies. For example, the chirality of thalidomide played a significant role in the birth defects caused by



(Above, from left) Chiral Terrace, a rendition of mirror molecules; ‘Lexicon’, a Portland stone sculpture by Tim Shutter in the Library Garden

Izzy de Wattripont for the FT



the drug in the 1950s-60s. Facer Hoffman designed the terrace to explore the topic of the chirality of molecules after reading a book on the subject.

Occasionally, and to Facer Hoffman’s delight, visitors to the garden play on the themes of her displays. Among the many comments in the visitors’ book is a lengthy tribute, written in a tidy and precise script that is impossible to decipher without a mirror because it is

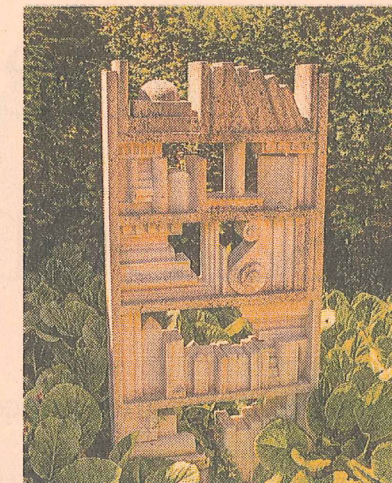
(Left) ‘Discovery of penicillin’, one of the Six Pillars of (Scientific) Wisdom; (above) Througham Court, in the Cotswolds

Izzy de Wattripont

written back to front. The guest was a mirror writer. A few pages later, there is a photograph of identical twins: mirror twins, whose identical traits are asymmetrical, as if either twin is gazing at their reflection in a mirror. Mirror twins are believed to comprise 25 per cent of identical twins worldwide.

When visitors arrive at the garden, which can be accessed on pre-booked guided tours, they enter via the Anatomy of the Black Swan gate. The gate was designed by Facer Hoffman as a visual metaphor of what former trader and risk analyst Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls Black Swans: seemingly improbable, unpredictable events with huge consequences, such as 9/11.

More predictable for Facer Hoffman is her next major project for the estate: a tribute to Charles Jencks, the architectural historian and international designer of both buildings and gardens, including his own 30-acre Garden of Cosmic Speculation in Scotland. Jencks was a friend and collaborator of Facer Hoffman, and when he died in 2019 the pair had been working for



several years on a garden design for Througham Court.

“Charles was amazing and his gardens are extraordinary. He was incredibly inspirational in that you would see what he did and think, ‘How could he do that?’ Then I’d have a go at doing it myself,” she says.

The garden they planned is one based on epigenetics: the study of how human behaviour and the environment can affect the way genes work without changing the DNA sequence. An example is the Dutch “hunger winter” of 1944-45, during which starving pregnant women gave birth to children who are thought to have suffered from various conditions throughout their lives due to their genes being affected in the womb by the famine.

With Jencks gone, Facer Hoffman has completed the design and will create the epigenetics garden on her own, in between her work for clients. She says she does not yet know where she will fit it in Througham Court, but is confident that she will find a spot.

“Charles used to say that we were peas in a pod and I don’t now have anyone to talk to about garden design. There aren’t many people doing what we do.”

The epigenetics garden design is, she admits, “complicated”. But as an award-winning, former consultant haematologist and past president of the British Society for Parasitology, Facer Hoffman is undaunted by complex ideas. The new garden will add another chapter to Througham Court’s metaphorical exploration of science — another story to be told, as Facer Hoffman puts it.

“I aim to create curiosity and my garden is a book with each area telling a story. A garden should be a voyage for the mind as well as the feet.”