

The colours of the four vases within the Alchemical pond, which is the central feature of the main front garden, symbolise different and opposing alchemical aspects.

Gardens of the imagination

By Alice Spenser-Higgs

It is safe to say that the garden of Little Athanor is like no other garden. It is a garden of startling originality, a place to be discovered over and over again like the intricate and interweaving melody of a Bach fugue.



From the upper storey it is easy to appreciate the myriad shades of green and the diverse textures of the 1470 indigenous trees and shrubs.

The rose garden bordering the pool, with its combination of water and fragrant plants in a formal design, is evocative of an Islamic courtyard garden.



Bird life is encouraged through the planting of fruit bearing trees and an organic approach that does not use any pesticides; only plantings of lavender and garlic as insect repellents.



spot that receives a shaft of sunlight.

It is a garden that appears to break all the rules (certainly of space and light) yet the overall impression is one of abundant, untrammelled and healthy growth. Acacias double their size in six months and roses surge up to four metres high.

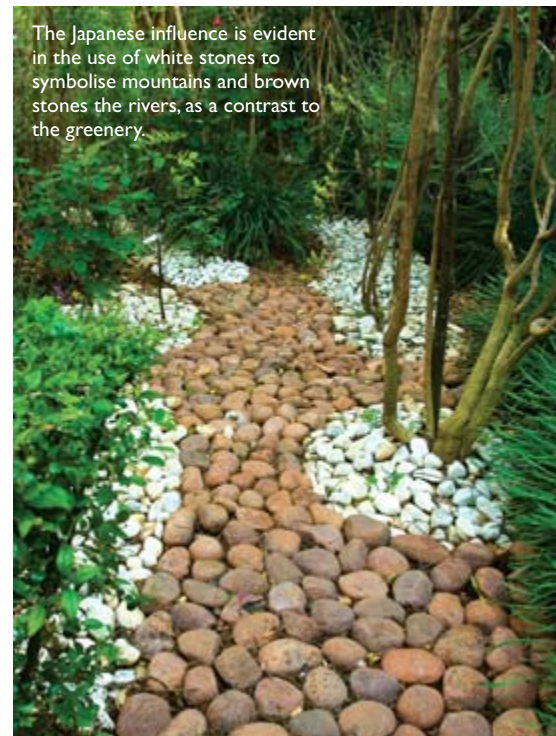
"I treat my plants like princes and princesses," says Mr de Châtillon. Compost is constantly worked into the soil, which is rich and crumbly, and many different varieties of Acacia add nitrogen. Abundant water is supplied by the borehole and intensive plantings of garlic and lavender keep pests away naturally. Nothing is allowed to threaten the bird life, except Lord Popcorn, the brown Burmese cat who is master of the garden (and the universe).

Plants are chosen because they match and complement one another, as well as for their dramatic effect. Indigenous plants predominate, not for bio-purity, but because they naturally grow so well. Roses are a lifelong love. Together they form the central theme of the garden. All the gardens, including those on the pavement, are a variation on this theme, and within them there are references to the garden traditions of monastic France, England, Japan and the Islamic gardens.

Mr de Châtillon is of the school that believes that plants should be primary in the garden and not secondary to the hardscaping, as is the current trend. Besides his often unconventional planting, the garden is rich in symbolism. A central feature is the alchemical pond with four vases symbolising different elements of alchemy. The design itself is entirely numeric, but based on the psychic energy of numbers rather than their mathematical precision. The *quinta essentia* of

alchemy, otherwise known as the quincunx or centred four, is the most used number in the gardens. It is the psychic image of wholeness. In this combination, a plant is placed in the centre (nought) with four other plants surrounding it.

"Construction by number allows for a large amount of intricacies and subtleties. Although it doesn't always turn out as I plan it numerically, it is so much more than I ever thought it would be," he says.



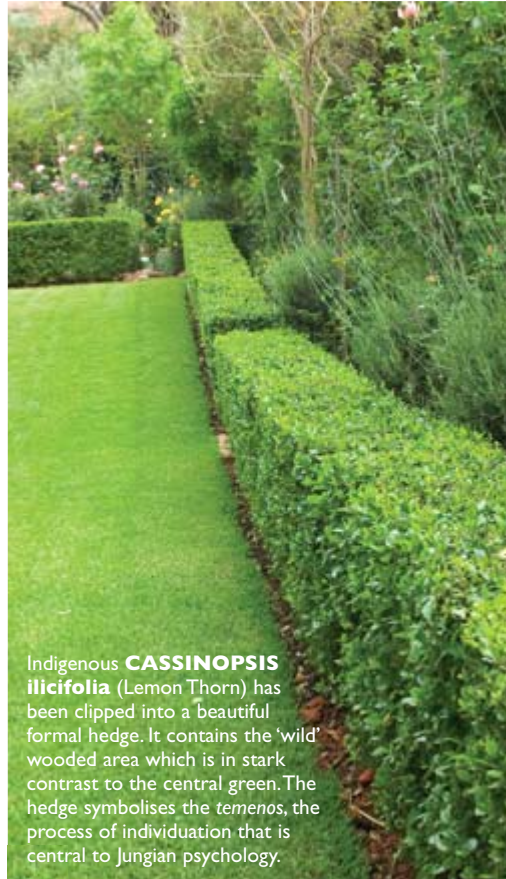
The Japanese influence is evident in the use of white stones to symbolise mountains and brown stones the rivers, as a contrast to the greenery.

In making this garden Jungian scholar MHF Kok de Châtillon de Coque de Crécy has drawn deeply on the philosophy of Carl Jung, the music of Bach, the ancient gardens of Europe and the East, and his own genetic line of indomitable women gardeners. In just over three years, he has turned one-and-a-half acres of abandoned garden on Johannesburg's Houghton Ridge into 23 gardens that flow into one another like variations on a theme. He has raised eyebrows by planting 1 470 indigenous trees and shrubs to create the beginning of an urban forest and confounded rose lovers by inserting over 500 roses into every

Perma-Edge



This arrangement of rocks and stones recalls the ancient Celtic cairns.

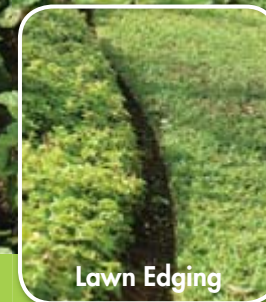


Indigenous **CASSINOPSIS ilicifolia** (Lemon Thorn) has been clipped into a beautiful formal hedge. It contains the 'wild' wooded area which is in stark contrast to the central green. The hedge symbolises the *temenos*, the process of individuation that is central to Jungian psychology.

Word of mouth has brought many visitors to his garden, and Mr de Châtillon has readily opened it believing that a garden needs to be shared to truly exist. It has evoked delight and intrigue; it has also provoked uneasiness and dismissal.

For those who are intrigued by this approach here are some key elements:

- For an original approach, start with an idea and turn that into a garden. Before starting have a clear design, whether on paper or in your head.
- A garden should be like a piece of music, with many different levels, or interweaving melodies. These can be differing shades of green, differing textures, the use of leitmotifs such as stones, statues, water and plants, and differing heights.
- If you plant a lot of trees close together don't be afraid to sculpt and train them. In the growing cycle of a tree the first five years is about upward growth, the next five years the development of the canopy, and the next five years fruiting.
- Pattern is a very important element in the garden; in Little Athanor this is achieved by the use of numbers and number chains.
- Trees play a very symbolic role in the garden. According to Jung "No noble, well grown tree ever disowned its dark roots, for it grows not only upwards but downwards as well."
- Use plants that are appropriate for your garden, in terms of your theme, climate, horticultural requirements, or symbolic elements. ☸



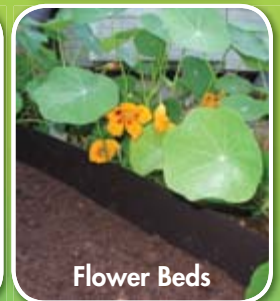
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Buddha is at home in the 'lesser' forest which is distinguished by widely spaced and individually sculpted trees to emulate the Japanese art of bonsai.

