

SEPTEMBER 2021

# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

## GODFATHERS OF FASHION AT HOME

Karl Lagerfeld outside Paris  
Sir Paul Smith in west London



Plus: the cottage  
on China's Great Wall



**GARDENS IN MY LIFE** (by Arabella Lennox-Boyd; Apollo, rrp £40) Keen gardeners will know Arabella Lennox-Boyd as a talented designer with an impressive client list (the Duke and Duchess of Westminster, Sting and Trudie Styler) and six Chelsea Flower Show Gold Medal gardens to her name. Her style is classic and her work prolific, with over 400 projects worldwide. As it turns out, she is also an engaging, graceful writer with a straightforward, almost modest style. Largely autobiographical, this book celebrates 16 of Lennox-Boyd's gardens, characterised by stories and anecdotes.

First, she delivers an enthralling account of her childhood spent living in a remote 15th-century Italian palazzo at Oliveto, perched on a hilltop between Rome and the Apennines. The last five hours of a journey home had to take place by mule. The youthful Lennox-Boyd, along with her mother and a Scottish nanny, occupied only three of its 40 rooms and, to begin with, there was no electricity. The sense of gloomy corridors complete with roosting bats, furniture shrouded in dust sheets, the annual cycle of olive picking/pressing and a harsh mountain environment reads like the start of a novel.

Arriving in London during the 1960s, Lennox-Boyd worked in her twenties with a furniture-designing friend and created small gardens while studying landscape architecture on day release. Her early immersion in the wild surroundings at Oliveto, knowledge of the classical architecture and gardens around Rome, an appreciation of the green, rolling hills of England and presumably a top-notch address book proved the perfect cocktail of ingredients to launch her long and prestigious career.



Digging deeper into the chapters, one discovers there's plenty to learn and apply to our own gardens. For Lennox-Boyd, entrances and the way houses sit in their plots and landscapes are important first impressions. At Il Palagio, near Florence, several narrow, out-of-scale and badly placed terraces built of ugly stone spoiled the connection between the villa and the countryside. Until, that is, widening and wall building restored harmony. Again, at the Hermitage, just outside Bath, an initial muddle of different levels is described as 'disconcerting' – a simplified entrance with enlarged terraces was a critical first step.

Plants are afforded plenty of space, from a paragraph or two on the Chatham Island forget-me-not (*Myosotidium hortensia*) in the section on East Cliff, a garden on the Isle of Wight, to *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' at the Hermitage. Lennox-Boyd likes to include vegetable gardens where she can and, as at Rooksnest in Berkshire, has a leaning towards old-fashioned roses such as Fantin-Latour and Chapeau de Napoléon. Another characteristic is the length of her involvement with gardens. The 30 years she has been associated with Rooksnest – still redesigning and adding – is not unusual. The garden at Gresgarth, her home in Lancashire for the last 40 years, is described as the most important of her life, while her involvement at Oliveto continues. As Lennox-Boyd asserts: 'A garden is a living organism which needs regular and constant improvement to keep it developing properly. The results are worth it' ■ ANNESWITHINBANK is a gardening writer and regular panellist on BBC Radio 4's 'Gardeners' Question Time' ▷

To order *Gardens in My Life* for £32 (plus £4.50 UK p&p), ring the *World of Interiors* Bookshop on 0871 911 1747