

# RETURN *to* ROMANCE

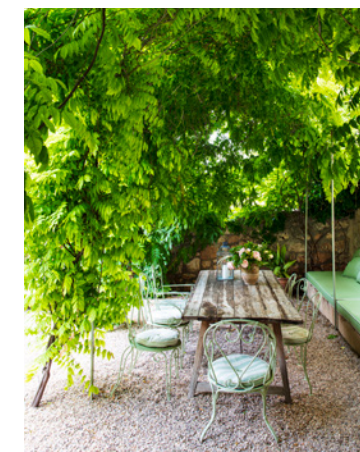
From a meadow wonderland in southeastern England to an urban sanctuary in Charleston, the winners of our **annual garden awards** reimagine idylls and traditions past with thoughtful, innovative ways forward.

PRODUCED BY  
GRACE HAYNES

♦ ♦ ♦

WRITTEN BY  
STEPHANIE HUNT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAIRE TAKACS.



## Ultimate Secret Garden

While restoring an ancient Spanish estate, a landscape designer unearths an enchanting road map to its former splendor.

**I** FOUND SOMETHING AMAZING—you must come see,” Spanish interior designer Luis Puerta instructed his long-time collaborator landscape designer Álvaro Sampedro. As it turns out, recalls Sampedro, *amazing* was perhaps an understatement. Just 50 minutes outside of Madrid, Puerta had discovered a 17th-century palace in near ruin in a little village named Tendilla close to Guadalajara. Behind it, a “jungle, an incredible paradise,” notes Sampedro, in need of rescue. There were hints of an orchard, creeks, and a kitchen garden, he recalls, but whatever overarching design there may have once been had long succumbed to neglect.

Near the outset of the six-year restoration project that followed, Sampedro made a serendipitous discovery of his own. “I uncovered old garden lines similar to the design of the chapel’s cupola,” says the landscape designer of an original plot

Beyond a lush oasis dotted with Italian cypress and linden trees, Boston ivy climbs the Spanish palace’s facade. INSET: A cloak of wisteria creates a hidden dining room.



## THE JUDGES



### BUNNY WILLIAMS

"I was impressed by the gardens' varieties of richness, with nice pockets of intimacy woven throughout the landscapes," says the renowned interior designer whose Connecticut home and garden graced our March/April 2023 issue.



### PETER LYDEN

"The best gardens don't overwhelm the architecture; instead they allow the surrounding structures to breathe," says Lyden, president of the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art. "Our winners balance formality with wilder, more romantic moments."



### METHODOLOGY

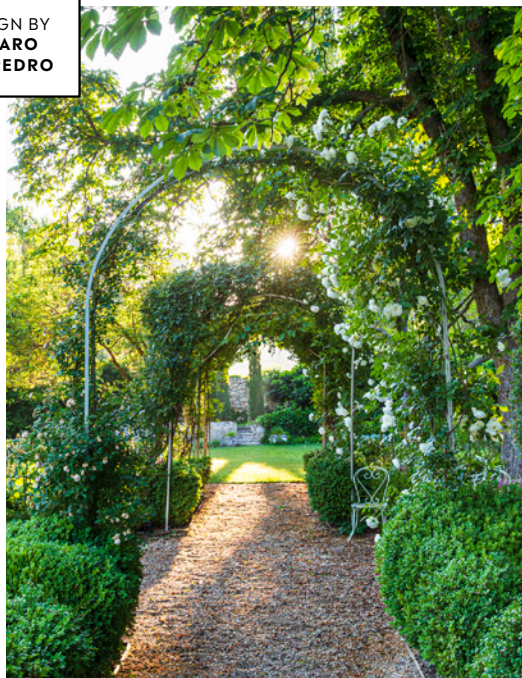
VERANDA editors chose the top 18 entries for blind judging by Williams and Lyden. For information and submission guidelines for the 2024 awards, see [veranda.com/most-beautiful-gardens-2024](https://veranda.com/most-beautiful-gardens-2024).



### Tendilla, Spain



DESIGN BY  
ÁLVARO  
SAMPEDRO



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Madame Alfred Carrière and Eden roses ascend a reappointed stone wall. ♦ Crowned with a sculptural fountain, the pool doubles as a soothing sound feature. ♦ Gravel paths are lined with boxwoods and arches of Lady Banks roses. ♦ A wispy perennial garden features grasses, *Nepeta*, salvia, yarrow, and irises.

set near the house. He salvaged those lines to revitalize the garden's octagon-inspired layout (mimicking the chapel's crowning structure), now outlined in boxwood and alive with roses. Nearby he added a new fountain pool and a perennial garden lush with grasses, *Nepeta*, salvia, and irises—"serene blues and purples"—as well as a kitchen garden, where willow raised beds are filled with aromatics, herbs, and a medley of vegetables.

"I like a sense of quiet order, especially near the house, then as you go down the paths, the garden loosens up to blend with the fields and trees beyond," says Sampedro, who saved and revived older trees and

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

*"There's a beautiful balance of formal and informal spaces. I love its relationship with the surrounding hills."* —PETER LYDEN

liberally interspersed new cypresses "to give vertical lift, unifying the ground and sky." Speaking of lift, some 15 species of roses grace pergolas and arches, while Boston ivy climbs the palace walls. "My client is a creator of magnificent spaces, a lover of beauty and tranquility, so I approached this garden similarly as if it was an interior space, with places to nap, have tea with friends, to play," says Sampedro, who composed every detail, from the sound of the gravel underfoot to the whiffs of jasmine. "I love how a garden is never finished and always changing—something curious and amazing all year long."



# Most Poetic Revival

On the crest of Authors Ridge in Massachusetts, a garden restoration allows the architecture of a historic American home to shine.

**A**LL THAT HAS BEEN is visible and clear,” wrote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, beloved bard of early America. This classic Georgian Revival along Concord, Massachusetts’s Authors Ridge is patterned after Longfellow’s house in nearby Cambridge, and when a young family bought the circa 1900 manse, its timeless beauty was indeed visible and clear. Yet the former glory of its nearly six acres was decidedly less so. “It was overgrown, with no real sense of order or plan,” says Dan Gordon of Dan Gordon Landscape Architects. Plus a 2016 microburst had decimated many of the existing trees.

Tasked with reenvisioning a landscape that both complemented and enhanced the stately architecture, Gordon and project manager Patrick Taylor created definition by regrading the front elevation

and introducing a stone retaining wall and a parade of bluestone pavers. An allée of London plane trees and groupings of mounded boxwood frame the entrance, creating quiet contrasts of height and form, order and elegance. From there, a sweeping lawn gives way to a grassy meadow with the woodland beyond, “in keeping with the rural nature of the surrounding landscape,” says Gordon.

Closer to the house, a terrace garden brims with white hydrangea and perennials surrounding a fountain.

“This more intimate garden contrasts with expanses of lawn. And it’s always lovely to hear a water feature from a porch,” Gordon notes. With the scent of catmint and salvia coming from the rear garden, these sensory elements become part of the poetry of the home, and the New England landscape its ardent muse.

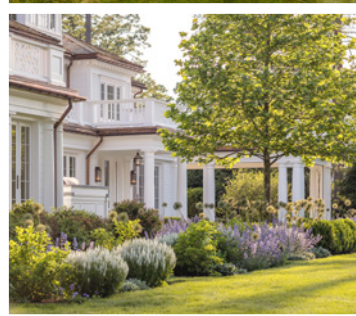
## Concord, Massachusetts

♦ ♦ ♦

DESIGN BY  
**DAN GORDON**  
LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTS

## WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

*“The plant materials are simple and controlled, with a sensibility that lets the home speak for itself.”* —BUNNY WILLIAMS



**Mounded boxwoods** and an allée of **London plane trees** quietly enhance the home’s historic grandeur. **INSET, FROM TOP:** White Annabelle hydrangeas and Rozanne geraniums pool around a **secluded garden fountain**. ♦ **Meadow grasses** invite a soft transition from the stately entrance to the rural Concord surrounds. ♦ White salvia, catmint, and allium bloom along a **backyard walkway**.







**FROM TOP:** In the **parterre garden**, Kingsville boxwood borders with corner globes of Japanese boxwood frame variegated Asiatic jasmine knots and smaller spheres of oregano. ♦ **White Lady Banks roses** tumble over a garden wall with creeping fig. ♦ A double border of white gardenias embraces **geometric Kingsville littleleaf boxwood**, with an old Ligustrum tree standing guard above two gardenia standards.

## Parterre Perfection

From a blank canvas, a preservationist revives formal French hedging in the spirit of his 18th-century Charleston, South Carolina, home.

**P**ARTERRE GARDENS are to be enjoyed from above, designed so the lady of the house could gaze from a piazza,” says Ben Lenhardt, pointing to the broad second-story porch of this 1743 home he and his wife have fully restored. Though small, his Charleston garden amplifies a refined lyricism, more exquisite chamber music than robust symphony. With boxwood-lined precision and plantings true to those found in the 18th-century Carolinas, it’s a celebration of history and preservation as much as form and finesse.

There was no preexisting garden, just a lovely “borrowed landscape” of live oaks, massive magnolia, loquat, dogwood, and hollies surrounding the property. Lenhardt, a retired CEO who serves as chairman emeritus of The Garden Conservancy and board member of the Chicago Botanic Garden, embraced the blank slate, creating a series of garden rooms, including a narrow brick-lined front courtyard, then a

central parterre aligned with sightlines from the main house. Espaliered Little Gem magnolia, Iceberg roses, and white lantana climb the brick kitchen house. This unusual treatment was a “happy accident,” he says, noting that a prostrate lantana plant had toppled over and began ascending on its own. “I tucked it behind Iceberg roses for support.”

A brick walkway leads past the original privy turned “poor man’s Hidcote Manor folly,” Lenhardt jokingly explains, and into the larger back garden, where brick and stucco walls are encircled by Pink Perfection camellias, sasanquas, crape myrtles, and dogwoods—“all the usual suspects.” A 90-year-old palmetto, one of Charleston’s tallest, stands sentry on the lawn. The middle parterre room’s strict

white-and-green palette disappears, allowing Lenhardt to play with plant varieties and introduce color. “The bigger the property, the more sins you can get away with. A small garden is like a magnifying glass; you can see every error.” And clearly, every success.

**Charleston,  
South Carolina**

♦ ♦ ♦

DESIGN BY  
**BEN LENHARDT**



..... **WHAT THE JUDGES SAID** .....

*“So much is achieved in such a small space. This garden also clearly reflects Charleston’s strong entertaining traditions.”* —PETER LYDEN



# Most Ingeniously Wild

An English gardener untames an old horse pasture, creating a biodiverse habitat for field animals, fruit trees, and North American grasses.

**S**TEP ONE: Plant 550 native trees. That was how fine art photographer turned gardener and ceramicist Emma Burrill began a decade ago, transforming nearly seven acres of scruffy horse pasture into the garden of her dreams. Charmed by the property's old buildings, Burrill and her husband gave the farmhouse a modern renovation and turned the old stables into an art studio—but the fields ignited Burrill's fantasy of a prairie-style haven of biodiversity. Her passion is rooted in the playfulness of gardening. "The process keeps me calm and sane," she says. "I love the slowness of it, like watching 40-centimeter little whips I planted 10 years ago grow into 30-foot trees."

Burrill also marvels at wild orchids colonizing amid her planted perennials and grasses. "To have it half-planned and half-wild links the gardens to the fields and woods beyond, creating connected

corridors for wildlife," she says. To her delight birds, mice, and foxes have begun to reclaim habitat that once was heavily sprayed for agricultural use, and emerging bee populations are particularly keen for her early flowering plum, pear, and almond trees. In the wildflower meadow behind

the studio, Burrill indulges her love of North American grasses; she's partial to their calm-inducing wispieness and "almost sculptural shape and seed structure, even when dormant." A mowed circular path in the prairie behind the

studio adds a graphic modernist element, juxtaposed with two large rectangular perennial borders enclosed by the studio and the house. "It's a completely different planting style than a traditional British garden and I love that contrast," she says. "I'm a tidy person by nature, but I try not to take that into the garden. Here I leave piles of twigs and leaves on the ground. It's so much better for wildlife."

East Sussex,  
England

DESIGN BY  
EMMA BURRILL

*"The ornamental grasses create movement and juxtapose nicely with the more manicured areas of this romantic prairie garden."* —PETER LYDEN



**Wispy grasses** like Warrior, Karl Foerster, and Goldtau varieties, mixed with **pink Autumn stonecrop** and other sedum, form playful corridors for wildlife. **INSET, FROM TOP:** A studio perch overlooks a **wildflower meadow**. ♦ **A circular mowed path** introduces a modern element. ♦ **Purple coneflower**, a favorite pollinator







## Best Perennial Parade

At an Italianate estate in Southeast England, historic borders become an enchanting avenue of contemporary color and texture.

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER Jo Thompson could tell the overgrown, shabby gardens surrounding the 19th-century Ladham House had once been well loved. When the Italianate mansion's new owners, a young family, asked her to reinvigorate the grounds, "we did so with a sense of respect to what was there while adding a fresh contemporary twist," says Thompson. For instance, she kept the structure of the existing double 260-foot-long borders but relaxed their formality, infusing a gentle zigzagging rhythm of mixed-height perennials and traditional pink roses—"such a British thing"—interspersed with grasses for an airy feel. "There are extraordinary magnolias and mature trees framing these borders," says Thompson, who built on this air of woodland mystery by introducing "pops of deep wine red" at the borders' sunnier end, with wilder roses as the shade creeps in. "Instead of

starting over, we regenerated what was there."

Off a side patio, Thompson's perennial garden in blues, pinks, and lilacs encircles a modern globe sculpture by David Harber. She echoed its curves with cloud-pruned topiary and allium, all softly blending into magnificent views of The Weald, the ancient natural forest well known in Southeast England.

In a previously unused part of the property, Thompson designed a sunken reclaimed York flagstone terrace and entertaining area surrounding an indoor pool and spa. "Here we can have a bit of contemporary fun," says Thompson, noting manicured hedges of yew, hornbeam, and box-

wood to give a cloistered effect and copious hydrangea in energizing dark green shades. "A nod to Sissinghurst just down the road," she says of the idea of a white garden but with a pared-down approach. "It's all about taking our cues from the landscape, from history and research, to create a sense of place." ♦

**Goudhurst,  
England**

♦ ♦ ♦

DESIGN BY  
**JO THOMPSON  
LANDSCAPE &  
GARDEN DESIGN**



**FROM TOP:** A double herbaceous border with purple berberis, ornamental grasses, Agastache, roses, *Nepeta*, and other perennials defines the entry. ♦ The terrace's asymmetrical boxwood and Japanese holly topiaries contrast white Annabelle hydrangeas. ♦ The expansive front lawn offers stillness amid the riotous borders. ♦ A sculpture by David Harber overlooks The Weald.