

May

SPECIAL HOME ISSUE

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Roberta Armani is making her family—and particularly her uncle Giorgio—very proud. *By Mimi Murphy.*

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Philippe Cottet and Scott Stover design a lush and sculptural garden for their second home, in Provence. *By Jean Bond Rafferty.*

ON OUR COVER: Roberta Armani, photographed by OBERTO GILI. Styled by Emilie Meinadier. Hair by Marilena for misslime.com. Makeup by Rajan Tolomei for Giorgio Armani Cosmetics. Giorgio Armani floral lace-and-satin gown (\$21,000), 212-988-9191; giorgioarmani.com. Giorgio Armani Privé diamond and pearl earrings (price on request), 212-988-9191. Ring and bracelet, Roberta's own. THIS PAGE: A swimming pool hidden within the Provence garden of Scott Stover and Philippe Cottet, photographed by CHRISTOPHER BAKER.



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A garden in the south of France comes gloriously to life—and remakes its owners in the process.

By Jean Bond Rafferty

FORM follows FANCY

Photographs by Christopher Baker

In western Provence, Scott Stover and Philippe Cottet have created a green landscape of remarkable variety. Twin pines shade a formal layout of boxwoods on the north side of the house.



ON A SLOPE in the Lubéron hills above the town of Apt, La Chabaude, a stone manor house on twenty acres, surveys unspoiled countryside with barely another

human habitation in sight. This late-September day, the sun-scorched fields that line the main road from Marseille testify to the region's summer drought. Up here in the heights, however, a swath of amazing greenery greets the eye.

Softly shaped mounds of topiary meld into a tapestry of silver and emerald along a garden path, while in front of the house a geometric arrangement of young boxwoods reflects the rigor of the 17th-century masonry facade. Around every turn is an enchanting vista—and an inviting seating or din-

ing arrangement from which to enjoy it.

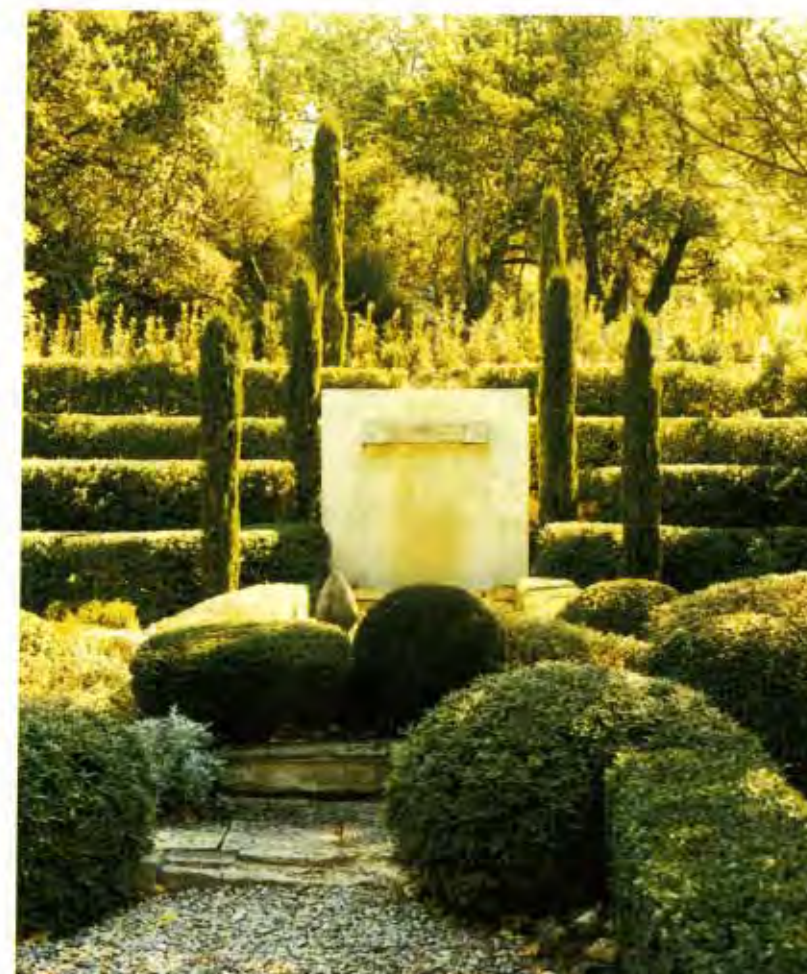
The garden is a collaboration between American-born Scott Stover, who has spent most of his adult life in France and bought the house twenty years ago, and his French partner, Philippe Cottet, a former equities analyst whose private passion for gardening has led him into a new profession as a landscape designer. The couple now split their time between La Chabaude and a main residence in Los Angeles, where Stover, executive director of the Centre Pompidou Foundation and a former Paris-based investment banker himself, is revitalizing the American Friends of the Centre Pompidou. Cottet's prowess with plants has already attracted attention on the West Coast—and a few commissions.

"Their Provence garden is magnificent," says designer and antiques dealer Rose Tarlow, who met the pair and discovered that she was their south-of-France neighbor over lunch in Los Angeles with mutual friends. On a subsequent trip abroad, she stopped by for a tour.

"I think Philippe is going to be a great success in the United States," she remarks. "His style isn't classic French but very contemporary, and I was surprised to discover that he knows so much about California planting. He really can do anything. I've been happy to recommend him to people."

The story of La Chabaude's new garden design began ten years ago, when Stover and Cottet, who were living in Paris at the time and using the house on weekends and holidays, decided to get serious about their surrounding landscape. First came negotiations to buy seven adjacent acres from their neigh-

Undaunted by the arid climate, Cottet (above) used gravel, stone and a short list of hardy green plants to diverse effect. Opposite, clockwise from top left: An outdoor living area; a boxwood parterre; cypresses at a fountain; intertwined shrubs by the pool.



Sunlight filters through beech trees onto a table set for lunch. In the late afternoon, shadows turn the swimming pool (opposite) into an elegantly proportioned reflecting pond.



“Today, only eight years into the effort, Cottet’s simple initial plan looks like the ‘before’ to an exuberantly verdant ‘after.’”

bor, whose family had once owned the couple’s property—an episode that took on the dimensions of a tale by writer Marcel Pagnol, a Provence native.

“Discussions went on for several years,” Cottet recounts. “Although you couldn’t legally build on the land, there were a number of natural springs, and the Provençaux never want to sell a source of water.”

The purchase was secured in 2000. By then, the two had had plenty of time to think about a plan for the roughly oval-shaped garden, the length of which runs north to south.

“We decided to make it an evergreen scheme that would be beautiful all year round—a place where we could have a drink outside on a sunny winter day as well as in summer,” Cottet explains. Mediterranean plants and shrubs that could resist the dry summers and cold winters of Provence would play the starring roles, and flowers would have only seasonal walk-on parts.

The gardening style of their late friend Nicole de Vésian was an inspiration; the designer and renowned stylist for Hermès had created a symmetrically clipped topiary garden in nearby Bonnieux that set a fashion in the eighties. Soon after Stover bought the property, de Vésian conceived La Chabaude’s informal entrance garden and installed a stand of pines, while landscape designer and artist Alain David Idoux set out a naturalistic plan highlighting several pieces of his sculpture. Stover and Cottet hoped to incorporate these features into their new scenario.

On a vacation in Java, Cottet painted a watercolor of the landscape plan that would surround the house on all sides. “I travel with a notebook and always do the designs of a project when I am not in the garden,” he explains. “The structure is the most important thing, and you have a better vision at a distance. I can adapt it later to reality.”

Stover proposed the addition of a mystical element. “I wanted what the Japanese call a stroll garden, where a particular route is taken to create certain emotions,” he says. As carried out at La Chabaude, “it’s a stroll

A gravel path winds through naturalistic groupings of pruned shrubs, with cypress and western redbud trees providing shade. The planting is inspired by the work of Belgian landscape wizard Jacques Wirtz.





with a smile. Those that do survive, Cottet discovered, progress with the speed of Jack's beanstalk. "We started planting in April, and by September everything had grown," he notes. "In one year you can make a difference. That is what makes gardening in Provence wonderful."

Cottet's walking tour of La Chabaude clarifies his horticultural concept. At the property's lowest point, to the west, an entry drive bordered by venerable oaks confirms the aristocratic past of the 17th-century manor, itself a revamp of a >182

Going Green in the Garden

If your own climate approaches the dryness of Provence, then Philippe Cottet's sage advice below might encourage you with some fresh ideas.

> **Skip the lawn.** It requires lots of water to maintain and can even harbor mosquitoes. Instead, add green to your garden with tough plants like boxwood or lavender, and choose flowering shrubs over flowers—they require less water and maintenance.

> **Make hardy plants your garden's core.** Use varieties adapted to the local climate (even if they are non-

native) for structural planting, and experiment with unproven species intermittently for diversity.

> **Include artful accents.** Don't overlook the importance of architectural materials like stone, gravel and wood in "planting." These natural elements provide structure, ease transitions and remain visually interesting year-round. They also serve functional roles, as a wooden bench does, for example.

> **Invest in petite plants.** Choose plentiful quantities of smaller plants, since they thrive as soon as they put down roots. Larger types tend to grow more slowly.

> **Hydrate creatively.** Using recycled water is both a green and practical approach to cultivating a healthy garden. Collect rainwater on rooftops and send it into the soil, and install recirculating pumps in fountains.

inspired by Italian Renaissance philosophy, where you progress from 'shadow and chaos,' which would be down the hill here under the oak trees, to 'logic and reason,' in the formal garden by the house," he says. "And I'm very pleased with the result." Today, only eight years into the effort, Cottet's simple initial plan looks like the "before" to an exuberantly verdant "after."

To achieve this result, the couple began commuting from Paris every weekend early on, placing plants for their gardener, who would put them in the following week. With just one full-time worker (except during the busy summer months), they made low maintenance and practicality their priorities.

Their first steps were to clean out the jungle of underbrush, then mark out the new structure with stones and gravel paths. "Once we put in paths made of pebbles from the Durance River, the garden immediately looked like something," Cottet recalls. And what to grow? "It was very easy—few plants work: santolina, lavender, ficus, pittosporum, viburnum, boxwood," he adds



Beyond a gate, a stone wall, sycamore trees, and a gravel path shade a gravel path and a rigorous garden. Opposite: All-weather cushions line cast-stone benches that overlook the countryside.

Opposites Attract

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and Cartel clocks that Blair says it was literally an effort to open the front door.

"I know these things were like his children," Blair says. "But I remember thinking, 'If I'm coming into this picture, we're going to have to sift.'"

Sift they did. But once they married, six years ago, they needed a bigger home in which to start a family. In 2003 they saw this three-bedroom apartment in a 1920s building on Park Avenue; its elderly occupant hadn't refurbished it in years.

"Alistair's eyes just lit up," Blair recounts. "He started telling me, 'We could put this here and that there'—I thought he'd lost his mind."

Having previously renovated apartments in London and New York, Alistair wasn't intimidated, despite his sometimes-harrowing work schedule. Among other things, he talked Blair into letting him install a special utility sink in the kitchen so that he could cut and arrange the flowers he grows at the couple's weekend house on Long Island.

The only structural changes the Clarkes made were to open up a wall between the dining and living rooms and to expand the kitchen by annexing an adjacent maid's room. "People in New York exaggerate the difficulties of renovation," Alistair says. "It's wise to put in modern electrical wiring and central air-conditioning, but you don't have to marble the bathrooms!"

At 2,200 square feet, the apartment isn't large, but it gains a certain grandeur from an entrance gallery in which Blair displays some of her Natasha Law nudes—and where Alistair exhibits his 17th-century Italian marble bust of a Roman emperor.

Calm and serene, the gallery is a "time-out" from the more vivid contrasts around every corner. Sort of.

Blair pouts while looking at the zebra-skin rug. It's vintage and a gift from Alistair's father. She shoots a glance at her husband and then gives the zebra a dubious nudge with her shoe.

"The jury's still out on *this*," she says. He smiles, delighted by her opening salvo. ✕

Form Follows Fancy

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more rustic 15th-century bastide. Across an open field of scrub, a grotto where rainwater gushes down through a spout in a storm will soon become a pond stocked with carp. This is Stover's place of "shadow and chaos," under five quite beautiful ancient oaks planted in a semicircle around a semicircle of stones.

From the copse of oaks, a stairway curls up the steep slope toward the house. At the top, a fountain made of old stone, surrounded by jasmine-scented pittosporum, burbles with recycled water. ("We

"Designed more like an ornamental pond and sited to catch even the last afternoon sun, the pool is in an enclosure totally masked from view by luxuriant shrubs."

need to save water, so I recycle everything," Cottet notes.)

The landscaper's surprising vignettes beckon in every direction. A recently created area southwest of the house, laid out on the theme of rectangles and squares ("but nothing is symmetrical," Cottet assures), marks the transition between the agricultural fields in the distance and the manicured grounds around the residence.

The geometrical north garden is the climax of Stover's philosophical promenade. "In Provence it was a tradition to have a formal garden on the northern side of a noble house," Cottet explains. "That had disappeared here, so we decided to reconstitute it." He worked out an ordered arrangement of boxwoods punctuated by pillars of yew that is "strict and severe, to go with the austere facade."

The pool sits just off the southern side of the house. Designed more like an ornamental pond and sited to catch even the last afternoon sun, it is in an enclosure

totally masked from view by luxuriant shrubs but accessible through a doorway. "But you have no swimming pool!" visitors exclaim when they come to tour the garden," Cottet says with a laugh.

Over lunch, he expands on his passion for green. "There are almost a dozen shades here, from the pale gray of santolina, lavender and rosemary to the dark green of yew," he observes. "And I love the different shaping of the leaves. Friends who came first in summer and then at Christmastime were amazed that the garden was even more beautiful in winter." In spring, he reveals, flowers distract from the purity of the scheme. "The Judas trees burst into purple and pink blossoms—and it's absolutely beautiful," he admits. Underneath the trees, there is an allée of white hydrangeas and a small square of white roses. Elsewhere, irises bloom in tones of dark blue and black, green rock rose bushes flower in pink and white, and blue sage also blossoms. During the first two weeks of July the balls of lavender are at their brightest. But after the early-summer color show, Cottet is happy to see the garden reassume its verdant mantle.

Given the part-time role that La Chaude plays in the current lives of its owners, its smartest feature is the plethora of seating and dining options sprinkled throughout the garden—more than a dozen in all. In almost any season, at any time of day, both hosts and guests can find captivating corners in which to escape—to read; relax over drinks and watch the sunset; have breakfast, lunch or dinner alfresco; or just enjoy the bucolic beauty. There are custom-crafted metal chairs, a wooden beam on supports, and sofas whose stone seats are softened by all-weather mattresses and cushions. Because Stover and Cottet dislike parasols, the latter explains, "I have designed the greenery to provide shade everywhere."

"A garden should be more than a place to walk through," Cottet contends. "A garden should be for living." ✕