

Looking back to the barn  
over *Cornus controversa*  
'Variegata' and scarlet  
*Monarda* 'Squaw'.

# Arcadian VISION

At Tyger Barn in Norfolk, designer Julianne Fernandez has channelled the ancient Greek spirit of a country idyll, creating a cultivated garden that sits in harmony with the fields and woodland beyond

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**Top** Early morning rays of sun shine on a border of *Stipa tenuissima*, *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' and *Alchemilla mollis*. **Above** Designer Julianne Fernandez in her garden at Tyger Barn.

**T**HE STRAPLINE ON JULIANNE FERNANDEZ' garden design website reads: 'Creating magical spaces'. In the pink light of dawn on a still summer's day, her own garden, on the southern edge of the Norfolk Broads, more than lives up to this promise. On one side a vast swathe of wildflower meadow is tinged golden by the rising sun; on the other, colourful stands of bold perennials are softened by the flow of ornamental grasses. The old oak and pantile barn looks out and down the garden, the view borrowing the landscape of misty field and ancient woodland beyond. "There's something very special about the East Anglian countryside," says Julianne. "The flatness of the land gives us those wonderful skies and open vistas. It's important to me to have the garden be at one with the landscape."

Julianne and husband Tino moved here in 2006, when the barn sat in a farmyard surrounded by fields. "There was literally nothing, just empty land," Julianne recalls. "There wasn't even a boundary hedge." They had come from a traditional-style new-build in Suffolk where Julianne had created the archetypal cottage garden; her first move was to make a similar space here, now known as the Secret Garden, on the southern side of the barn.

With this achieved, she realised she needed a different approach for the main plot. A period of deliberation followed, in which she observed the landscape and mulled over ideas. Two years later, as the couple extended the house, the terrace linking the barn to the outside space was created and a relatively formal planting of clipped box and grasses (*Stipa tenuissima*) came into being. In contrast, the first main border, created at around the same time, was open and flowing, full of hot, bold colour. "Many people suggest that my planting is influenced by Piet Oudolf, but actually it's Christopher Lloyd and his iconic garden at Great Dixter that has really inspired me," she says. "All that rampant abundance, and the huge borders with amazing colour combinations. I totally get that."

The soil is 'nasty, heavy clay' around the barn, mixed with the generous helping of rubble characteristic of a Norfolk farmyard. The stipa don't seem to mind, and the vine on the pergola (*Vitis* 'Brant') positively relishes this, but Julianne's eye-catching agapanthus stay in pots throughout the year to prevent rotting off. The soil becomes lighter and easier further from the house, allowing a variety of structural perennials and grasses to thrive, including *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus',



Bold plants in the main border: *Arundo donax* towers over *Yucca filamentosa*, and the seedheads of *Salvia nemorosa* 'Ostfriesland'.



daylilies (*hemerocallis*) and plume poppy (*Macleaya cordata*). Julianne keeps the macleaya under control by ruthless but selective weeding, enjoying the occasional unplanned combination, such as with orange *Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora* 'Emily McKenzie'.

Further down the garden and a couple of years later, Julianne created a second, even bolder, planting, based around a colour palette of magenta, apricot, cream and



**Above** Vivid heads of *Agapanthus africanus* with *Stipa tenuissima*.  
**Left** Weathered wooden recliners take in a view of fulsome curving borders.  
**Below** *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album' with *Echinops sphaerocephalus* 'Arctic Glow' makes an impact.

purple. "I went for bigger, more architectural plants, like *Tetrapanax papyrifera*, *Arundo donax*, and the yuccas," she explains. "I started then to really experiment with colour combinations and different textures and sizes." Following on from this was the 'ghost border' at the end of the garden, where Julianne has tried to limit flower colour to white and cream, relying on shape and texture for interest.

## The wildflower meadow has delighted Julianne with its *untamed character* and its attractiveness to *bees* and *butterflies*



The wildflower meadow was another of her experiments: "I wanted to see what it would be like having that contrast of the natural meadow against the clipped grass and the structure of the planted beds," she says. "It was also another way to connect the garden with the wider landscape." At five years old, it has delighted her with its untamed character, its attractiveness to bees and butterflies, and most especially its diversity, with ox-eye daisies, teasels, knapweed, sorrel and even the occasional thistle popping up unexpectedly. "Everyone said we'd be overrun by the teasels," she recalls, smiling, "but so far it's been fine!"

Each of these so-called experiments has been the product of a long period of reflection, during which Julianne watches her current borders grow and mature, taking note of what works well and what needs changing, before she embarks on a new planting. There is no paper plan for this garden: "By the time I actually go ahead and do it, I've thought about it so much that I don't need to write any of it down," she explains. The planting also tends to take place gradually: "Unlike my client work, where I have a planting plan and do it all in one go, here I tend to do the planting a little at a time," she says. "I see different plants that I like or



want to try out, and I find a place for them within the overall scheme that I have in my head.”

The plant knowledge she gains here contributes to her garden design practice, serving as a test-bed for planting combinations: spires of *Verbascum chaixii* ‘Album’ paired with the spiky globes of *Echinops sphaerocephalus* ‘Arctic Glow’, for example, and drumstick alliums (*Allium sphaerocephalon*) grown through ornamental grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*.

For Julianne, garden design is a second career, after many years spent working in investment banking and investor relations. “I had always made gardens,” she remarks cheerfully. “It’s just that now I can do it full-time instead of having to fit it into evenings and weekends.” Although she clearly already had a passion and a flair for planting, Julianne decided at this point to retrain at the Inchbald School of Design, where she learnt more about design and the technical aspects, including drawing plans and hard landscaping. “People started asking me to design gardens for them, and I thought if I’m going to do it for others, I need to get some sort of qualification,” she says modestly.

Back in her own garden, the development is ongoing, with a wildlife pond and a bog garden planned for the area behind the serpentine hedge at the end of the plot. This has already been prepared, with an archway in place for the walk-through. The new space will take the garden beyond two acres, but Julianne is undaunted; she has the help of two part-time gardeners who weed, cut grass, and do the heavy lifting, letting her concentrate on developing

and improving the planting. “I’m always moving plants around,” she says. “I’ve already got a list of things that are going to be relocated or replaced ready for next year.”

Does she ever sit in the garden? She laughs. “Of course not! I have to force myself to go and sit on a seat, and then the moment I do sit down I see a weed, or something that needs pruning.” For Julianne, the garden is about constantly seeking a version of the country idyll, a sense of the cultivated in harmony with the surrounding natural world. “That Ancient Greek

“I’m trying to go back to that time when everything was *perfect*, everything was *beautiful*, everything was *peaceful*”

vision of Arcadia, I think that’s what gardeners are striving for,” she says. “I’m trying to go back to that time when everything was perfect, everything was beautiful, everything was peaceful.” At Tyger Barn, she may just have succeeded. ■

Tyger Barn, Beccles, Norfolk NR34 0DA is open for the NGS on Sunday 7 July 2019. See [ngs.org.uk](http://ngs.org.uk) Julianne can be contacted at [chasing-arcadia.com](http://chasing-arcadia.com)



**Top** At the front, catmint, peonies and *Corylus avellana* ‘Anny’s Purple Dream’ flank the path.

**Above** Drumstick allium, *A. sphaerocephalon*, flowers attract a painted lady butterfly.