HOUSE FEBRUARY 2001 8 CARDEN





Hawke's Bay sleeping beauty • Trees of knowledge Kinky classic • Melon-coolly babies • A peck of peppers

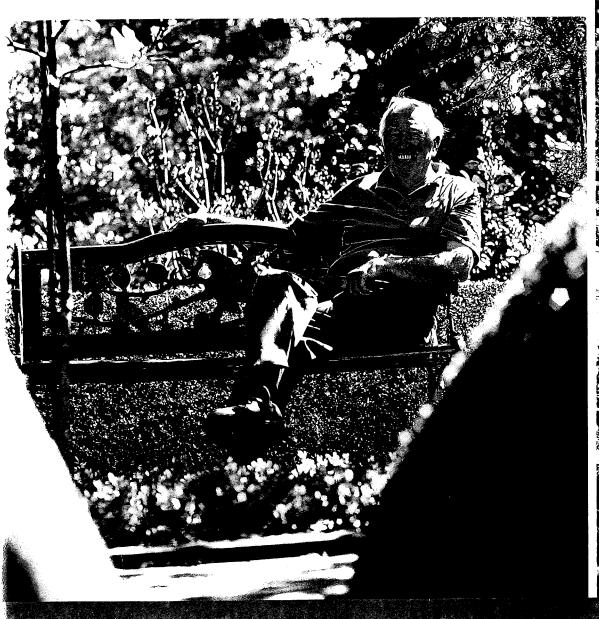


olin and Enid Hutchinson are English by birth, Canadian by inclination but New Zealanders by destiny. The well-travelled pair have made their home in New Plymouth in a much-loved colonial cottage ringed by a forest remnant. In the twelve years they have lived there, Colin has carved an exceptional garden from the bush.

Teaming perfectly with the house's wide board-and-batten exterior, tall buxus hedges make patterns and line pathways and luxuriant borders brimming with flowering plants reflect this gardener's catholic tastes.

"I love plants. I adore plants!" Colin exclaims.

"I like plants in different ways, texture and colours. Working with plants is my life." ▷















Foxglove Cottage, too, is a treasure. It was built in New Plymouth in 1854 in the very early days of European settlement after its kauri timbers were shipped down from Auckland.

Threatened with demolition in later years, it was rescued and sledged down a steep bank to its present site. Inside, the extra-wide floorboards and original frosted glass recall the pioneering days when kauri was king.

But it is what lies outside the cottage that interests Colin most.

"Today more people are interested in the inside of their houses than gardening. \triangleright





"It's a pity busy people don't get time to create a garden until they are too old to enjoy doing it."

Always an enthusiastic and ebullient horticulturist, he was five years old when his grandmother gave him a piece of ground in which he grew primroses and snowdrops.

And he has been dabbling in the soil ever since.

He has worked and gardened in three different countries and reckons he has created about fifteen gardens in his time. After training in England, he landed a job in forestry in Canada and later returned to England for a stint with father and son Allan and Adrian Bloom (Allan was a real plantsman, Colin recalls).

Shifting yet again – this time all the way to New Zealand – Colin worked out his days for the famous New Plymouth nursery, Duncan & Davies, before he retired in 1987.

While working there he wrote his magnum opus, the five hundred-page colossus *The Art of Gardening*, which he followed with three further books: on perennials, fruit growing and roses. He is a firm believer that just as people should not be segregated, neither should plants.

Strong plants make strong landscapes, he says.

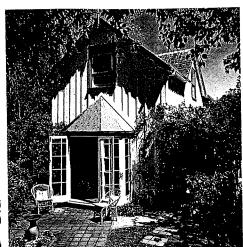


His is a structured garden relying on camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons in winter while spring and summer play host to a terrific number of appealing woodland plants, hostas and ferns. Later, hydrangeas and a few roses add flower power. The buxus hedges are a real feature and have high impact all year round. Colin cuts them all by hand, which is no quick undertaking.

Showing me around, Colin keeps up a running commentary on life as he sees it and on gardening in particular.

"Gardening shouldn't be a question of fashion; a plant should stand on its own merits," he says. As if proving his point, a little plant takes Colin's eye as we pass a shady corner. "Here's *Hosta* 'Diamond Tiara'," he says, delighted. "Isn't that a little charmer?"





and the tree collects moisture and brings coolness," he says.

"From now on, trees must not be

"From now on, trees must not be unfashionable – the average section can afford up to five deciduous trees. Why is it that the average New Zealander is afraid of shade?

"The leaves fall off in winter and then there is an ocean of light at a time when sunshine is not dangerous. New Zealand gardens of the future must have shade."

After lunch the tour recommences. From the high walk at the side there is a splendid view of Mount Taranaki over the treetops. At the other end of the walk Colin and Enid have built an enticing hexagonal gazebo designed to mirror the architecture of the house. It's a beautiful structure with ornamental bracketwork, a powder-blue ceiling and beige-painted woodwork. Behind it a neat specimen of *Rhododendron* 'Percy Wiseman' and its many tight trusses of peach-pink flowers completes the picture.

It's a perfect place to pray, says Colin, but he is a pagan and believes in nature's gods!

"I could retire here no bother at all. This is a magic garden – a place to hide from the world."

Enid calls time out for lunch and we cross the long, vine-draped veranda and enter the cool shade of the historic house.

A delicious lunch is washed down by some pressings of the grape proffered by Colin, who continues his observations on life in New Zealand and the state of the gardening industry. The conversation drifts from the tall poppy syndrome to musings on why Auckland, with its liking for palms and subtropicals, drives the rest of the nursery industry.

Talk eventually turns to the subject of trees. Colin is a shade gardener by inclination and sees trees as a crucial protection against radiation.

"It's trees that will give the right kind of shade to gardens of the future.

"A modern garden with just one big specimen tree can create a place to sit,



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