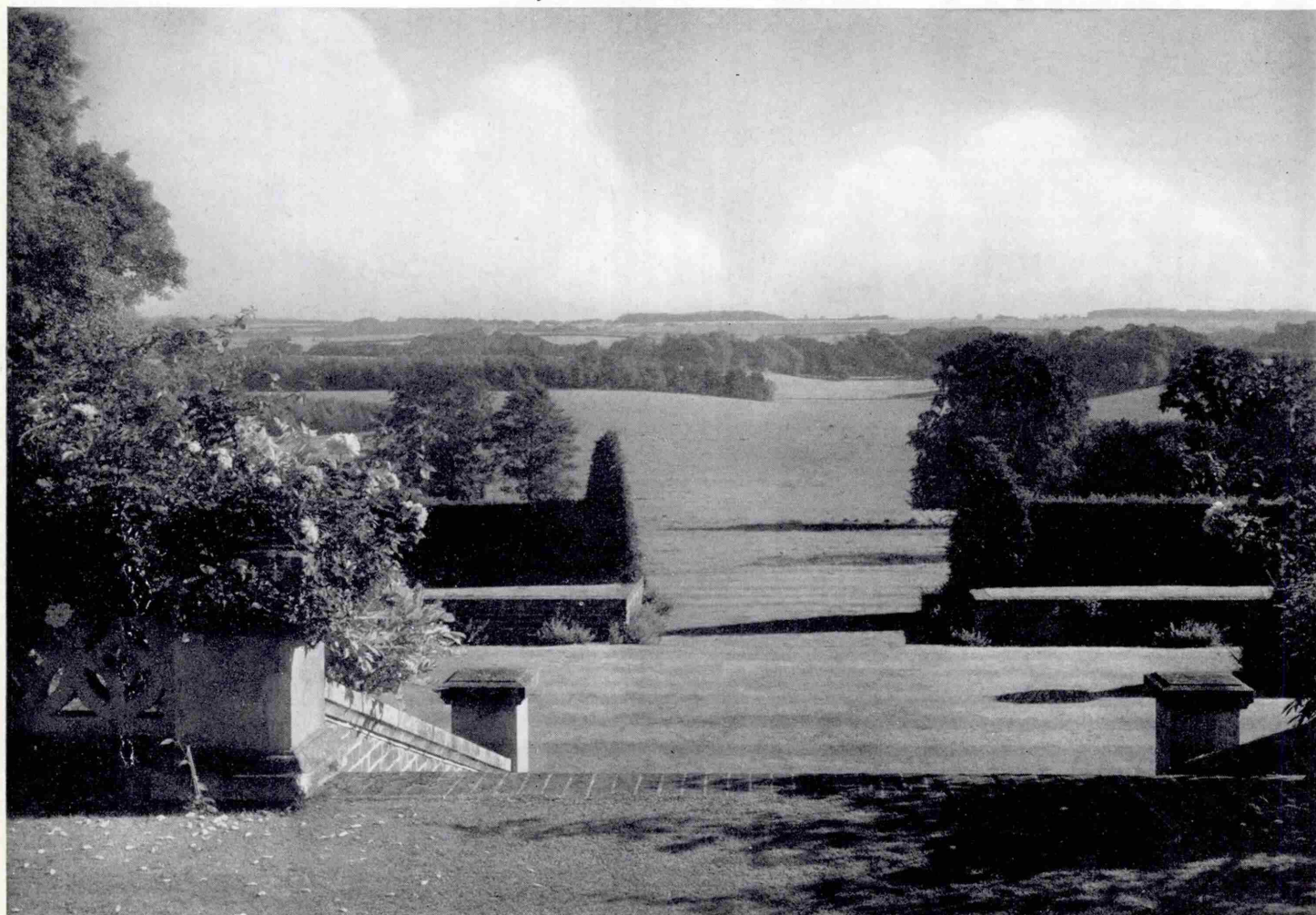


A NOTABLE MODERN GARDEN

By LANNING ROPER



THE VIEW FROM THE TERRACE OF HINTON AMPNER HOUSE, HAMPSHIRE, LOOKING SOUTH

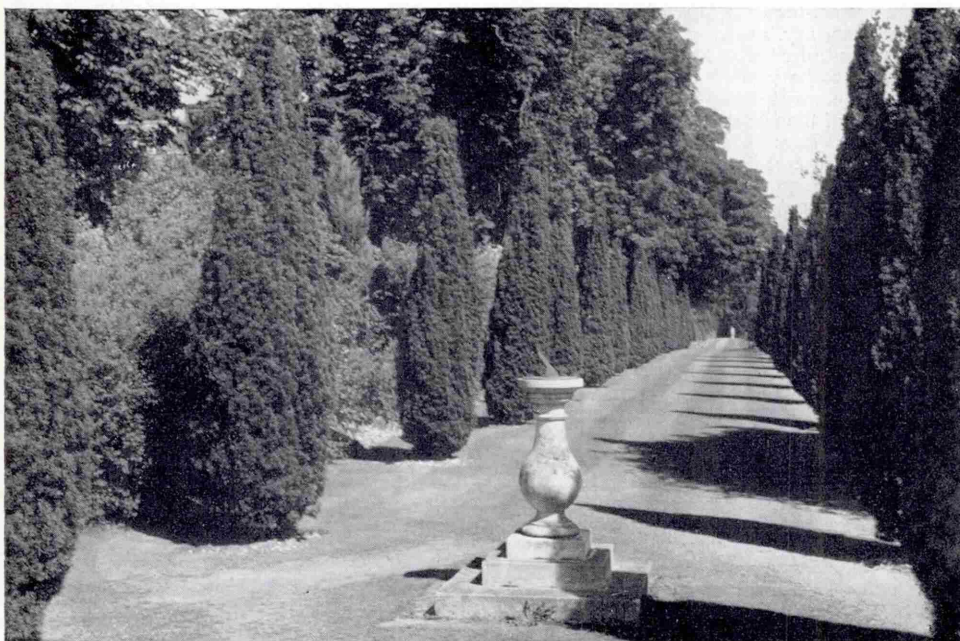
THE garden of Hinton Ampner House, near Alresford, Hampshire, happily combines both formal and informal elements, but it is on the whole architectural in conception with fine trees and flowering shrubs within a formal lay-out of walls, paths and terraces. Although made to a great extent over the last twenty years, it has an established look of timelessness

as the result of the wonderful trees and the clever integration of old elements with new. Ralph Dutton, its creator and owner, is the author of the authoritative book *English Gardens*, which first appeared in 1937, and his own garden reflects his intimate knowledge and understanding of this vast subject, as is evident in its broad terraces and fine yews, cool avenues of trees with

carefully chosen sculptured ornaments, quiet glades with flowering shrubberies and simple formal lay-outs, pleasing in proportion and in design, where great attention has been given to the form of the planting, texture of the foliage and always to the colour harmonies.

One of the great assets of Hinton Ampner is its location on the top of a ridge which commands a prospect across a broad green valley of farms and woodlands in the best English tradition to the slopes of the downlands. The top of the ridge where the house, the kitchen garden and the near-by church stand is comparatively level, but to the east and to the south of the house the land slopes considerably, making possible a series of terraces and separate gardens. This has played an important part in the design of the whole scheme and some of the successful features, such as the long vista from the temple to the obelisk and the interesting dell with its upper path circling the top of what was once a chalk-pit, are the result. It has made possible retaining walls along the terraces where sun-loving plants luxuriate. There is no doubt that the gardens owe much of their personality to this fine sloping site and to the rather formal treatment which has been evolved as a result.

The house, Georgian in style and orientated so that the principal rooms face south, was entirely remodelled in 1937-38 from a large Victorian structure, which had in turn swallowed up the core of a Georgian house. From the long windows of the drawing-room on the east front there are delightful glimpses of the pool garden, with its pink roses and water-lilies in shades of pink, yellow and red, and of the sunken garden beyond, while the south windows of the library, dining-room and the principal bedrooms command a view of perfectly kept lawns, the terrace below with its yews and old roses and the superb rolling landscape.



THE LONG WALK, BORDERED WITH IRISH YEWS AND TERMINATED BY A STATUE OF DIANA



THE FORMAL GARDEN BELOW THE EAST FRONT OF THE HOUSE

The long rectangular pool to the east is flanked on the right by a bed devoted entirely to the delicate pink floribunda rose, Mrs. Inge Poulsen, and on the left by a group of seven flowering cherry trees underplanted with laurestinus. At the far end there is a brick retaining wall with a curved paved bay holding a garden seat flanked by lead vases containing mauve hydrangeas. This delightful composition has as a back-drop a huge lime tree with pendulous branches. This tree and other mature specimens of beech, evergreen oak, chestnut and Scotch pine form wonderful backgrounds, against which the garden has been made, and as one can see in the photographs they are an essential part of almost every composition.

A flagstone path skirting the rose bed leads to the sunken garden, which is approached by an attractive broken flight of brick steps, planted with cotoneasters and choisyas with clumps of silvery-leaved *Cerastium tomentosum*. The clipped yew hedges which enclose the garden are the perfect foil in texture and colour for the backgrounds of copper beech, oaks, limes and glistening hollies on the north and south sides. Four octagonal beds are set in the perfectly kept lawn, and another of the same shape with a large stone vase forms the central motif. In spring the outer beds are planted with wallflowers with tulips of blending colours in the centre, followed in summer by fragrant purple heliotrope pink and ivy-leaved geraniums. Simplicity, scale and attention to detail are the keynotes of this garden.

A broad grass path continues the paved central axis down a gentle slope, with several flights of steps and cross paths leading among the shrubberies, to a wrought-iron gate which cuts the vista at the eastern end. This path is bordered by Irish yews which are used as vertical accents and backed by mixed plantings of lilacs, roses, mahonias, deutzias, philadelphus, hypericums and a variety of other shrubs, with here and there clumps of peonies and the giant onopordons with their silvered thistle-like leaves.

A terrace runs the length of the south front of the house. This is planted with huge clumps of rosemary, cistuses, romneyas and other sun-lovers, while specimens of *Magnolia soulangeana*, *M. grandiflora*, ceanothus, *Clematis armandii* and wistaria grow superbly against the house. These have been trained carefully so as not to conceal too much of the simple Georgian façade. The broad sweep of the south lawn is bounded by retaining walls with rose-covered balustrades which make possible the long terrace below. Broad central steps lead to a formal yew garden with beds of tulips and forget-me-nots followed by scarlet dahlias

among ornamental topiary yews. This garden forms the central motif of the long terrace. It is backed by raised beds which flank the steps, and in these herbaceous plants are carefully grouped by height so that they make a sloping mass of colour. This lower terrace extends the entire length of the garden, terminating with a sun-dial at the end of the long walk to the west and with a statue of Diana, the Huntress, to the east.

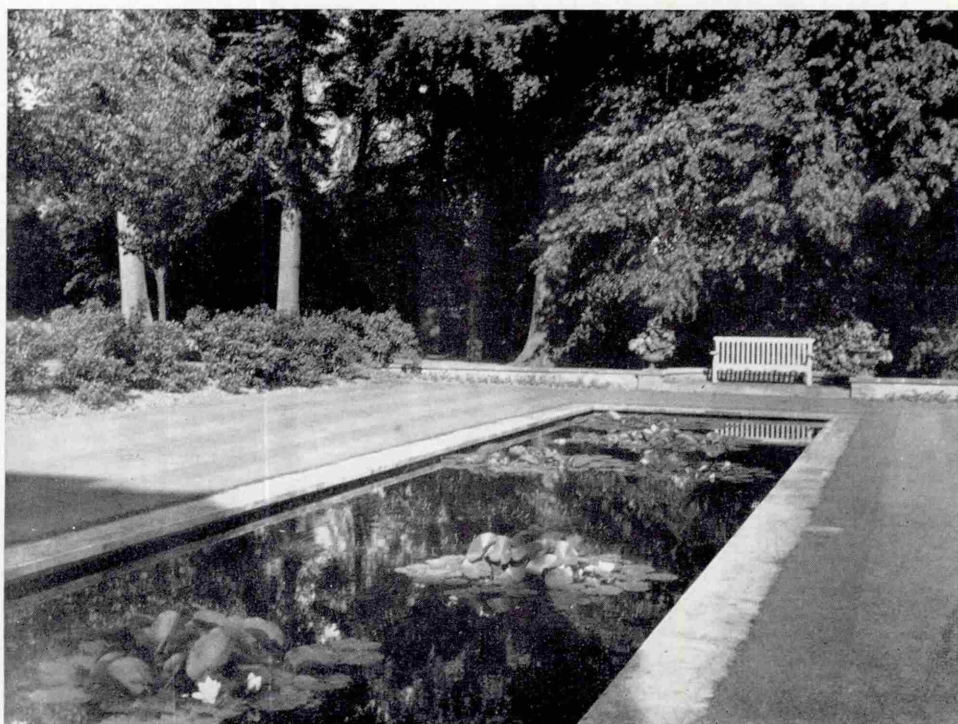
The long walk, bordered with Irish yews planted in 1937, is beautifully proportioned. The yews are backed by deep borders, the one to the north on a considerable slope. Both are planted with a good collection of flowering shrubs, bush roses predominating. The finest old roses, including Mme. Isaac Pereire, Fantin Latour, Mme. Pierre Oger, Celestial, Tour de Malakoff, Tricolore and Koenigen von Danemark, are completely at home with hybrid musks, rugosas and species. Here and there flowering crabs, cherries, laburnums and lilacs give needed height, while berberis, flowering quince, ceanothus and fragrant viburnum lend

variety and extend the flowering season. This planting is particularly successful because it is exciting to see the pinks, yellows, reds, mauves and purples through the dark inky green of the yews and because the shrubs massed on the slope make a great wall of colour well above one's head, so that there seems to be an even greater abundance of scented flowers than there would be in a level border of comparable depth. Several giant chestnuts on the lawn make a superb background and break the view of the house so that it is not too dominant, as it well might have been, standing as it does on the crest of the hill.

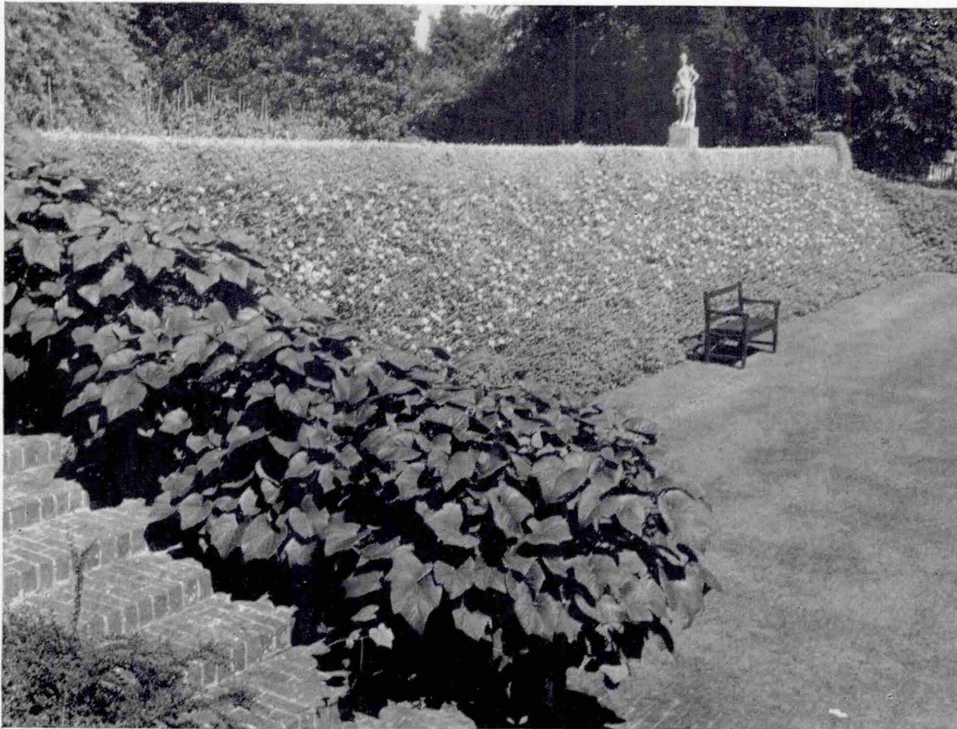
To the east of the central steps the long terrace leads through massive shrubberies. On the left a charming little 18th-century temple with four Tuscan columns, a frieze and pediment makes an ideal garden house. A portrait bust in porphyry and white marble of Poppaea, one of the unlucky wives of Nero, stands on a column in the middle of the back wall, the colour of the porphyry by happy accident echoing the deep rich tones of the *Rhus cotinus foliis purpureis* planted near it. Garden chairs of white wrought iron fit admirably into this decorative scheme, for they are light in effect, yet strong and comfortable.

Opposite the temple is a long grass vista which leads down the hillside through an avenue of old limes to an early-18th-century obelisk, which forms the focal point. It is small in scale, but this increases the feeling of length of the vista. Several side paths lead off among shrub plantings. Again there are great masses of purple rhus. Mr. Dutton has made excellent use of this fine shrub, combining it with the delicate pink of escallonias, the felted grey of *Senecio greyi* and the silver and lilac of *Buddleia alternifolia*. The last is a rewarding contrast of habit, colour and texture—the buddleia growing to a great size with its long graceful branches of grey foliage which are wreathed in June with myriads of fragrant pale violet flowers, over which white and yellow butterflies always seem to hover, and the rhus a mound of shimmering rich claret-coloured foliage with feathery heads of subtle mauve and silver, quite rightly earning it the name smoke tree.

Shrubs have been skilfully utilised in this garden, where they are the answer to the problems imposed by the scale of the garden and difficulties of the sloping terrain. Osmanthus,



THE POOL GARDEN WITH A SEAT FLANKED BY VASES OF HYDRANGEAS



STUDY IN PLANT TEXTURES: A VINE TRAINED OVER BRICKWORK AND HYPERICUM CARPETING A STEEP BANK

forsythias, diervillas, deutzias, viburnums, philadelphuses, lilacs and cotoneasters are all satisfactory on the limy soil, and it is a reassuring and welcome change to see what a fine garden can be made without resort to the usual and often overworked rhododendrons, azaleas, pierises and other ericaceous shrubs.

With so much green in the landscape white and the paler colours are particularly striking. Philadelphuses have been liberally used in wide variety, singles and doubles, some pure white, others creamy white or suffused with purple as in the case of the fragrant Belle Etoile. *Kolkwitzia amabilis* is outstanding with its peeling brown bark and flesh-pink flowers, urn-shaped and lemon-throated, in June. Later there are hydrangeas in variety, deciduous ceanothus, *Aesculus parviflora*, *Caryopteris clandonensis* and *Hibiscus syriacus* in various colour forms. Good use has been made of foliage plants, particularly *Viburnum davidii* and *V. rhytidophyllum*, the former being employed in mass plantings in the entrance court, where a low-spreading plant of

interesting bold texture was required. Eleagnuses including the evergreen *E. macrophylla* and *E. pungens aureo-variegata* and the deciduous *argentea* and *multiflora* are all superb plants whose merits have been fully recognised.

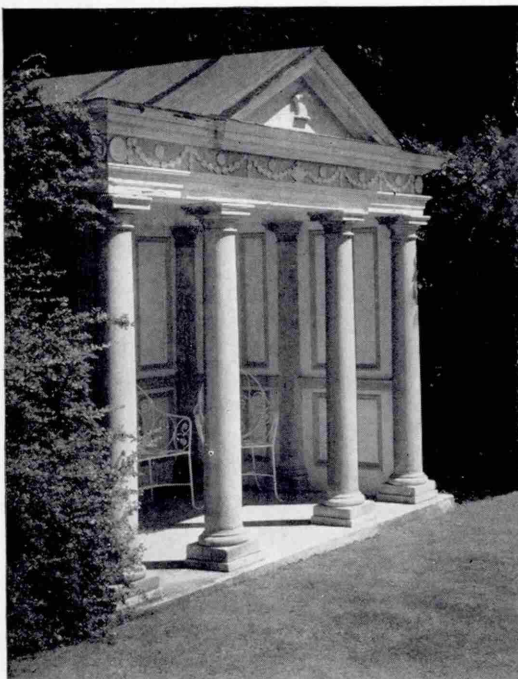
Beyond the temple, steps lead down to a large level lawn, at one time a tennis court. The sunny bank has been completely planted with *Hypericum calycinum*, which has made a perfect ground cover even on the very steep slope. Here is a lesson for observant gardeners with similar problems, for the mowing of such a bank is virtually impossible and clipping by hand time-consuming. A vine trained over the brickwork of the steps makes a striking contrast to the pale greens and yellows of the hypericums. At the top of the grass terrace is the statue of Diana, boldly silhouetted against a background of dark yew.

From it a path leads to the left, past the gate referred to previously, and into the dell, which is a remarkable gardening achievement

on the site of an unpromising old chalk-pit. Here there is a wonderful luxuriance, almost tropical in feeling, under a canopy of ash trees, limes, *Populus lasiocarpa*, with mixed evergreens in the background. *Rhus typhina laciniata*, Japanese maples, *Viburnum tomentosum Mariesii*, *Spiraea aruncus*, tree peonies including *Paeonia lutea*, *suffruticosa* and *delavayi* and even the acanthus-like leaves of the wild *Hevea giganteum* are superb in this setting, *Polygonum baldschuanicum* clammers through an old tree, flinging its curtains of white flowers over the branches, and that extraordinary tree *Aralia chinensis variegata* (so often misused) finds at last the right setting. The dell should be studied not only from the grassy floor but from the path which encircles the upper brink of the steep banks. Anyone who is gloomy about growing shrubs and trees on chalk will find comfort here.

From the dell a path leads through a glade to the drive, past the 19th-century church, which stands on the site of one of great antiquity, to the iris garden with its symmetrical lay-out, with rows of flowering cherries and borders. Lead urns and a seat add decorative notes to the cleverly planned design, the main axis of which is the continuation of the central flower-bordered path of the walled kitchen garden on the other side of the drive. One catches a glimpse through the metal gates of the flowering borders and the terminal decorative urn at the farthest end. Deep shrub borders with late-flowering shrubs have been planted outside the walls facing the iris garden. In all of this area the soil is a heavy clay, very different from that of the chalk-pit.

There are many lessons in gardening design to be learned from a study of Hinton Ampner. Not the least of these is the use of long vistas by the integration of several separate units of the design. Examples are the various parts of the long south terrace, the linking of the iris garden with the kitchen garden, and the sunken garden with the alley leading to the east gate. Another lesson is the correct choice and careful siting of garden ornament. Strange as the choice of words may seem, I always associate the words "restraint" and "elegance" with this fine formal garden, for it is beautifully conceived, laid out and maintained. It is low-keyed in colour, depending on trees and shrubs, topiary and lawns, and on walls and architectural features rather than on brilliant colour borders and parterre effects. It is, in fact, a well-designed modern garden, the dignified formality of which is a pleasant antidote to the numerous woodland gardens and over-sized cottage gardens which have become so prevalent in post-war Britain.



THE TUSCAN TEMPLE, AND (right) THE VIEW FROM IT DOWN AN OLD LIME AVENUE TO AN 18th-CENTURY OBELISK