

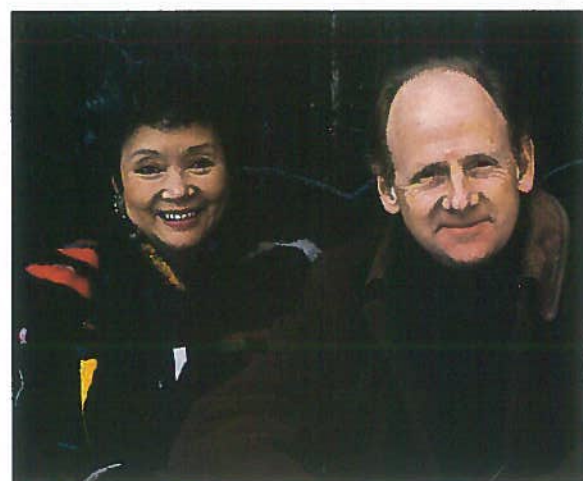
A lush garden scene with various flowers and dense foliage. In the foreground, there are large, light pink and white peonies, a tall red foxglove, and clusters of small white flowers. The background is filled with dense green bushes and trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

A FOUR SEASON

HOW ADRIENNE CLARKSON AND JOHN RALSTON SAUL CREATED A LITTLE HAVEN

GARDEN

IN TOWN. BY VERONICA CUSACK



I AM A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE. John Ralston Saul, the affable intellectual and cultural critic who includes an essay on René Descartes and a cure for dandruff in his philosophical dictionary *The Doubter's Companion*, is not the cause. However, Adrienne Clarkson, Saul's helpmate, presents a daunting prospect. She has found success as a publisher, Agent General for Ontario, a producer and the proud host of her own television show, and as I approach their Toronto home, the round vowels of Double Exposure's oft-repeated spoof roll through my brain: "I'm Adrienne Clarkson and you're not."

But there is no need for concern. I realize all will be well when Clarkson tells me she is a member of the Mycological Society of Toronto. She likes fungi. Her walks in the country are searches for the habitats of puffballs and morels, their secret places key to the understanding of zoning, exposure, shade and shadow. Could anyone be intimidated?

In a 25-foot-square plot of land behind a downtown Victorian house, she and Saul have created "a little wildness." Their green space gives no access to the laneway, presents no door into the parking pad; enclosed in cedar fencing, it is entire unto itself. The couple's numerous journeys to North Africa, the Far East and Europe are reflected in the design: aspects

The sensitive visual flow in this garden is matched only by the exquisite choice of plants. Above top, left to right: annual *Cleome* 'Purple Sensation'; peashrub, *Caragana arborescens pendula*; beech tree, *Fagus sylvatica*; lilac, *Syringa x hyacinthiflora*; katsura tree, *Cercidiphyllum*. Centre, left to right: *Phlox paniculata* 'Bressingham Pink'; coneflower, *Rudbeckia purpurea* syn. *Echinacea purpurea*; *Acidanthera bicolor murielae*; *Aster novae-angliae* 'Little Blue Boy'; *P. paniculata* 'Bressingham Pink' (there's also deep red in the same family). Blue spruce, *Picea pungens* add touch of interest for winter. Bottom left: *Anemone japonica* 'Honorine Jobert'; oriental lilies, *Lilium orientalis* 'Journey's End'; *Chrysanthemum grenadine*; *Iris reticulata*; tarragon, *Artemisia dranunculus*; annual four o'clocks, *Mirabilis jalapa*; Japanese cedar, *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Compressa'.



ABOVE LEFT: The garden in winter shows off its excellent bones: the euonymus on the rear fence gives a wonderful background for the beech trees, *Fagus sylvatica*. The shape of the katsura tree with the lilac standard and the rock spray cotoneaster balances the mass of planting on the opposite side of the garden. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The pond supports a small microclimate of its own. In October, it still looks good: in the rear, *Monarda didyma* 'Croftway Pink'; *Geranium endressii* 'Wargrave Pink,' spilling over the edge, accompanied by periwinkle, *Vinca minor*, and the silvery grey with white of *cerastium*.

of Islamic walled gardens, Japanese landscapes of composed serenity and English herbaceous borders—a multicultural city haven. “Gardeners in southern Ontario,” maintains Saul, “inevitably started out with a colonial mentality: The best way to do things was the British way. Today, thanks to the work of innovative landscape architects and nurseries, people are gathering plants and ideas from all over the world.”

Centering the garden, and demonstrating his point, is a wooden Thai monk standing beneath the branches of an English beech, pruned to grow only to the right and arrested at a height of 10 feet. Between them, a Japanese fountain flows over three levels into a small circular pool. This pool and the narrow cobblestone paths that divide the tiny plot into tinier quarters were laid out by landscape architect Neil Turnbull in 1979. By 1987, Clarkson and Saul had decided to eschew their shrubs and bedding plants in order to create and maintain a perennial garden that reflected their travels and their philosophies. Neither had any real horticultural knowledge, but both came from families of gardeners and both possessed a love of all growing things—well, most of them, although impatiens, zinnias and dahlias do give some concern (Saul describes zinnias as “the essence of ugliness”).

Five years earlier, Clarkson had been named Agent General for Ontario in France. During her stay in Paris, she and Saul frequently visited the great gardens of England, to be entranced by the allium and huge drifts of Oriental poppies, and repelled by the monstrous rhododendrons of Stourhead. They gathered knowledge and concepts, and resolved to become masters of their own small estate. Turnbull’s ordered design remained, but its denizens would change. The garden’s focal point, the teak Buddhist monk, slowly rots away, reflecting the Asian belief that nothing is a permanent possession; everything must one day return into the earth.

Saul is the planter and Clarkson the planner. In winter, she reads catalogues—never buying by mail, just pillaging ideas. “I don’t look at anything that won’t survive this microclimate,” she says. “When I am dead, you will find Zone 6a lying in my heart, as Calais did in Mary Tudor’s.” Saul plants her choices, creating undulating waves of colour. “Each section has its own little height,” he explains, “so that we see the architectural shaping, but when the flowers die back there should be something to replace them. That’s the challenge—always something in every area.”

May until November presents continuous bloom. In June, after the carpet of faded forget-me-nots has been removed,



ABOVE LEFT: The spirit house shows itself in winter when the climbing hydrangea, *Hydrangea petiolaris*, has shed its leaves.

ABOVE RIGHT: Peonies from Clarkson's mother's garden and foxgloves make a small but stunning detail.

pink and white peonies are the glory of the garden and the ruffled apricot petals of Siberian irises reach across the pool. By July, Asiatic lilies and hemerocallis reshape the site and herald white phlox and the blues of campanulas, balloon flowers and veronica. Japanese anemones glow in the August twilight, their pale quatrefoil flowers dancing over mounds of deeply divided dark-green leaves. Bee balm, aster and purple obedients open slowly through the late summer. Herbs grow throughout the garden, wherever their foliage will complement the neighbours, and carefully selected annuals fill any holes in the patchwork. Narrow-petaled cleomes in shades of pink and white hide the winterkill, and fragrant four o' clocks, their seeds planted at two-week intervals, bloom until frost, complemented by *Acidanthera* and *A. murielae* (summer bulbs).

To Saul and Clarkson a 10 per cent loss to the ravages of winter is considered acceptable—though some things still produce a cry of despair. “The *Lychnis coronaria* died and we couldn't believe it,” wails Clarkson. “We kept wandering out there and staring at this bare patch. The thing is supposed to be unkillable.” Other plants that present a serious risk are made acceptable by their glory, and Clarkson's Zone 6a rule is broken—as all good rules should be, occasionally. Their *Gaura lindheimeri*, for

instance, struggled at the absolute limit of its zoning. A native of the southern United States, it produces arching racemes of small white flowers that bloom from August to mid-November. It will survive in Toronto only in the most hospitable of microclimates. “Plants do respond to personal attention,” declares Clarkson. “I have conversations with them and demand ‘Now come on, why are you doing that?’” In the end, the gaura wasn't listening, but Clarkson and Saul will try again.

When a plant needs to be replaced or moved, Saul takes the opportunity to dig at least two feet down to the clay bed. He lays a drainage base of rock and gravel, and supplements the soil with lashings of sheep manure before installing the new tenant. “A lot of traditional rules,” he says, “are based on English rules that have been only vaguely modified for this country. Ours is a much more violent climate than that of northern Europe; we should be thinking of things in very different ways. Transplanting times, for instance. I'm sure we can move things around much more than the experts say.”

Thoughts of rules segue into thoughts of pruning, a subject on which Saul, pruner of the beech, can expound at length. Three espaliered fruit trees, two pear and an apple, decorate one end of the garden fence. They need very special care. “I

have never been able to understand what the books mean when they tell you to prune in the spring. This never made any sense to me. The tree has already decided it's going to grow three feet and won't be stopped because you cut it. Wait until that growth has occurred and then prune it. The books seem to be based on European patterns. There, things have been growing since January."

His knowledge, like Clarkson's, comes from extensive reading and continuous observation. Clarkson has memorized the botanical names of plants so she can easily converse with gardeners throughout the world. North American four o'clocks are known as *belles de nuit* in France; their proper Latin name, *Mirabilis*, needs no translation. The couple also learns from listening to the lore of nursery-keepers and the savvy of neighbours.

"We do all our own maintenance: planting, picking slugs, deadheading," says Clarkson. "It's the only way to really understand the garden—it is our shape and our relationship. Today, we can definitely call ourselves gardeners because of the work we do and the knowledge we have gathered. And just as we should not remain static in our own lives, just as we should look to see what can be improved, so a garden is a growing thing, it must change and shift." Knowledge is the key: of self and of plants. ■

The serenity of the garden in winter is enhanced by the beautifully pruned and espaliered pear. **OPPOSITE:** The garden in autumn:

Cosmos, *Cosmos bipinnatus*, dominates the Russian sage, *Perovskia atriplicifolia*, on the left of the beech tree. On the right: snakeroot, *Cimicifuga simplex*, the smaller in-front of *C. simplex* 'White Pearl'; Obedient plant, *Physostegia*; annual candytuft, *Iberis umbellata*, which self-seeds prettily; *Geranium endressii* 'Wargrave Pink'; *Artemisia ludoviciana* 'Silver Queen'; *Heuchera micrantha* and peach leaf bellflower, *Campanula persicifolia*.



