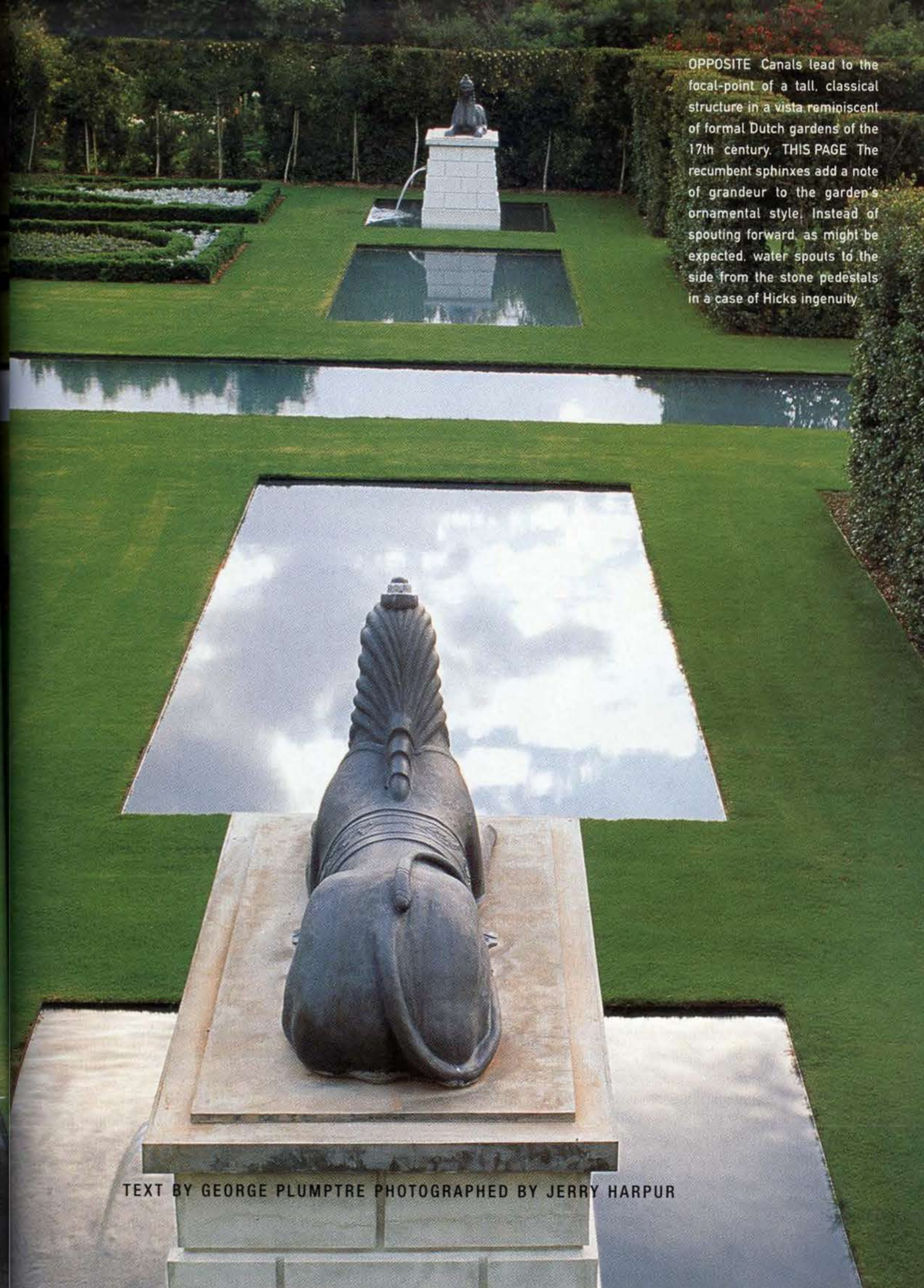




LATERAL THINKING

INGENIOUS FORMAL SYMMETRY CONTRIBUTES TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS JOHANNESBURG GARDEN DESIGNED BY THE LATE DAVID HICKS



OPPOSITE Canals lead to the focal-point of a tall, classical structure in a vista reminiscent of formal Dutch gardens of the 17th century. THIS PAGE The recumbent sphinxes add a note of grandeur to the garden's ornamental style. Instead of spouting forward, as might be expected, water spouts to the side from the stone pedestals in a case of Hicks ingenuity.

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Looking down from the house the masterly composition of the garden's adjoining compartments into an harmonious whole can be fully appreciated

One of the best characteristics of the contemporary garden is a bold enthusiasm for the combination of very different gardening styles. Most of us do not have the space to go ahead on a large scale, but for those who do, the results can be exciting, as exemplified in this Johannesburg garden. Four years ago,

having completed substantial work on her house, the owner turned her attention to the garden. Development in two stages has given her two gardens which are entirely individual yet complementary.

The creation of the main area closest to the house came first and has a fascinating history. The determination to have an 'English' garden and a chance conversation with a gardening

friend from Cape Town led the owner to contact the celebrated designer David Hicks. She could not have expected the enthusiasm of his response: on being asked when he could make the trip from London to Johannesburg, he replied, 'How about next weekend?'

The area of the garden that Hicks was to redesign is overlooked by the front of the house. Today, the immaculate formality belies the

engineering work required for the new design. Originally, the ground sloped sharply from right to left so the first task was to level the site. After removing truck loads of soil, the granite bedrock had to be dynamited to complete the preparation. It is entirely suitable that following excavations recalling the creation of some hill-side Italian Renaissance garden, the David Hicks design imposed a classical symmetry

that is both timeless and suitable for a garden site anywhere in the world.

The essential framework of the design is the unity between the house, the long terrace in front and the large, flat, rectangular area that both house and terrace overlook. In the garden area, Hicks incorporated trees, water canals, ornaments and different areas of planting in a design that has variety yet remains uncluttered.

The framework of the garden is provided by the formal water feature. The main canal stretches away from the house with smaller ones at right-angles to it. The clipped hedges and trees emphasise the geometric lines and at the same time create compartments. Decorating the canals in classical style are sphinxes and a lion spouting water. These were copied and cast from the English originals ▶



in KwaZulu-Natal. Similarly, the central vista from the house and terrace ends in a gazebo, the spartan elegance of which typifies David Hicks' work.

Clipped evergreens are a mainstay of formal gardening and here Hicks showed the luxury of a wider planting range than would be practical in the colder climes of his native Britain. From low box, myrtle and *Ugni molinae* the range of clipped evergreens used includes viburnum, *Euonymus japonicus* 'Microphyllus', *Prunus laurocerasus* (cherry laurel) and individual *Cinnamomum camphora* clipped into lollipops.

Seasonal planting in the pattern of formal beds below the terrace changes from ornamental kale and *Ajuga reptans* 'Catlin's Giant' with purple foliage and blue flowers, to silver-leaved *Cineraria maritima* (or *Senecio maritimus*) 'Silver Dust'.

Given the strict formality that the garden appears to have, the joy for the visitor is the discovery of the component areas hidden behind clipped hedges: the rose garden planted with David Austin's English shrub and climbing roses, the rose walk with yellow-flowered climbers trained over arches, the vegetable

garden without which no David Hicks garden is complete, the orchard and meadow lawn.

This is a garden for all seasons, as rewarding on a winter's day as it is cool and composed at the height of summer. It emphasises the ground rule that Hicks learnt from great designers in history: a strong overall design allows the parts of a garden to fit together in total harmony. And it certainly achieves more than half of the owner's original desire, 'to have two gardens'. Not only did David Hicks give her *one*, but that has proved a highly compatible companion to the other. ■

ABOVE The view towards the house along the main canal demonstrates the classical simplicity of the composition of water, grass and clipped hedges. Pine trees and purple-flowered jacarandas frame the background **OPPOSITE, ABOVE** Camphor trees clipped into lollipops are underplanted with a carpet of blue, summer-flowering phlox and extend the garden's symmetry to the main terrace **OPPOSITE, BELOW** The style of planting enriches the overall formality. Metal arches, draped with climbing roses, lead to the point where the broad gravel paths meet at a sundial, around which white-flowered 'Climbing Iceberg' roses tumble over obelisks

