

Stephen Baughan of Aston Pottery near Bampton in Oxfordshire has the energy of 10 men. He regularly works 16-hour days and divides his time between making hand-decorated ceramics and creating a wow-factor garden. He says that his garden is there to please visitors to the pottery, although I think it might be a personal passion that just happens to please the visitors as well.

When he talks about planting up a long border, though, he has drawn out a plan as meticulous as any of the pottery's stencilled designs. He personally ordered the hundreds of plants required, cleared the land, and then wrestled them into position according to his coloured-in blueprint. He was assisted by a single helper, a large measure of enthusiasm and the odd cake snatched from the tea room.

The garden renovation started five years ago, and in 2012 – the pottery's 21st anniversary – the garden was in the news when David Cameron, accompanied by the Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, had tea with local schoolchildren and cut the ribbon leading to the new Jubilee Walk.

Its colour theme contains some green and purple – to match the pottery logo – and 'Purple Sensation' alliums are followed by purple dahlias and asters to keep the theme going for months.

The Hot Bank, a border containing yellows, reds and oranges, sweeps up and around the summerhouse, flanked by a curved copper beech hedge that eventually will look like a frame around a photo. And there are always pots galore. In spring, tulips major, to be followed by agapanthus and salvias.

The idea is that visitors have tea or lunch, then buy something and enjoy a creative stroll around the garden. They come back repeatedly to enjoy a garden that remains colourful until November.

This rural pottery employs 30 people. Today, two women are busy wielding thickly bristled stencil brushes to make the colours on a plate look entirely natural. Bluebells and cowslips take shape slowly as each stencil, neatly numbered, is deftly applied. This afternoon a range for Liberty of London, based on its fabrics, is keeping everyone busy. Mostly, though, Aston Pottery's 180 designs are sold in its own shop, or other specialist outlets.

One of the most popular designs is the Strawberry Thief, based on a William Morris fabric, and Aston lies only seven miles from Kelmscott, once Morris's country home. Morris championed handmade products, rather than mass-produced cheapies, and that drives Stephen Baughan, too. He produces artisan-made pottery to cherish in an age when



Pot spot: white agapanthus 'Queen Mother' with eucomis 'Sparkling Burgundy'; Stephen Baughan, below



Anatomy of a late-summer border

• The Jubilee Walk at Aston Pottery (above), with borders roughly three metres wide, was inspired by a border of annuals and dahlias at Nymans in West Sussex. Hornbeams, which will eventually be pleached, run along each side with a spine of tall grasses.

• These include the ramrod-straight *Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster', the shorter feathery *Calamagrostis brachytricha*, the beaded *Panicum virgatum* 'Warrior' and airier *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *arundinacea* 'Bergfreund'. These add a ripple of movement from June onwards and a russet-brown presence through autumn and winter. A shorter molinia, 'Moorhexe', dissects the spine of taller grasses at right angles, creating planting bays for strong colour.

• The dahlia border at the National Trust's Biddulph Grange in Staffordshire prompted Stephen to acquire lots of cuttings from the National Dahlia Collection. He plants dahlias in pots and in a dedicated bed, because they provide weeks of flower from July until late summer.

• Stephen particularly loves the collarettes – single dahlias with an inner ruff. "I admire the sheer complexity of the flower and the detail," he says. 'Teesbrooke Red Eye', a lilac collarette with a burnished red middle, is a personal favourite. "I absolutely adore the cactus-flowered 'Weston Spanish Dancer', too, a spiky mixture of orange and yellow," he says.

• In July and August, red and orange dahlias highlight blocks of blue agapanthus, always planted in fives. They include 'Blue Triumphantor', 'Torbay', 'Sky', 'Cobalt Blue' and 'Headbourne Hybrids'. "When you look along the path, they flop all over the ground, breaking up the blocks of dahlias," says Stephen.

• As the agapanthus fade, the asters, planted in groups of three at the front of the border, take over. Stephen uses blocks of *Aster x frikartii* 'Wunder von Stäfa', a floppy, drought-tolerant aster that performs from July onwards. Shorter asters include *A. novi-belgii* 'Waterperry', a pink-mauve; the blue *A. x herveyi* 'Twilight', the aptly named *A. novae-angliae* 'Purple Dome' and the fragile-looking *A. amellus* 'Veilchenkönigin'.

• Penstemons last until November, as do many of the salvias planted in pots.

A potter casts a late season spell

A combination of hand-decorated ceramics and inspired planting create magic at this rural pottery, says Val Bourne

most independent potteries have been scooped up by the giants who then get everything made in China, Portugal or Sri Lanka.

Like Morris, Stephen also has a wife named Jane, with whom he works (she doesn't have flowing auburn locks or a passion for Rossetti). No one could mistake Jane Baughan for anything but artistic because she is so fashionably flamboyant. Her first design, Wild Clematis, sketched in 1991, was inspired by a plant on the village's post office wall.

It's still among Aston's top-five designs, but it was



Reader offer

• Buy 25 Allium 'Purple Sensation' for £10.99, or 50 for £21.98 and receive 25 free. Orders to Telegraph Garden, Dept TL251, 14 Hadfield Street, Old Trafford M16 9FG. Cheques/postal orders payable to Telegraph Garden. Or call 0844 375 9973, ref TL251, or visit garden shop.telegraph.co.uk/offers. UK addresses only. 6cm module plants. 21 days delivery.

immediately copied and mass produced more cheaply. It isn't easy being in the world of ceramics.

Jane isn't a gardener, but Stephen has been hands-on since the age of five, at first helping his father on a half-acre vegetable plot before taking it over at the age of nine. "When dad rotavated the plot, it was like Christmas; soon after a box of Dobies seeds would arrive. It was so exciting seeing all those packets and I used to grow all our vegetables. Growing things was just what I did and I always painted, too, on large pieces of hardboard. What I do now is what I've always done, but I've had to wait to do the gardening bit again, because I didn't have enough time. The pottery took over.

There's so much I want to get done. I want to run a successful ceramics company, to play the classical guitar really well and to have an outstanding garden."

When there's free time, the couple visit equally flamboyant and stylish gardens around the country that include Graham Robeson's and Alan Gray's East Ruston Old Vicarage in Norfolk. Stephen isn't interested in copying designs, though, he simply looks for good plants and records them in his notebook. The double purple and green Parent's Walk at the National Trust's Buscot Park is another regular place of pilgrimage, because it's so close.

"The border of annuals and dahlias at Nymans has also inspired me. It's packed with plants, despite being only two or three metres wide.

"Gardening is good therapy because I can do what I like. I haven't an accountant, or a bank manager to answer to, and I don't have to get along with a work force. It's

just me and the plants."

That's probably the appeal of gardening for most of us. It offers a kind of creative freedom lacking in other areas of life.

The garden is now influencing the designs on the pottery – more and more flowers are appearing and proving popular with the public.

The blue agapanthus range (shown inset left) sells out all the time and more designs are in the pipeline. I rather think the garden will be creeping out into the field a little farther every year, but, as Stephen says, "it's a very healthy crossover between pottery and gardening".

• Aston Pottery, The Stables, Kingsway Farm, Aston, Oxfordshire (01993 852031; astonpottery.co.uk).
• The National Dahlia Collection (07879 337714; national-dahlia-collection.co.uk).



Welcome To Aston Pottery And Gardens.

The Great Perennial Border: Full of:-
 Eupatorium, Rudbeckia, Solidago, Helianthus, Verbena, Phlox, Helenium, Penstemon, Lobelia, Sedum, Dianthus, Veronicastrum.

Home back 6000
 and see in April
 and see in April

The Garden Pipes
 128 Dillies

Notes On The Pottery:-

1. We have been producing Pottery here for 34 Years. See us in Liberty of London.
2. We opened our first Shop in 1996 and built and opened our second Shop and Cafe in 2008.
3. We started the Gardens in 2010 and still developing and going strong.
4. We cook all our Sakes and Quiche on site - for which we are more famous than our Gardens - (takes some believing!)
5. Voted one of the top 20 shops in Britain in 2012:-
 Come back and visit us at Christmas to see our themed Christmas trees to totally inspire you.

The Annual Border: Full of:-
 Sunflowers, Cornflowers, Marigolds, Agapanthus, Salvia, Lavender, Petunias, Fuchsias, Impatiens, Begonias, Ageratum, Perilla, Aster, Redbeet, Heliothis, Nicotiana, Tithonia, Penicillium, Fuchsias, Salvia, Marigolds, Agapanthus, Salvia, Lavender, Petunias, Fuchsias, Impatiens, Begonias, Ageratum, Perilla, Aster, Redbeet, Heliothis, Nicotiana, Tithonia.

The Jubilee Walkway: Opened by David Cameron in 2012
 Over 2,000 plants come together to form a continuous show of colour from the Alliums of May to the Nemeses of November. Look on our Garden all 12 months of the year.

Himalayan Border:
 Nepenthes, Drosera, Dionaea

Cafe for the BEST Quiche and Cake you will ever taste.

THE GARDENING TEAM.

- Patrick:- Awesome Digger.
- Carolyn:- Hard Weeder & extraordinary.
- Maria:- Needs A Very Useful Spade.
- Adam:- Very Useful With A Hoe.
- Stephen:- Tries to keep it All Together.
- Nikki:- Did This Beautiful Illustration

Please Note:- We are all actually the Pottery Workers;
 The Garden is our part time job.

Helianthus, Phlox, Monarda, Verbena, Salvia, Gaura, Echinacea, Cosmos, Nicotiana, Tithonia, Penicillium, Fuchsias, Salvia, Marigolds, Agapanthus, Salvia, Lavender, Petunias, Fuchsias, Impatiens, Begonias, Ageratum, Perilla, Aster, Redbeet, Heliothis, Nicotiana, Tithonia.

