



**GREEN PLAYGROUND** Lucy's daughters Flori and Tilly enjoy the beautiful garden she has created at Rushbrooke

**"I**t's got to go, too ugly." Gardener Lucy Redman is exasperated, not by the misplacement of a plant in her garden, but by the audacity of one of her builders – "They're lovely, fantastic," she's quick to insist – to put an ordinary lampshade on the bathroom ceiling.

From the outside, you'd be forgiven for expecting the dilute colours of shabby chic-dom to pervade this pretty, thatched Suffolk cottage, and the guest room that Lucy is busy creating.

But those colours would be predictable, a bit boring and you would be wrong. What is emerging from the dust of husband Dominic's saw and the sweep of Lucy's paintbrush is a flamboyant collision of intense Moroccan blues, rich yellows, sea greens, luxurious velvet curtains and woven throws, perforated silvered lamps that send pinprick shards of light across the room – and an alabaster wall sculpture of the most enormous, sexy lips.

"Fabulous, aren't they," says Lucy.

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# Gardening for fun

Tessa Allingham goes for a stroll in the fantastic, quirky garden of Suffolk plantswoman Lucy Redman

"Hope they don't fall, could be an awful accident!" The thought tips her into gales of laughter, and you get the feeling the lips will stay put and puckered.

It's a second room for the couple's fledgling B&B business – the first is a similarly exotic homage to India – and both are an extension of Lucy who is a warm, and at the time of writing, purple-haired whirlwind. She appears to talk,

laugh and have several strands of conversation at the same time, twisting and weaving, and ultimately making perfect sense, a bit like some of the features in her garden – the copper beech spiral, or the woven metal Celtic racetrack, or the log stepping stones that meander through a carpet of hellebores.

It is in this profusion of a garden surrounding the couple's 1930s cottage ▶





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which still sends Lucy into raptures. "May 12, 2008 is engraved on my mind! If Roy Lancaster is the god of gardening, she's the goddess. And to think I'm on kissing terms with her, my hero . . ."

What marks her heroes out, Lucy says, is that they are true plants-people. "I want to be known as a plantswoman," she adds. The care and knowledge that's gone into her scheme at Rushbrooke would suggest that she could already comfortably lay claim to such a title. Uncommon plants of Asian origin – many choices inspired by Lancaster's influential book *Travels in China: a Plantsman's Paradise* – announce the garden. In spring, the tiny dark-yellow flowers of *lindera obtusiloba* contrast with the pink-tinged leaves of a *Koelreuteria paniculata fastigiata* or Golden Rain tree, and the arching leaves of *disporopsis pernyi*, a form of Solomon's Seal.

Elsewhere, she likes to put the familiar next to the specialist. In the long borders

## A good story

Dominic Watts's extraordinary metalwork is dotted throughout the garden. It's always been a creative passion of his but, since being made redundant last year from his job managing the Rushbrooke Estate, he has turned interest into commerce and launched Metallurgi. He now designs and makes bespoke metal garden sculpture such as well as more practical metal lawn edging, fencing and raised beds. "I love the contrast of metal and plant life," says Dom, who splits his time between metalworking and advising farmers around the UK on organic and conservation issues. "It brings a different dimension to a garden, a structure. And it will outlast most plants!"



► that Lucy really expresses her personality. The garden is not big – barely three quarters of an acre – but it's packed and interesting and full of life. It's a garden where Lucy the plantswoman, teacher (she helps local primary schools to use outdoor space as a classroom), garden designer and writer demonstrates what she calls her "maximalist" style of gardening, and where Lucy the mother of Tilly, 11, and Flori, nine, has created a playground to inspire and entertain.

"The whole idea is to be original, quirky, never boring," she says. "Gardens that are too straight and perfect leave me cold. I want people to relate to my garden, feel they could have a go themselves, maybe do it better!"

Visitors are regular from April to September, either through the National Gardens Scheme or the Gardeners' Friday route which links four fabulous and very different local gardens (Fuller's Mill, Wyken Hall and the Walled Garden at Langham Hall). "It can be stressful getting the garden ready but it's such a pleasure to show people round. I make sure visitors don't miss a thing." Of course there was not a weed in sight when Beth Chatto paid a visit, the memory of

**PRETTY AS A PICTURE** Above; Lucy's Suffolk cottage. Right; a striking sculpture made by Lucy. Above right; The Walking Man in the flower beds and inset; a woven grass-covered seat under an apple tree







which lead from the Asian specialities towards a very English apple tree encircled with her husband's woven metal turf seat, Photinia 'Red Robin' stands next to an unusual sambucus linearis. Round the back of the house a fabulous Holboellia latifolia scrambles vigorously over the porch, sending out its green-white scented spring flowers, next to a robust jasminum mesnyi with its semi-double bright yellow blooms. "That one's special – Beth Chatto admired it hugely!"

Planting is planned to provide year-round interest and minimal fuss. "I'm a great believer in successional planting," says Lucy. "It's cleverer than just filling in the gaps with bedding, and easier to manage." At the time of Suffolk Magazine's visit, shy crocuses were giving tiny splashes of deep purple on the stone parterre, to be followed soon by delicate snake's head fritillaries. Scented narcissus 'Paper White' were ready to line up along the pergola to be followed by legions of giant purple allium 'Globemaster' in May. "The heads are as big as tennis balls, it's my psychedelic Wimbledon!" Over the

pergola, the cottage garden favourites, wisteria, then passion flower, promise abundant summer shade.

Grasses get a lot of space. Black weatherboarding provides a suitably strong backdrop for stately miscanthus 'Cosmopolitan' on the so-called Trampoline Border ("I had to disguise it somehow!") while elsewhere eryngium giganteum 'Miss Willmott's Ghost' and Spartina alterniflora give shape, sound and movement.

- Lucy's garden is dotted with intriguing metal sculptures too, giving a dramatic contrast with the plant life. A giant 10' terracotta vessel by Suffolk sculptor Maryanne Nicholls heralds the garden and another Nicholls' piece, the Walking Man, strides through drifts of sedum, alliums and, in season, wafting molinia. Dennis the lawnmower, well past his grass-cutting days, rests among the gentlest of wild flowers often with Mittens the tabby for company, and a copper seed pod by local sculptor, Cary Norman, gives interest to the vegetable patch. A metal urn by Dom, woven with spaghetti-like



strands of rusted metal is a focal point at the end of the Agapanthus Walk, while, most Lucy-esque of all perhaps, is the fire pit by Halesworth-based Fantastical Contraptions. "Flori calls it a 'spidercue'. It's a barbecue or fire pit in the shape of a spider. I love it!"

Crazy? Maybe. But this is a garden and Lucy is a plantswoman that you leave with a smile on your face. **SM**

■ The garden is open every Friday, 10am-5pm from April to end September. Lucy runs garden design courses throughout the year, and welcomes private commissions. Go to [www.lucyredman.co.uk](http://www.lucyredman.co.uk) for more information.

■ Two double rooms are available at £80 per night B&B. Call 01284 386250.