

Merlin 636



Armeria species on Cape St. Vincent

PGG Trainee Algarve Tour with Mediterranean Gardening Association Portugal - 28/03/15 - 04/04/15

Report for the Merlin Trust by Robert Burstow

Introduction

The circumstances that led to the manifestation and realisation of this trip were quite coincidental and opportunistic, truth be told. Me and four other Professional Gardeners Guild Trainees (Becky Cross, Jo Huckvale, Dagmar Mueller and John Gould) were set to travel to Sintra - in the Greater Lisbon region of Central Portugal - for a weeks work placement in the gardens of Monserrate (Part of the famed Parques de Sintra Natural Park and UNESCO Heritage Site) when I mention to John Humphris (PGG President) in passing that I was thinking of extending my trip to maximise the opportunity if he didn't mind me flying back at a later date. As it would transpire, John would be able to put me in contact with someone from the Mediterranean Garden Society (Rosie Peddle, who he met through Gerald Luckhurst, Landscape Architect for Parques de Sintra) who was interested in receiving students for work placements and tours of the Algarve. Rosie having set up, with others, the Mediterranean Gardening Association Portugal (MGAP), a branch of the Society that would allow them to focus attention on their aspirations in Portugal, which I will discuss later.

Extending our trip and travelling different parts of the country would offer us a much better and more rounded experience of the endemic horticultural discipline, landscape, climate and wildlife flora etc. of Portugal and allow a degree of critical comparison which we would otherwise not have. With this being my first exclusive horticultural study trip so to speak, it seemed like an opportunity too good to miss. Likewise, it would also a brilliant opportunity to establish a connection and dialogue between MGAP and the PGG that will hopefully prove beneficial to both parties in the future.

My aspirations for this trip were varied and quite pragmatic in personal relevance and experience:

- To compare the climate, landscape and wildlife of the Algarve with that of Sintra (Another region with fascinating local variations in climate, habitats and wildlife).
- To experience and gain a better appreciation for the prominent Mediterranean climate and its endemic flora in its proper and preferred situation.
- To diversify my horticultural experiences through replicating and experiencing wildflower hunting in areas famous for rich diversity and abundance of wild flora.
- To continue discovering and exploring the relevance horticulture has in the contemporary setting through garden tours, visits and analysis.
- To open a dialogue between my fellow trainees and our various hosts over our experiences and trips.

Climate

Whilst it is arguably impractical and flawed to compare a small municipality and microclimate such as Sintra to a much larger and varied province like the Algarve, there may be some benefit in doing so for the purposes of this expedition to examine and study the diversity, variations and effects of these different climates and habitats on wildlife flora and fauna. Naturally, it would be prudent and of more benefit to discuss and compare the local microclimates and individual habitats we visited throughout our trip and where possible I shall do so. Likewise, there are many other important and influential factors that affect ecosystems beyond climatic conditions, such as soil types, exposure and shelter, aspect, orientation and altitude, and these also need to be taken into consideration at the same time.

Nevertheless, both the Algarve and Sintra, like much of coastal Portugal, exist under the inescapable influence of the Atlantic Ocean and experience warm temperate oceanic climates comparable to the Mediterranean (Despite their geographical differences) with mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers generally speaking. Average temperatures across both regions vary between 4 - 15° in Winter to 20 - 30°+ in Summer, with extremely rare instances of frost and a short growing season between Autumn and Spring when temperatures are less crippling and rainfall is more bountiful. This creates a Spring display unlike any other during the early months of the year and coincided well with our planned visit.

However, there exists a favourable microclimate around the coastal mountains and valleys of Sintra which, despite coastal winds, often traps moisture in dense, persistent cloud cover and helps create warm, damp, humid maritime weather beneath the canopy of the forests. The resultant climate is particularly amenable and favourable for the cultivation of a diverse range of geographical species and is quite dissimilar to the unprotected coastal Litoral of the Algarve further South, for instance, where the exposed cliffs of Cape St. Vincent and the South-West Alentejo are rugged and windswept, and only hardy and adaptive natives can survive.

The evolutionary effects of this climate on indigenous plant life and soil culture are self-evident and manifold, which this report should hopefully make clear, with soils generally low in humus and biological activity, and susceptible to erosion and degradation amongst other things. Typical perennial vegetation has evolved summer dormancy and geophytic habits or become evergreen and sclerophyllous to survive the seasonal arid heat. Likewise annual and herbaceous habits have also become localised, isolated and seasonal with variations in microclimatic conditions.

Itinerary

The original itinerary as submitted to the Merlin Trust and planned with Rosie prior to departure and can be abridged as follows:

Sat 28/03/15 –

Arrive in Algarve from Lisbon and travel to Quinta da Figueirinha for welcome and introduction to Mediterranean Garden Association Portugal (MGAP) with Board Member, Dr Gerhard Zabel, followed by tour of the Quinta, including nursery and discussion and preview of the areas for work later in the week.

Sun 29/03/15 –

Meet with Rosie Peddle (MGAP) at the Quinta. Opportunity to visit the local historic town of Silves, and its Moorish castle with Islamic inspired gardens recently restored by a local Landscape architect well known for incorporating native plants. Evening spent at Quinta library for illustrated talk on Algarve gardening conditions, soil types and basic geology given by Rosie Peddle, followed by an MGAP meeting with local members and short presentations from trainees on their own areas of interest in horticulture and opportunities for questions from both parties.

Mon 30/03/15 –

Guided wildflower walks of the Rio de Algibre and Rocha da Pena with Rosie.

Tues 31/03/15 –

Garden and nursery tours with Marilyn Medina Ribeiro visiting locally important gardens in Lagos and Almancil, Central Algarve, some of which she maintains (With and without irrigation.) and discussions on her experiences working in the Algarve since 2008.

Weds 01/04/15–

Work placement in new native plant garden at Quinta, supervised by Dr Zabel.

Thurs 02/04/15 -

Work placement with Marilyn Medina Ribeiro; planting and maintenance of native plant gardens in Mediterranean climates.

Fri 03/04/15 -

Garden/nursery visits in Eastern Algarve, including the garden of Rosie and Rob Peddle (Mixed planting and with biological swimming pond.), specialist and larger wholesale nurseries and an organic farm producing award winning olive oils. Also trips to nationally registered trees (650 year old *Ceratonia siliqua*, veteran *Olea europaea* (Reputed to be 1,000+ years old and an ancient native *Quercus ilex*.)

Sat 04/04/15–

Visit to Natura Mediterranean Plant Nursery in Almancil (And associated Porches site specialising in transplanting mature olive trees.), and the garden of owner, Jean-Claude Defrance, near Carvoeiro (Depending on flight times back; can be done on the way to the airport in Faro.).

*There will also be the opportunity in the evenings to view online illustrated presentations from renowned nurseryman Olivier Filippi on lawn alternatives, Mediterranean ecological authority Dr Oliver Rackham, Mediterranean bulb expert John Fielding and Dr Elizabete Marchante of Coimbra University on Invasive Plants in Portugal.

Diary

Inevitably circumstances can change and adjustments are necessary but Rosie graciously presented us with options allowing us to tailor our trips and experiences to our preferences, ideals and time constraints. Whilst our main targets and objectives were realised - with only a few necessary amendments to the itinerary -, as with planning for any such trip that tries to achieve much in a relatively short period of time whilst travelling over large areas, we unfortunately struggled to a degree with timing visits during some of the busier days.

Either way, how events transpired and unrolled are as follows, and studies, events and analysis will be discussed further in separate sections.

Sat 28/03/15 -

Travelled by train to Poco Barreto via Tunes (From Lisbon) where Gerhard (Dr. Zabel) greeted and showed us to the Quinta da Figueirinha (Our accommodation and base for the week) East of the historic town of Silves.

A very warm welcome was received from Gerhard and his wife, and we were treated to a brief tour of the Citrus groves and botanical tree collection before dinner, where discussions continued on the projects, aspirations and future of the Quinta amongst many other topics. Gerhard enlightened us on his history and interest in various branches relating to horticulture, the shift of focus away from agriculture towards botanical interests and conservation, his various trials relating to fire and drought resistance in semi-arid habitats and his desire for the Quinta to evolve into a space for networking like and open-minded individuals of all disciplines. The mood and criteria were firmly set for the week ahead!

Weather was hot and sunny, and welcoming after the mixed weather further North in Sintra.

Sunday 29/03/15

On Sunday Rosie met us at the Quinta with fellow MGAP member and freelance gardener Theresa Schuva to introduce and familiarise us with the group, the Algarve climate and wildlife, and to plan for the coming week.

In the afternoon we took a small tour of the exotic fruit collection and made an informal wildflower tour around the farm discovering many healthy endemic populations thriving through natural regeneration of the semi-disturbed, reclaimed agricultural land, whilst heading towards the area designated for the new educational native botanic garden.

In the evening Rosie and Theresa took us through slideshow presentations outlining the basic geography and geology of the Algarve, soil types, climate and their interaction with native wildlife as well as wildflower presentations by John Fielding (Originally for MGAP).

Weather was hot, sunny and dry.

Monday 30/03/15 -

Left the Quinta early to meet Rosie - who lent us a vehicle for transport - at the Rocha da Pena Natural Park in the morning for a wildflower tour before the heat of the midday sun. I shall discuss our findings in more depth later in a separate section but breaking over the midday heat, we made a brief tour of nearby Barrocal Cork Oak woodlands, witnessing the aftermath of wildfires, enroute to Sao Bras for a small veteran tree tour of registered *Quercus ilex* subsp. *Rotundifolia* (Holm Oak), *Ceratonia siliqua* (Carob) and *Olea* species (Olive).

Weather remained hot and sunny.

Tuesday 31/03/15 -

With Marilyn busy, the day was spent with Rosie in the Eastern Algarve, exploring her native garden at the Quinta das Sesmarias in the morning with a plant ident., tour and discussions on its conception, use of exotics/non-natives, maintenance and future plans etc. I will discuss in depth our various garden tours later but from Rosie's we headed to the salt marshes and lagoons of the Ria Formosa Natural Park to explore the associated habitats and wildflowers as well as nearby veteran trees (Carob and Olive) and the wholesale nurseries of Monte Rosa near Moncarapacho and the Danish Scholls nursery which has attracted local opposition and criticism for excessive groundwater monopoly and use.

Weather still hot, sunny and dry.

Wednesday - 01/04/15 -

With arrangements to meet Marilyn towards the end of the week, the day was spent with Rosie again in the Eastern Algarve, undertaking further tours of associated MGAP gardens. We explored three unique gardens of different situations, scenarios and ambitions, and spent sometime discussing the achievements and aspirations of MGAP with Rosie as well as the difficulties and struggles they've encountered with the climate, water usage and public attitude etc. Some time was also spent visiting the Natura garden centre near Almancil (Owned by designer Jean Claude Defrance) specialists in sustainable landscape design and tree transplanting, and exploring sandy clay woodland around one of the suburban gardens which were abundant with wildflowers.

Weather continued trend of hot, sunny and dry.

Thursday 02/04/15 -

Marilyn Medina Ribeiro met us at the Quinta to introduce herself and begin discussions and initial preparations for the new educational native botanic garden. Marilyn is a self-employed gardener and founder of Waterwise Gardens; advocating sustainable landscape management and garden design. To be discussed further later on.

With the project still in the very early stages, we began sourcing and creating basic maps for surveying using software and tracing boundaries with Gerhard for confirmation. The project shall be discussed in greater depth later but Marilyn left us to begin recording and mapping existing vegetation, wildflowers and pathways etc. for the remainder of the day.

Friday 03/04/15 -

Finished mapping vegetation and pathways in the morning and began marking and mapping orchids thereafter (So that their locations could be protected after they go into dormancy). Was the last working day unfortunately with much still to do. In the afternoon, we visited two Waterwise gardens Marilyn had designed to client briefs, one of which being set for further extension in the near future with a new design.

After a humid, cloudy start, the skies cleared in the afternoon to leave more hot, sunny weather.

Saturday 04/04/15 -

Our last day in Portugal and with our return flight booked for the evening, we travelled quite far, given the opportunity and after hearing great things, to visit Cape St. Vincent. Rosie and Marilyn were unfortunately unable to join us, but we met Rosie at the airport afterwards to finalise the week and return the vehicle etc.

Weather was bright, hot and sunny again.

*At this point, before I discuss any of our experiences, I thought I would mention the equipment used to record our discoveries and how this affected my experience of the trip and the analysis thereof afterwards.

For some years before this trip I had been using a Pentax P30T film camera almost exclusively after I inherited one through family around the time my digital camera begun misbehaving. I found I quite enjoyed the format, experience and results, and whilst it is perhaps a cliché somewhat, I found the resultant media more tactile and refreshingly engaging amongst other things. I found I considered individual photographs and moments more and would perhaps have better luck keeping hold of them (Computers and technology in general seeming to fail on me!). Either way, before travelling to Portugal - evidently rather foolishly in hindsight - it hadn't especially crossed my mind that I should take any other camera with me, and whilst I still enjoyed the same process and interaction whilst using the camera out there, it was almost immediately obvious that I wouldn't be able to make photographic records - instead of 'aesthetic photographs' for want of a better expression - as easily or in quite the same way. Likewise, with digital you have the flexibility to study your photos afterwards and decide whether you would like to in fact take another, for instance, as well as take photos easily and purely as visual records (Eg to help record and identify wildflowers later).

Unfortunately, whilst this may not have been such a problem after I managed to track down more film on the road (Though I did miss photo opportunities!), upon my return to the UK, I was forced to go to a different developer I hadn't used before as my usual was experiencing technical difficulties. This other agent, as it would turn out, was perhaps less experienced and potentially underdeveloped the films, which came back rather flat, pale and lifeless. Deciding to take the prints and negatives to another trader for a second opinion, they offered to redevelop the negatives and try to correct the shortcomings as best as possible. Whilst I may prefer the finish on the second prints, the contrast has been increased to such an extent to bring out the rich colours there has been a noticeable loss of detail, which is without a doubt quite important when botanising and studying flowers which are often quite diminutive and finely detailed. Either way, the outcome of the whole debacle has left me with two sets of prints neither of which I am 100% happy with and some potentially underdeveloped memories and negatives. If I was more confident or knowledgeable of digital technology and software, and it was available and accessible to me, I could potentially experiment with altering the images myself and maybe create a medium and balance between the two, and this is something I am hoping to attempt in the future.

Either way, the lesson here being of course to realise the limitations of such analogue equipment and plan accordingly. In hindsight, I should have attempted to take both digital and film so as to exploit the benefits and preferences of both.

Hosts

Mediterranean Gardening Association Portugal (MGAP)

The Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal is one of many internationally recognised branches of the larger, well-known Mediterranean Garden Society (Based in Athens, Greece.), establishing itself to allow more regional autonomy and self-sufficiency within its own territories. Within Portugal, MGAP is a legally-constituted, not-for-profit association, whose interests, aspirations and aims reach beyond the aesthetic and ornamental interests of horticulture to incorporate and challenge the future of gardening heritage, sustainability, ecology and environmental issues as well.

We were invited to the Algarve by Rosie Peddle, Secretary to MGAP and Linnean Society of London Fellow whose interests in plant and habitat conservation are reflected in her previous work for the British charity Plant Heritage. Likewise, Gerhard Zabel, whom we stayed with, acts as the association's Scientific Advisor and Marilyn Medina Ribeiro, who we worked with on the new project at the Quinta, the Plant Advisor (We would also meet MGAP President, Burford Hurry, when we toured his garden on one of our visits.). Money from the association's endeavours and projects are always reinvested directly back into its future and continuation, and most of the associations members act voluntarily, in their own time, and are self-employed in the industry outside the association.

Meeting Rosie and following discussions over the course of the week, some of the more interesting and poignant themes for me centred around the environmental and ecological issues of increasing regional resource pressure and water usage, public perceptions and misconceptions, and equally the association's endeavours to counteract these trends. For me, these controversial points are of particular interest and strike a profound chord as they are universal issues or comparable to, and part of much larger global trends, problems and crises that we are all facing. They are arguably not unique to Portugal or to the horticultural discipline and part of larger complex and interconnected issues affecting the future of the environment and ourselves equally. Alas, these are largely out of the scope of this report but I admire Rosie's attitude and aspirations profusely. Her work through and with MGAP, especially of late, is trying to counteract ongoing trends that see high inputs into horticultural systems, fighting uphill and ultimately in vain, against the natural conditions, climate and potential of the Algarvian environment, only to achieve what is arguably very little. There undoubtedly seems to be growing and continuous trends of recreating and trying to sustain gardens and plants that are realistically unsuited and poorly adapted for the hot, dry climatic and seasonal conditions and associated soils.

With the Algarve being one of the most popular and growing tourist destinations in Europe, there can be no doubt that tourism is one of the biggest drivers of the regional economy, and with this comes a degree of immigration and development to accommodate. Many of these expatriates move for the climate and weather, coming from countries further North, and bring with them traditions and expectations from their homeland, which are sometimes reflected in their gardening designs, preferences and habits. Rosie would point out if we were passing by, landscape gardens in the vein of those famed in Northern Europe, with expanses of lawns and planting more suitable for temperate climates and seasons that will, more likely than not, struggle in the hot, dry Portuguese summers without copious irrigation.

It is this combination of unmitigated expansion and development and inappropriate planting that Rosie believes is contributing to a decline in ecological habitats, wild flora and horticultural heritage, whilst also putting unsustainable pressure on the regional watertable and supplies, leading to the increases in water prices the region is experiencing already. These effects would be in conjunction with possible increased industrial usage, from the large scale export nurseries we were shown for instance, and the possible escalating effects of climate change which may be responsible for the uncharacteristic seasons such as the dry Winter preceding our visit.

However, many of these expats must have moved to the Algarve for its landscapes and environment as well as its weather, and it is through MGAP that Rosie and the other members try to raise awareness of these issues and encourage people to embrace the indigenous flora, welcome it into the gardens and exploit the many benefits of doing so. Their work tries to educate people on the differing horticultural practices of such different seasonal climates, where the gardening calendar can begin in Autumn with the coming rain for instance, and breakdown some of the misconceptions surrounding them. MGAP disseminates information on appropriate and 'alternative' planting schemes and formative aftercare for plants and gardens, amongst other information, and its members gardens and designs pioneer and advocate dry and seasonal gardening and reduced water usage. Whilst it may not be ideal, Rosie believes there may be opportunities with rising water prices and costs of living to steer people towards less intensive forms of gardening whilst reducing their rates of consumption. If such an opportunity does exist, regardless of the means to the end, it will inevitably benefit the region, supporting native genetics, alleviating resource pressure during uncertain times and possibly help reduce the risk of desertification with the loss of indigenous vegetation etc.

Having grown up in the East of England and lived here again for the last five years or so after travelling and experiencing other parks of the UK, I have also experienced regional climatic variations and witnessed the steady rise in water prices and frequency of restrictions in the region, such as hosepipe bans etc. over some of hotter and drier Summers we have experienced over the last few years. Although this isn't restricted to the East only, with the possibility of regional temperatures increasing with climate change, and geographical weather patterns becoming more extreme, there is the distinct chance drier parts of the UK - under the effect of multiple convergent factors - will find climatic idiosyncrasies increasingly more challenging and exaggerated. And if such scenarios do unfold, then there can be no doubt that the work and theories of groups such as MGAP will become increasingly more important and influential, and a source of inspiration and reference for many gardeners and disciplines alike. For these very reasons, their work warrants further attention, respect and support and I would only encourage others to look into and research for themselves.

Quinta da Figueirinha

The Quinta da Figueirinha, or Farm of the Figueirinha, is a 36 hectare experimental and transitional farm owned by Dr. Gerhard Zabel, lifelong Agronomic Engineer, philanthropist and Scientific Advisor to the Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal. Situated amongst the rolling hills of the Barrocal a few miles East of the historic town of Silves, the farm has its roots in traditional agriculture with familiar dry cultures of Almond, Olive, Fig and Carob, and several hectares of varied Citrus plantation exploiting the more suitable soil and conditions between the coastal Littoral and the Mountainous Serra.

Nevertheless, Dr. Zabel and his - sadly - late wife, Uta Zabel, had greater aspirations and hopes for the Quinta and early on set about designating areas for natural regeneration and the study thereof, nurturing and protecting the genetic resources and biodiversity of the land from the start. To help support and safeguard such future projects and experiments, they would establish and encourage rural and ecotourism on the farm and develop various areas for communal and multidisciplinary use and networking.

Gerhard and Uta spent many formative years in the arid and semi-arid regions of Niger and the Sahel of Africa, working on various regenerative, developmental and desertification projects, before moving to Portugal some thirty years ago, and applying their theories, results and findings to the comparable climate of the South Iberian Peninsula. Since then, Gerhard has collaborated with various bodies on different projects across the Quinta, some still ongoing and others evolving to take on new relevancies and objectives, becoming different experiments entirely and areas for observation akin with the farm's progressive ethos. Projects and experiments focus in general around the conditions and functionality of the semi-arid climate, and range from agroforestry trials for drought tolerance and fire resistance, agronomic engineering to reduce soil erosion and increase infiltration capacities and rates, and trialling technologies such as passive solar irrigation systems with floating pumps.

With forest fires a seasonal and extremely problematic phenomena throughout Portugal, trials with fire resistant species contribute to and are part of extremely valuable research into the prevention and suppression of wildfires which are dangerous to people and wildlife and economically detrimental. As part of the transnational Cypfire project sponsored by the European Commission and Union, plantations of clonal Cypress have been planted across Mediterranean regions, including at the Quinta (In collaboration with the Portuguese Forestry Service), to continue ongoing research and to help establish seed banks from which material can be disseminated and introduced to the market. With their low flammability and high resistance and burning points, Cypress species are being studied as potential natural barriers and buffer species to help reduce and slow the spread of fires, acting as natural wind and firebreaks for forestry situations. The combustibility of conventional forestry species exacerbates the problem, with Pines and Eucalyptus catching fire and burning quickly, and helping fires spread exponentially in windy conditions. Research is now progressing to establish the more resistant species, optimum spacing and, at the Quinta, the possibility of incorporating and trialling species of Portuguese origin which may adapt better to the conditions. Conversely though, and perhaps controversially, it is worth noting and remembering that wildfires are a natural phenomena in the region and arguably part of natural cycles of regeneration and colonisation and it is modern forestry practices and economies that aggravate and further complicate issues etc.

The solar irrigation project, supported by the German Ministry of Research, has allowed Gerhard to trial a whole range of exotic trees, fruits and nuts such as Cherimoya (*Annona cherimola*), Malabar Plum (*Syzygium jambos*), Lychee (*Litchi chinensis*), Starfruit (*Averrhoa carambola*) and White Sapote (*Casimiroa edulis*), amongst others, outside their native climates, using a solar powered floating pump which can adjust to the variable water levels. The orchard is now over twenty years old and Gerhard is still adding and trialling new species and varieties as and when he can (We all made small and personal donations to this project to show our gratitude for the hospitality.).

True to Gerhard and Uta's aspirations and vision for the Quinta, the farm is continuing to develop and evolve, moving away from its agricultural roots towards broad community, networking and multidisciplinary goals, incorporating conservation, education, research and sustainable development

into every new venture. Rosie invited us to the Quinta around the conceptional time of several new ambitious and collaborative projects which could potentially see the parameters and expectations of the estate transformed in pioneering and superlative new directions and landscapes. With the help of Rosie, Marilyn, MGAP and others, Gerhard is hoping to establish several new botanic gardens at the Quinta representing the various different geographical regions that experience Mediterranean Climates, such as areas of California, Central Chile, South Africa, South West Australia and countries on the Mediterranean Basin etc. If the project achieves what it sets out to do, it will undoubtedly become an incomparable and inspirational collection and genetic resource for future education, research and, equally, recreation. Working closely with Marilyn during our stay, we would start the very precursory and preliminary stages of the project, starting with the native garden, making use of an area of rich disturbed and reclaimed agricultural land that is showing promising levels of regeneration and biodiversity. Over the course of a couple of days, we set about plotting the boundaries, mapping the existing paths and established Matos vegetation, and begun to identify and mark some of the priority species. The next steps discussed, after mapping and marking established populations, included collecting seed and propagating the less represented species, establishing and installing the permanent access and pathways (Including vehicular and disabled access) and creating work and interpretation areas.

Such autonomy, self-motivation, progressive and forward-thinking attitudes and projects help make the Quinta da Figueirinha an acutely radical, self-empowering and motivational entity and hub. The dedication that Gerhard and his peers express and the altruistic nature of their actions and intentions are truly inspiring and instills faith that such critical and sympathetic initiatives are achievable and worth pursuing everywhere and as their own reward. I will be endeavouring to keep abreast of the new project and would only encourage others to get involved in such noble enterprises or follow suit in similar ventures, no matter the scale.

Marilyn Medina Ribeiro

Marilyn Medina Ribeiro is the highly motivated and energetic founder and director behind Waterwise Gardens, a sustainable landscape management and design company based in the Algarve offering project consultancy, construction, management and maintenance with an emphasis on environmentally friendly dry gardening appropriate to the climate. Marilyn is also Plant Advisor to and for the Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal and worked closely with us on new botanic garden at the Quinta da Figueirinha, helping to identify and survey the native plants.

After studying Landscape Management and Horticulture in Britain, Marilyn moved to Portugal and begun redesigning, developing and managing various gardens and landscapes for commercial enterprises around the Algarve, starting up Waterwise Gardens in 2008 to promote, support and explore the potential of sustainable land management further and across the broader spectrum of horticulture. Along with Rosie, Marilyn is a passionate advocate of sustainable and appropriate water usage and planting, and about actively protecting and developing the cultural heritage of Mediterranean gardening and flora. Her Waterwise designs - inspired by the movement and idiom of the same name - reflect this, with many reinventing stressed, poorly designed and neglected gardens, high maintenance lawns and tropical plantings etc., using native and Mediterranean species. We would visit two of her clients, which I will discuss later, both of whom were enamoured with their new gardens and impressed with Marilyn's designs, detailing and methodology. Her ethos and designs are clearly influenced by the work of pioneering designer Olivier Filippi and whilst tailored

to the clients preferences, also encourage mutual experimentation. Marilyn's designs often incorporate successful elements of previous designs into new naturalistic compositions and contemporary styles, utilising architectural and seasonal textures, colours and varieties of natives. Wildflowers, meadows, herbs, succulents, rock and gravel gardens, terracing and hard landscaping are frequently incorporated, referencing heritage Mediterranean styles whilst also looking to the future and taking maximum advantage of the natural climate.

The success of Marilyn's designs and company goes to demonstrate and prove that the sustainable management and maintenance of landscapes can be incorporated in contemporary garden design and achieve great results and effects whilst outperforming high-input systems, helping re-establish fading cultural identities and breaking down common and deep ingrained misconceptions and illusions. Given such accomplishments and exponents, there can only be hope that more sensitive and sustainable garden practices will spread into the public conscience with time and contribute to a more sympathetic future, and I have every faith that the challenge is in the right and capable hands, and that Marilyn's business will go from strength to strength in the future.

Protected Landscapes

Three protected sites of note were visited during our time in the Algarve, all of which are protected under varying designations, criterias and policies etc. that aim to preserve both the natural/semi-natural and man-made landscapes and cultures symbiotically and simultaneously. It is worth bearing in mind that our visit happened to come after an uncharacteristically dry Winter, which would inevitably affect Spring flowering, with the likelihood of a shorter, less prolific display.

- **The Cape of Saint Vincent** is the most South-Westerly headland of Portugal, in the municipality of Sagres, and is perhaps one of the most famous landscapes of the sizeable and diverse South-West Alentejo and Vicentine Coast national Nature Park, which runs almost the entire 70 mile length of the South Western Atlantic Litoral coast from Sao Torpes beach South of Sines to the former fishing village of Burgau on the South coast roughly 10 miles West of Lagos. With much of the Southern coastal Litoral now developed for tourism and agriculture, it is an invaluable stronghold for wild flora in the South and considered by many to be some of the richest and best coastlines for botanising in Europe.
- **Rocha da Pena** is a small but prominent inland Local Protected Landscape of some of the highest rocky barrocal massif in the region. Part of the Northern parishes of Salir and Benafim in the central municipality of Loule, it is managed accordingly by their relevant local authorities and experts. The area is considered a valuable site for indigenous wildlife flora and fauna.
- **Ria Formosa** is another varied and valued large national Nature Park of roughly 3000 hectares, running some 35 miles through several municipalities, lagoons, dunes and coastal systems along the South-Eastern Algarve. Roughly from the city of Faro to the beach of Manta Rota some 25 miles to the East. It is a particularly valuable site for regional wildlife fauna as well as flora.

The Cape of Saint Vincent

The Cape of Saint Vincent is just the tip of the larger South-West Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park, one of the most important conservation areas in Portugal, representing some of the most unspoiled Western Litoral coastal landscapes and scenery in the Algarve. A dramatic and challenging environment at the most South-Western point of Portugal, the vertical cliffs of the Vicentina headland rise uncompromisingly from the sea to some 75m or more, creating a surreal promontory plateau of mixed geology exposed to the raw elements and mercy of the Atlantic Ocean. Extraordinarily, perched atop these phenomenal cliffs exists a stout network of deep, zonal dune systems that defy their windswept condition to accommodate diverse, rich and thriving plant communities.



Antirrhinum majus on cliff face

Despite the exposed Atlantic aspect creating a seemingly inhospitable and hostile environment - bringing in highly saline spray and fierce winds - there are opportunities for adventitious and pioneering adaptation from the hardier of species and equally advantages to be found in the peculiar and divergent microclimate. Given its oceanic vicinity, the cape is distinctly wetter and cloudier than other coastal and continental habitats in the province (And Mediterranean climates in general.), which given the hot, dry climate can only be beneficial to plant life. The Spring display was noticeably superior here than further inland with mean annual temperatures in nearby Sagres (Roughly 4 miles away) around 16°C; falling to a mean average of 11°C over Winter evenings and up to 22°C during Summer days. There are around 2900 hours of sunshine and 420mm of precipitation annually. Although it is worth noting that Sagres sits inland compared to the clifftops of Cape St. Vincent, where statistics are likely to differ to a degree, but this is distinctly milder than conditions further inland regardless. The area is of mixed and variable geology, with sedimentary rock (Including alkaline limestone), younger alluvial depositions and, of course, acidic sand, which is noticeable with vegetation of common calcareous soils.

Whilst the vegetation of certain zonal dunes is likely to be typical low Litoral Matos of the region with hardy, sclerified scrub species of Mediterranean Maquis - Xerophytes adapted to drought and to retain moisture in the dry, hot conditions with tough, hard, waxy leaves etc. - the vegetation of Cape St. Vincent is often described as Garrigue Matos; low-lying Maquis associated with dry, shallow, rocky coastal soils. Whilst the same species may be present in Matos vegetation and more specific Garrigue Matos, the effect of climate and conditions is notable with the Garrigue, found generally more stunted and dwarfed - compounded by coastal winds - than their counterparts elsewhere in more sheltered, accommodating situations. For example, you can observe the vegetation of Cape St. Vincent cling to the contours of the dunes, no taller than a metre from the sands whilst elsewhere the same species may reach twice that, seemingly less troubled.



Iberis linifolia in Matos roots

Nevertheless, despite the aforementioned circumstances, climatic challenges and potential impediments, the plant populations and species here are thriving, rich and complex in all manner of wonderfully unique, juxtaposed and contrasting mosaics and tapestries that words and photographs could never hope to describe or capture in any way comparable to the magnificence of its reality. What flourishes here between the isolated sand dunes and more typical coastal Matos communities can only be described as a natural rock garden and an unfathomably awe inspiring one at that. Despite the dry Winter, our visit was timed well (The display can peak between mid March and late April) and we were graced with a glorious blaze of vibrant and radiant yellows, pinks, whites and blues, intense in the bright midday sun and slightly overwhelming and glaring at times. Viewed from a distance as a patchwork, stretching as far as the eye could see, or examined up close, these beautiful compositions were truly a sight for sore eyes, refreshing and energising after years working in the manicured landscape gardens of England. I found myself momentarily entranced, frantically trying to take in the different combinations before ceding, running out of film, and realising my time could be equally well spent absorbing its sheer beauty and indescribable sense of *place*. Whilst I was genuinely struck by these brash and bold fusions that so many contemporary garden designs and designers try so hard to replicate, I found their context equally, if not more, compelling. Set against the harsh and brutal conditions atop these hopelessly epic cliffs, their fleeting beauty and abundance epitomised everything that is fantastical and indescribable about the natural world. Amongst jagged

rock and weathered wood, against all odds in blistering sandstorms and incomprehensibly thin, sandy soils, their very success and existence was inspiringly defiant and limitless. I'm not entirely sure I can remember the last time I felt that sense of 'place', that feeling that so many strive to achieve in artificial landscapes and grapple with ceaselessly to varying success. Needless to say, I am eternally thankful for the experience and had to take several moments to try and take it in. I could have spent much more time here and arguably only saw such a small part of it. Hopefully I shall get the opportunity to return in the future and give it the time it deserves, accompanied by Rosie or Marilyn ideally who could likely show us some of the best and lesser-known spots. I do not feel I am exaggerating in any of my statements here, it truly is a beautiful and unfathomable sight to behold.



Cistus and Coronilla valentina with deadwood

On top of this astonishingly beautiful and incomparable display, Cape St. Vincent is home to many rare and endemic species, and heavily debated subspecies and ecotypes. Species such as *Astragalus tragacantha* subsp. *vicentinus*, *Biscutella vicentina*, *Centaurea vicentina*, *Cistus palhinhae*, *Diploaxis vicentina*, *Hyacinthoides vicentina*, *Scilla vicentina*, *Silene rothmaleri* and *Plantago almogravensis*. Given obvious time constrictions during our visit, we didn't particularly have time to try and find or identify these species and as mentioned before, we chose to simply explore rather than set out with any particular or wider ambitions.



Coronilla valentina and *Antirrhinum majus*

The weather was pretty representative for our visit, I believe, with some cloud cover breaking up the dazzlingly bright, hot, sunny spells; a persistent, steady breeze and some smaller sandstorms. Despite much of our brief time being spent appreciating and recording the abundant natural wonders, we were able to get some impression of the management of the area as well. There was little signposting or information interpretation as far as I could tell, to identify its protected and valued status or to try and implement any rules or regulations and as a result perhaps but nevertheless unfortunately, vehicles were parking up on the wayside and valuable marginal areas the entire length of the single road and no doubt slowly widening the verge at the same time. Quite extensive and wide vehicle tracks frequently extended and weaved out from these further into the dunes as well with accompanying damage and litter evident alongside. Though, I'm not entirely comfortable commenting on the management plan without further research, or feel in anyway sure what policies exist in place or what their stance and maintenance of such impacts and potentially degrading footfall is, some attempt to display, implement and regulate rules would be obviously beneficial and perhaps a more serious approach to access and facilities including perhaps parking.

However brief our visit was, it was enough to recognise and realise that this is undoubtedly a very special and unique place indeed, and enough to embrace its beguiling atmosphere and unquestionably ethereal qualities. Cape St. Vincent was one of the last places we visited on our trip, and for me personally, a real highlight.



Astragalus sp.



Astragalus, *Bellevalia*, *Cistus*, *Coronilla* and *Daucus* community on clifftop



Anagallis arvensis, *Dipcadi serotinum* and *Cerinthe gymnandra*



Cistus and *Coronilla*



Asteriscus maritimus and *Cistus* sp. on Vincentine clifftop

Rocha da Pena

Rocha da Pena, whilst a comparatively smaller reserve, stands incontestable as another imposing feat of natural geology in the Algarve and an unrivalled transitional zone between the lowland and coastal Litoral to the South and the rugged, mountainous Serra to the North. At altitudes of around 480m, the monumental massif plateau stands between the Northern villages of Benafim and Salir in the central municipality of Loule, and towers over the surrounding Barrocal foothills.

With sheer fifty metre escarpments of hard limestone and carbonate rock, the panoramic tabletop of Rocha da Pena is a formidable natural feature and a foreboding backdrop to the rolling Barrocal at its feet; russet red and orange with Iron oxides despite its chalky content. Steady and progressive chemical erosion has helped shape this landscape through time, creating a surplus of crags, caves, sinkholes and potholes across a wide karstic pavement of crevices and fissures. The elevated plateau itself is relatively level, over a mile long and 250m wide in places. The various microclimates around its different orientations have long sheltered and protected some of the finest surviving examples of original alkaline Barrocal vegetation and ecosystems in the region. The Matos scrubland here can grow over three metres tall, sheltering and protecting in its clearings and glades, the regional fauna and flora understorey, that the harsh elements and Mediterranean conditions may otherwise exhaust. Evapotranspiration rates in inland areas such as these can be over twice as high as in coastal regions and the evolution of the Matos vegetation is typical for such conditions, with species responding to the stresses of intense and prolonged drought and solar radiation, which has induced defensive and protective evolution physiologically over time. Vegetation has become Xerophytic, much like elsewhere, with downy and glaucous blue-grey foliage which is often tough, hard and waxy in an attempt to diffuse and reflect light and heat.



Paeonia broteroi in dappled shade

Rocha da Pena was our first wildflower walk of the trip and we visited on a typically stifling, clear, sunny day, ascending steadily towards the plateau in the oppressive late morning heat. Nevertheless, full of enthusiasm and true to style - as with any wildflower hunt or horticultural tour - we found ourselves almost immediately waylaid, scrutinising the vegetation, shrubbery, verges and everything

in between. Despite the dry Winter, we found some fantastic specimens and populations (Though I'd love to see it after more rainfall!). Beneath the Matos, wildflowers leapt from the shade bold, bringing the shadows to life, their vibrancy somehow at odds with their darker surroundings and conditions. Elegant *Paeonia broteri* was a personal highlight here, its fleeting resplendence playing off the rough bark of the Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) and caught at just the right time with its fresh foliage almost alien against the scorched Matos vegetation around it. There is something undeniably ceremonious and majestic about its form and habit, a simple refinement in its flower.

Around the marginal zones and verges we found some brilliant orchid specimens including *Ophrys lutea* (Yellow Bee Orchid), *Ophrys scolopax* (Woodcock Bee Orchid), *Ophrys speculum* (Mirror Orchid) and *Anacamptis morio* (Green-Winged Orchid). Wild Orchidaceae always a personal favourite, a pleasure to find and truly a marvel of evolution.



Anacamptis morio in marginal area

Despite its obvious - and perhaps justified - reputation, it was interesting to find *Phelipanche ramosa*, a small holoparasitic plant lacking chlorophyll or a developed root system, which gains most of its nutrients through herbaceous Solanaceae and Leguminosae hosts. I'm not entirely sure I can explain their interest to me but I have always found parasitic plants fascinating and the Algarve happens to be quite well known for its diversity thereof. Perhaps due to their deceptive appearance or an intrigue of the unknown? Either way, it was quite prolific under parts of the Matos, making identifying its possible host difficult but as it would turn out, this would be the first of quite a few parasites we would find.

Sticking to the main track, it was evident that there had been some arguably rather heavy-handed clearance and cutting of the marginal Matos relatively recently with arisings rather clumsily and inconsiderately dumped on the steep banks alongside the track, to the detriment of the plants and vegetation there. Whilst I cannot claim to know the management plans and strategies for the area, and the cuttings could be set to be collected in the future, they seemed somewhat old and were at risk of damaging the plants beneath and/or collapsing down the steep sides further into the Matos. If they had been cleared properly, they could have potentially helped sustain the valuable marginal zone but I am imagine they were cut purely for access and out of basic maintenance.



Buds opening on Ophrys scolopax

Approaching the last section and climb towards the plateau around midday, we elected to avoid the peak temperatures and exposure, and descend. Although disappointing, it was perhaps wise and understandable given the conditions and the rate of our progress so far. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting and beneficial to compare the habitat of the plateau with the foot of the escarpments and the Northern aspect to the Southern where we ascended etc. The adventitious views out over the Barrocal to the coast were quite unlike anything I had seen before, and I imagine those from the plateau to Northern Serra were equally so. Perhaps next time we could explore the microclimates around the plateau cliffs and hopefully after more rainfall.

Travelling and sheltering through the worst of the heat, Rosie would go on to show us the extensive areas of Cork forest and plantation (*Quercus suber*) in the region and the effects of forest fires thereupon, finding a spectacular field and population of Yellow Lupins (*Lupinus luteus*) on agricultural land on the way; perhaps being left or grown for livestock fodder? It was interesting to see the native understorey with *Lavandula viridis* (Green Lavender), *Erica arborea* (Tree Heath), *Cytisus scoparius* (Broom) and Orchids, the natural cyclical regeneration after fires, and the marking and dating of trees for ownership and as a means of record keeping for periodic stripping (Every nine to twelve years sustainably). The stripping of the bark obviously leaving the plant more vulnerable to fire, the effect of fires are devastating, leaving a harrowing fallout which can potentially ruin the livelihood of farmers. With Portugal being of the world's leading producers of cork, the ever-present threat of climate change and water shortages is menacing and with the associated risk of wildfires potentially increasing, I imagine this global industry may be in increasing danger as well. Furthermore, with the harvesting of cork being a sustainable farming practice, the forests sustain and support high levels and diversity of Barrocal and Serra wildlife flora and fauna (Including the endangered Iberian Lynx) which may also be at risk. On top of this, there is a general decline in the demand for cork and farmers, attracted by the quicker and easier profits, are responding, clearing and switching to faster growing and easier Eucalyptus and Pine plantations for paper and pulp production predominantly (Although other industries exist, such as Lyocell fabrics), exacerbating problems. Portugal now has some of largest Eucalyptus plantations in the world and at the expense of various rich and primary native habitats and forests.



Ophrys lutea on verge side



Scilla peruviana at Rocha da Pena



Field of *Lupinus luteus*

Ria Formosa

The vast and expansive coastal wetlands of the Ria Formosa nature reserve incorporate a multitude of interconnected habitats; salt pans and marshes, lagoons, mudflats, sand dunes and beaches and barrier islands of great value to a diversity of wildlife flora and fauna. The various bodies of freshwater and brackish salt waters include both seasonal and tidal waters, contributing further to the polarity and multiplicity of this convergent hotspot. Similarly, the varying habitats and associated vegetation are zonal as a result of the natural grading and variations in coastal, saline and tidal conditions and exposures, and help support the comprehensive and healthy variety of native flora.

Perhaps some of the more distinctive populations in these habitats, especially the salt marshes and mudflats, would be the Halophytes. Species which can tolerate saline conditions and withstand prolonged exposure to salt and brackish water through the submerged root zone and atmospheric salt spray. Many of these belong to the Amaranthaceae family and are graded zonally, with large colonies of *Arthrocnemum perenne* and *A. glaucum*, *Atriplex halimus*, *Halimione portulacoides*, *Salicornia europaea*, *Salsola kali* and *S. vermiculata*, *Suaeda maritima* and *S. vera* common throughout the Ria Formosa.



Bee visiting Asphodelus in woodland understorey

The land is fertile and sheltered in places (Compared to the Atlantic coast and Cape St. Vincent, for instance), owing much to continental alluvium from the inland watercourses and sediment from the sandy dunes and rich tidal lagoons, and helping to support both agriculture and woodland as well in certain regions. The binding action of rooting vegetation being of particular importance here for soil conservation, helping catch sediment and debris, and consolidating otherwise quite temperamental soils which shift with the changing weather and conditions..

The coastal area experiences a Mediterranean climate of semi-arid characteristics and subtropical influence, with average temperatures of 18°C year round and roughly 3150 hours of sunshine and 450mm of rainfall annually. Mean maximum temperatures are often around 28°C on average in Summer, sinking to around 8°C through the Winter nights.



Leucojum trichophyllum in shady understory

We visited from near Olhao - after a morning spent in Rosie's garden on another particularly hot, sunny day - entering West of the town (Somewhat central of the Park itself) and completing a circular walk through the lightly wooded and more stable inner dunes to the nearby tidal lagoon mill, incorporating parts of the raised boardwalks over the tidal sands. There was an immediate ethereal quality to the light levels below the Maritime and Umbrella Pines (*Pinus pinaster* and *P. pinea*), whose tall, branching canopies befitted their common name and help create favourable, sheltered conditions beneath, reducing light intensity (Especially when the Summer sun is high) and producing dappled shade. When the sun is lower on the horizon and temperatures and light intensity are less extreme - earlier and later in the day - sunlight is also more likely to reach under the flat canopy and to the understory plants beneath.

The understorey, marginal, sandy and dunal areas beneath these sparse woodlands were heavily exploited and colonised by the local flora and wildflowers such as *Anthemis maritima*, *Anagallis monelli*, *Armeria pungens*, *Calystegia soldanella*, *Corrigiola litoralis*, *Crucianella maritima*, *Eryngium maritimum*, *Euphorbia paralias*, *Helichrysum italicum*, *Hypocotum procumbens*, *Linaria lamarckii* (And *L. pedunculata*, *L. spartea*), *Lotus creticus*, *Medicago littoralis*, *Ononis variegata*, *Otanthus maritimus*, *Pancratium maritimum*, *Paronychia argentea*, *Pycnocomon rutifolium*, *Reichardia gaditana*, *Scilla monophyllos*, *Scrophularia frutescens* and *Silene nicaeensis*.



Vicia with *Lupinus* in background

It's easy to spend a lot of time identifying, recording, discussing and studying individual plants on such trips and despite the relatively small area covered, I would like to think we found a respectable range of interesting plants. With the Ria Formosa being such substantial and fantastically diverse reserve, it would have of course been advantageous and rewarding to have explored further some of the other habitats for diligence and comparison, amongst everything else, but all things considered, such ambitions were quite unfeasible given the sheer size of the areas and the time it would take to do so.

Despite being somewhat hidden and apparently not so easy to find, the infrastructure within the Park itself was to a reasonable standard - especially compared with the other Parks we visited - with maps, signs, hard landscaped paths and boardwalks between the dunes and along the tidal beaches improving accessibility and interpretation, and hopefully discouraging footfall over sensitive areas.



Shady and protective woodland canopy

From the promenade we were able to observe the smothering habit and effect of alien *Carpobrotus edulis*, the invasive Hottentot Fig escaping from gardens after introduction from South Africa, carpeting the sands with a dense, impenetrable layer of growth. A serious and sustained threat to wild flora and coastal habitats across the entire province, suffocating and outcompeting less vigorous and robust species, I would be interested to know the current strategies and plans for the ongoing management of its continued threat.

As previously mentioned, the Algarve is celebrated in certain circles for its diversity of parasitic plants, including Hemi- and Holoparasitic species of the Cynomoriaceae, Cytinaceae, Orobanchaceae and Santalaceae families. The various saline and maritime habitats of the Southern coast, including the Ria Formosa, being home to two particularly uncommon and interesting species of fully Holoparasitic species; *Cynomorium coccineum* and *Cistanche phelypaea*, both of which have developed extraordinarily perturbing and imposing forms and appearances.

Cynomorium coccineum is a highly reduced geophytic species, appearing as a stout black-red cylindrical club-like structure of lanceolate scale leaves. Devoid of chlorophyll and densely covered in minute scarlet flowers (Pollinated by flies), the structures emerge from extensive rhizome-like networks, on parasitised halophytic Amaranthaceae and Cistaceae roots of salt marshes and rocky saline coastal conditions. The species is so far reduced in fact that it arguably resembles a fungus more than a plant at first sight or to the untrained eye. Nevertheless, this remarkable species is still somewhat poorly understood and threatened by ongoing development and loss of habitat with populations declining and even possibly diminished to unprotected areas along the Southern coast between the Cape of St. Vincent and the Ria Formosa.

Cistanche phelypaea of the Orobanchaceae family has a perhaps more deceptive appearance but is no less robust and striking in form. Another fully Holoparasitic species, its inflorescence stands broad and hairless, congested with dazzlingly bright, shiny yellow flowers in conical spikes and ovate scale-like leaves. Similarly parasitic on halophytic Amaranthaceae species - frequently *Atriplex halimus* and *Arthrocnemum* spp. -, of saline coastal habitats, *C. phelypaea* isn't perhaps as rare as *Cynomorium coccineum* but whilst it can form large colonies, it is becoming locally restricted throughout the region for much the same reasons. Such circumstances and deteriorations are truly saddening across the whole animal and plant kingdoms and certainly didn't help our chances of discovering any of these intriguing and peculiar treasures. They are undoubtedly remarkable and fascinating species and like our expeditions, warrant further attention and are worth returning for. Fingers crossed!



Ghostly Dipcadi serotinum in woodland understorey

Garden Tours

We would visit six very distinct and characterful gardens during our time in the Algarve (Seven if you included the Quinta da Figueirinha); Rosie's garden at the Quinta das Sesmarias, three gardens of Mediterranean Garden Association (MGAP) members and two clients of Waterwise and Marilyn Medina Ribeiro. The broad diversity of designs and approaches gave a brilliant overview and contrast of some of the practitioners and styles active in the region and industry, and was testimony that the craft and its associated disciplines are still very much engaged and committed to the future of gardening heritage in the province.

Quinta das Sesmarias (Eastern Algarve)

The Quinta das Sesmarias is Rosie and Rob Peddle's four acre/two hectare experimental and naturalistic garden near Fornalha, Moncarapacho in the Eastern Algarve. Utilising and reclaiming abandoned Barrocal agricultural land, the garden is an asymmetric and dynamic juxtaposition and mixture of divergent elements and plant species alike, with traditional and formal areas around the house surrounded by large wild areas left to natural regeneration and experimentation.

When Rosie and Rob rediscovered the land some ten years ago, the area that would become the garden was dense with overgrown native Matos vegetation and the house was partially buried with soil building up against the back walls. After making the house inhabitable again and undertaking crucial hard landscaping to create a terrace with retaining walls, they were able to turn their attention towards the garden. As they began to clear pathways through the vegetation, they would discover lost ornamental features such as the fastigiate Italian Cypress trees (*Cupressus sempervirens* sp.) that now punctuate the marginal zone and in doing so, allow light and rain to penetrate and reach the ground once again. In time, native wildflowers would recolonise the land once more with the dormant seed bank and geophytes in the soil obliging and naturally responding to the changing physiological conditions. The re-emerging floral culture would prove to be rich and diverse, with populations of less common species such as the Small-Flowered Tongue Orchid (*Serapias lingua*) and Rosie nurtured this from early on, encouraging and helping the once abundant understories to re-establish themselves again (Only a few species have had to be reintroduced.). With Rosie's keen interest in conservation, habitats and wildflowers, sensitive restoration and maintenance would see some trees and shrubs pruned and renovated and others allowed to express their natural habits and forms, helping create a garden and space that replicates natural systems and straddles and blurs the line between the cultivated and the wild.



Salvia sp. around abandoned cart

Elsewhere in the garden, raised beds and rock gardens use local materials to harmonise and unify the surroundings whilst making use of the climatic conditions to assist the cultivation of species succulents and other unusual exotic plants (The use of raised beds helping separate smaller, less robust species from the terrestrial natives and allowing the easy cultivation and observation thereof.). The subtle addition of choice foreign and tropical species doesn't clash or seem out-of-place like it potentially could but adds further year-round interest after the Spring wildflower display subsides and creates an inspiring composition of natives and non-natives.

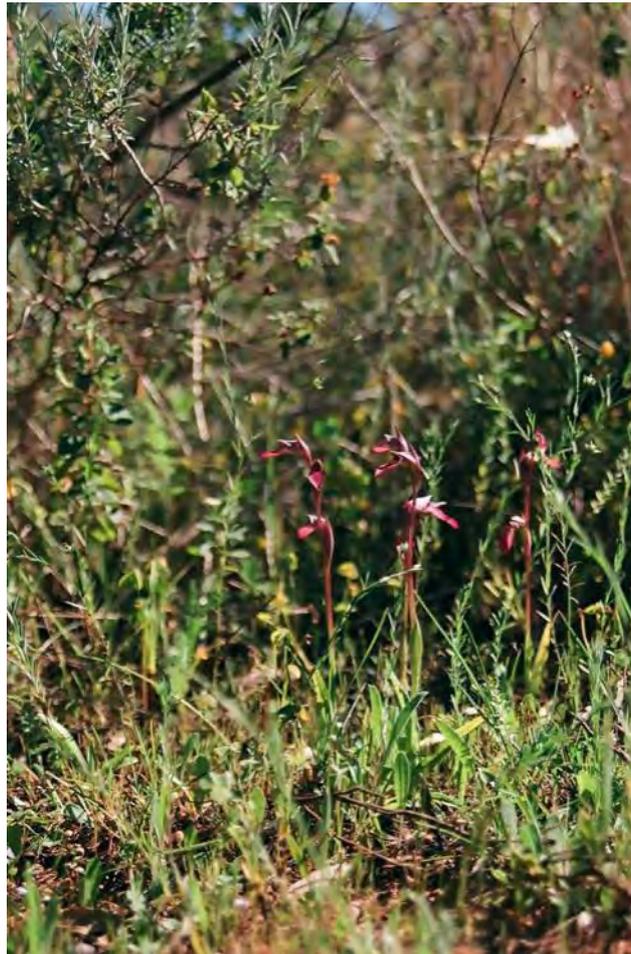


Scilla peruviana in wild area

Perhaps one of the main features beyond the terrace would be the natural swimming pool located away from the house, that uses biological filters and plants to purify and cleanse the water for recreation and practical usage. Designed by local firm Piscinas Biologicas (Set up by a Landscape Architect and a Biologist), the biodiversity and natural cycles create a significantly more sustainable system and are both the stabilising element in its functionality and a key part of its intrinsic ornamental and design qualities. In the marginal overflow zones, where the substrate and specific flora filter and regenerate the water, more ornamental species such as Lotus flowers (*Nelumbo* spp.) help create a healthy, valuable and biodiverse habitat for horticultural and aesthetic interest as well, that ensures the area becomes a feature of and symbiotic with the garden and not at odds or disparate of it. When we visited, the science and benefits were self-evident with the pool buzzing, croaking and chirping with life, bringing another, often overlooked, aural dimension to the garden.

The terrace area is the more formal and functional area that surrounds the house but acts as a brilliant platform and contrast for the wider garden, bearing attractive ornamental and hard landscape features such as decorative Moorish tiling, cascading plants and dry stone walling, pots and vases of more tropical plants, archways and a pergola draped with fragrant pink Wisteria and *Jasminum polyanthum*. Almost immediately after though, with only some marginal and transitional planting, this atmosphere is deconstructed and falls away into the more wild and free air of the wider garden, acting almost as a portal where the visitor can leave the intensity of the modern world behind and step into a completely different space entirely where conventional garden design principles and preconceptions are absent and eschewed in favour of a more natural, indeterminate order.

Rob and Rosie like to claim they do as little 'gardening' as possible, but have arguably established and cultivated the crucial foundations from which natural systems can thrive organically and manage themselves to a degree, without the often heavy and intrusive hand of man. The wilder areas look after themselves, more-or-less and look healthier and lush for it, with Rosie maintaining mainly the pathway only. When new plants are propagated or introduced artificially, usually in Autumn, homemade worm farm compost is incorporated, and strategic use of traditional irrigation basins and mulching employed. Plants are infrequently drenched only for the first summer, and left thereafter to encourage deep rooting and self-sufficiency. Those that prove suitably adapted and resilient are then propagated and spread, with a small, sheltered, shaded nursery behind the house full of wonderful and intriguing succulents and less common species.



Serapias lingua in wild area

The ninety metre borehole, hardly used, towards the back of the garden stands testimony to Rob and Rosie's dedication to reduce and lower their environmental impact and burden, and the simple open boundary fencing all around gives views out to the wider Matos beyond, creating a feeling of space and context; the unbeatable borrowed landscapes, helping bring a certain transparency to the design and setting. A handful of found objects, including an abandoned rustic drawn cart add alternative interest, creating a few focal points amongst the vegetation but the driveway is perhaps the most conservative and unassuming part of the garden and gives nothing away of the hidden oasis behind, with more typical modern materials and raised beds adding little to the less conventional and more unusual planting you would expect from Rosie, some of which I believe was retained from the previous design.

With many current and contemporary designs, trends and habits coming across as over-thought to me and giving too much credence to hard landscaping and materials with sharp, defined lines, boundaries and palettes etc., I found Rosie and Rob's garden refreshing in its free approach and emphasis on plants, naturalism and experimentation. Whilst I may not be able to define or explain why such naturalism appeals and connects with me, I do believe I enjoy the absence of manmade design and principles which can often lead to critical and overly analytical reflection and behaviour which can dominate the state of being and experiencing. Working and visiting the contemporary and historic gardens in the UK like I do, I never feel I have enough of a chance to continue exploring and considering the wildflowers and countryside which I have such a longstanding penchant and passion for, and I often crave to escape to wild and free places. Leaving the Quinta das Sesmarias though, I felt inspired, determined and revitalised to continue exploring this alternative style of gardening and will very much look forward to the prospect of doing so given the opportunity in the future. The thought of the equivalent with British natives truly excites me and this feeling and aspiration only intensified after visiting the Algarve national parks as well.



Carpet of Phelipanche in wild area

Quinta das Salinas (Eastern Algarve)

We would visit Margaret Jackson's suburban garden in the coastal Quinta do Lago after seeing Rosie's and the two couldn't be more different in terms of design and intention. Margaret was an architect by trade before retiring, and the garden reflects another output for her deep-set passion for design and enthusiasm for plantsmanship alike. The Quinta das Salinas isn't Margaret's first garden and this is self evident in the fine attention to detail, expert finish and rounded sense of order and balance. Starting from an almost blank canvas, its conception and creation have also been uniquely, and perhaps quite accidentally, documented in a fantastic portfolio and diary.

The design is brilliantly contemporary, fusing a backdrop of more typical Portuguese planting with a broad palette of exotic and rare species, modern materials and contemporary themes and ideas. Crucially though, equal weight and attention is paid to the plant collection as it is the hard landscaping and other elements, and a certain balance is struck that helps make the garden an impressive progression in the history of garden design.



Polygala myrtifolia in gravel garden

Given its relative size and scale, the space is designed and used impeccably, creating a sense of space and movement with a long sweeping path and Myrtle hedge (*Myrtus* sp,) that leads and curves visitors roughly around the perimeters and boundary before bringing them back to the opposite side of the house in a figure of eight shape. Similarly, the vertical space is exploited to maximum effect as well with the garden spread out over multiple interconnected levels, and judicious architectural plants and structural elements used in faultless proportion; clearly positioned by a trained eye.

Nearer the house, the land is terraced with a patio and functional area overlooking a small swimming pool and sunbathing area. Both make use of high quality materials and finishes with clean, sharp lines set at angles against the garden to cleverly exaggerate the space. The garden borders start here, extending out from the side of the house into the garden, unifying the whole design and bringing the foliage and vegetation right up to the back door. Unusual species succulents and Orchids adorn the hard landscape here, with Margaret making excellent use of containers and borders to help break up the level plane. A plethora of pots, vases and troughs in all manner of sizes, materials and styles are exquisitely arranged around the terraces in different themes and compositions, helping bringing the foliage out of the border and into the forefront of the design.



Architectural Agave attenuata with succulents

Down from the terraces, the almost absolute use of rock, gravel and stone further highlights the tangible and tactile nature of the materials and theme, and continues the clever manipulation of textures and colours within the palette. Gravel is used more-or-less exclusively throughout the garden here, acting as the perfect visceral foil and canvas for the architectural planting of succulents, cacti, palms and similar climatic and foliage species of spiky rosette forms. Similarly, it will also double as a protective and beneficial mulch after Margaret improved the sandy Litoral soil with imported material. Scattered around the garden in miniaturised scenes, rocks, stones and found objects of all shapes and forms almost hark back to the picturesque but are seemingly placed with such precision they are reminiscent of the latent theories of Japanese gardens.

These outwardly small and simple touches betray the depth of their consideration, imparting not only an attention to detail but also the character of its creator. The Quinta das Salinas seemed a deeply personal garden to me and one clearly loved by its author, with unassuming features such as the potting table, wildlife pond and the aforementioned found objects (Which must have taken many memorable years to accumulate), along with the idiosyncratic plant collection, retaining Margaret's presence and personality throughout.



Salvia sp. in gravel garden

Given this sentiment, it is somewhat unfortunate that Margaret's neighbours overlook her garden whilst failing to share her passion, negating privacy and borrowed views with swathes of uninspired lawns and palm trees. We can only hold hope that such zeal is infectious and that through such actions and projects, given time, others may be inspired to experiment and express themselves similarly. Whilst I think it may be fair to compare Marilyn's style to Margaret's and acknowledge their mutual influence, I would perhaps like to suggest they are both part of an emerging and developing movement and trend towards the hyper-contemporary that has the potential to transform garden culture and the industry alike. In creating designs that are both modern and forward-thinking as well as a low-input (Such as these dry gardens.), contemporary designs have the opportunity to influence popular culture and fashions as well as horticultural heritage and sustainability. Whilst this could counteract some of the previous concerns and issues raised earlier in the report, I wouldn't feel particularly comfortable trying to predict any potential future or course for such trends, however. Whilst the Quinta das Salinas is undoubtedly an impressive and compelling design, and one that could easily influence and spawn imitations and offspring, I hold no illusions that it is likely an expensive venture that will could continue to be such. Finances and budgets are such crucial factors that they are often a key limiting one in designs and projects and to the extent that it can easily hinder the prospective future of one, and to speak frankly, I am unsure how many people would be prepared to make such dedications or have the real option to.

Regardless, this can only ever be speculation at this point and we have only to follow such pioneers and advocates to see how the industry and market responds and dictates. Similarly, whilst I appreciated the clarity and delivery of the design, the personal touches and unique plant collection, I cannot help but personally feel there is a certain palpable formality in such manicured styles that slightly unsettles me. Something in its unwavering perfection that is perhaps too unnatural or contrived for my personal tastes, but then again, Margaret's garden is her own and is a reflection of her and for her, and ultimately, this is the most important element. If the garden pleases Margaret and makes her feel comfortable, content and happy, then it can only be a success.



Cycad in front garden

Mandihari Gardens nr Ferraris, Almancil

The Mandihari Gardens, created by designer Vivian Hirst, whilst not technically the largest we visited, felt the most expansive, with numerous garden rooms spread across the three acre/one and half hectare property and residential compound in the sandy Litoral of the Eastern Algarve. Laid out quite some time ago, the gardens and design have matured positively and Vivian now has the brilliant opportunity to experience and reflect upon her design fully realised and appreciate the foresight.

Vivian and her partner run a gardening and design business in the area, and much like Margaret, their garden reflects their passions and vocation with subtle but harmonic and conscious compositions that manipulate space and plantings with dynamism and excellence. The planting and collection is resolutely diverse and Vivian's history in Costa Rica and the Canary Islands permeates through in lavish displays and intriguing exotics and subtropicals. Crucially though, at no point does it feel excessive or forced. Vivian has managed to manifest, through space and harmony, an almost timeless idyllic and tranquil atmosphere that enchants the visitor immediately and befits its rural surroundings.



Quercus suber courtyard with *Clivia*

On our arrival, we would meet Vivian on a small veranda at the front of the house, under the lofty and shady boughs of a mature Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*); the cool light beneath creating an almost cloister-like space with a circular stone terrace and border surrounding the tree, and traditional planted earthenware pots and vases. From here we would move to a dry gravel garden on the driveway, where species of Australian origin (Including attractive and fragrant Lemon Eucalyptus, *Corymbia citriodora*, and unusual *Eucalyptus macrocarpa*), succulents, trees and shrubs surround a large ornamental lake of puddled clay with *Nymphaea* Waterlilies and an accompanying bridge. As you head round the back of the cottages though, the gardens really come into their own; Spanning the length of the property, linked through low-key gateways and paths, different rooms break up the land and create smaller, more intimate spaces, each feeling secluded and private with mature walls, hedgerows, shrubs, trees and lawns, and other obliging garden and water features. With holiday rental cottages in the compound some integrate a degree of domestic functionality and practicality as well as privacy, such as the salt-water swimming pool and cabana, but nevertheless still retain the thematic landscaping and planting. Arguably, the real highlight of the gardens and plant collection would be the room behind the main cottage, however, where grass paths lead out from an area of lawn around subtropical borders and beds, with a low branched, well-proportioned False Pepper Tree (*Schinus molle*, raised from seed by Vivian) offering a congruous and balanced focal point on the opposite side.

A Mediterranean rose garden stands in this area as well and a vegetable garden nearby, but the exotic and mixed planting in the borders manages to be both exuberant and understated at the same time, bringing interest, colour, form and texture to the relaxed domicile scene with species of *Adhatoda*, *Banksia*, *Buddleja salviifolia*, *Callistemon*, *Cassia* and *Petrea*.



Cassia species amongst the exotic planting

The serene spirit and calm of the Mandihari Gardens is compelling and impressive but also something I may struggle to describe in words. The rich and abundant planting undoubtedly creates an almost paradisiacal quality but, crucially for me, the garden feels loved, appreciated, cared for, and ultimately, inhabited. When gardens appear untouched and immaculate, they can sometimes seem vacant and empty, unappreciated almost, but Vivian's felt occupied, lived-in, and I imagine it as a peaceful retreat; a place for relaxation, reflection and escapism amongst everything else. Either way, I appreciated these relaxed and peaceful qualities and found the informal design favourably unpretentious despite its obviously devised and considered nature.



Adhatoda species in exotic borders

With mixed planting including lawns, exotics and subtropicals, Vivian inevitably has to irrigate more than some of the other gardens we visited, or than if she used more natives and/or dry cultures instead (Though Margaret also irrigated, I believe), and when considered in conjunction with the garden's size, this is a reasonable addition to the maintenance regime. Vivian has regular, though brief help from employees of the gardening business, I believe, and I imagine this makes the size and maintenance more manageable.



False Pepper Tree; Schinus molle. Raised from seed



Banksia sp. in tropical border



Callistemon sp in tropical border

Loule Garden, Eastern Algarve

Burford Hurry is President of the Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal and lives in quite possibly one of the most unique and characterful urban spaces I have ever known. Tucked away from the heat and noise of the city, the property lies nestled in the steep valley of a natural watercourse, making discerning use of terracing to create different microclimates and scenarios over multiple levels. Whilst undoubtedly small, the garden is deceptive and makes up for any perceived shortcomings with prudent planting and imaginative and characterful design work.



Exotic containers on balcony

The property entrance is on the highest level, the front door set in the boundary wall and opening onto a courtyard of sorts with the bustling street and bridge above. Irregular, asymmetric paving and wall stones finish the terrace informally, accentuating the planting and setting the tone for the rest of the garden, where hard landscaping remains the constant and unifying element. A topiary Pomegranate (*Punica granatum.*), almost Bonsai and pruned to exaggerate its slightly weeping habit, forms a striking focal point. There is an immediate feeling you have entered a hidden urban oasis with the rushing water starting to buffer the rumble of the road. Elsewhere, a Carob tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*) has been pruned into an umbrella shape for shade, and balustrades offer views over the river and opposite bank. Burford is quite fond of topiary and bonsai work, and the shrubs and trees are immaculately but subtly maintained here, thriving in the cool moist alluvial soils below the protective paving. He has also begun experimenting with epiphytic plants (Such as *Tillandsia* species) in the canopies, though some are struggling in this drier, hotter part of the garden.

Descending the staircase, the house and gardens continue to become more private, spread across separate levels with different vistas opening with increasing proximity to the river and waterfall. After the relative expanse of the courtyard, the space becomes more narrow, sheltered and secluded, the waterfall an ever more pervasive presence. Pots and containers crowd the intermediate terraces and balconies down to the open riverside, planted with bulbs, succulents and more unusual exotics, many of South African origin - including a novel bonsai *Carissa macrocarpa* - reflecting Burford's native homelands. Nearer the river and beneath the house in places, small microclimates have been established with a series of springs and reservoirs creating humidity in places and cooling effects elsewhere. Burford even manages to garden a small island on the opposite side of the river bank having planted various palms to stabilise the soils. The dramatic waterfall making an imposing and extraordinary borrowed landscape, transporting the garden away from its urban milieu and overwhelming the senses with the movement and sound of cascading water reverberating round the valley walls. From the bottom riverside terrace though, a previously obscured White Mulberry (*Morus Alba*) is revealed as the proud and defiant tree eluding its cliffside perch to tower above the terraces. Drawing the eye with it, the narrow valley and terraces feel humbled and cloistered almost, the gardens understated but beguiling. Cycads, palms and shrubs (Such as *Grewia*) jostle to affirm themselves on the lower terrace, creating varied structural interest, whilst ferns and Arums (*Zantedeschia*) thrive in the relative cool shade and shelter. Climbers and scramblers such as *Wisteria* and *Canarina canariensis* hang and trail the walls alongside native Ivy-Leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*).



Vista across bottom terrace to island with Strelitzia

With an inspired and balanced palette of hard and soft landscape textures, forms and colours, Burford's garden is brilliantly alluring and considered. There is a very subtle harmony and atmosphere throughout its design, along with a certain rustic beauty and charm, that many gardens strive to achieve but seem so natural and effortless here. With its acutely idiosyncratic character and highly inimitable setting, this may have been one of my favourite gardens we visited, and I would be interested to know more about the history of the property and gardens and would relish the opportunity to visit again to see the seasonal variations, and how and if, Burford continues to experiment with the space.



Structural Morus alba and Zamia furfuracea on the bottom terrace with Zantedeschia in background shade

Carvoeiro Garden

This modern villa garden between Carvoeiro and Lagoa in the Western Algarve, owned by an expat couple, is one of Marilyn's ongoing Waterwise projects currently undergoing further renovation and redesign to create a more appropriate and tolerant dry garden. Marilyn has completely overhauled the original rock garden, restructuring the poorly realised and faltering structure to create a much more aesthetic, pragmatic and effective design. Elsewhere, an uninspired and ailing subtropical corridor and lawn has been transformed into a native and Mediterranean walk leading to a small succulent rockery below the terrace. A small courtyard has also been created around the opposite side of the house, with a Jacaranda tree overlooked by the raised borders. A new thematic garden is now also being designed after the couple purchased the adjacent plot of land, and will see the new walk transformed into a promenade overlooking a contemporary sunken native garden of sorts.

Suffering with shallow planting pockets and soils, the original rock garden was crude and dilapidated, the steep inclines exacerbating run-off and compaction, and offering little in the way of water absorption or retention. Needless to say, the planting failed to establish and regular irrigation was pointless, only running up water bills. The problem wasn't helped by misguided and ill-conceived planting schemes that incorporated species of polar adaptations and requirements that would have been difficult to maintain regardless of the situation. Marilyn completely deconstructed the entire anatomy, keystones and all, to create new terraces with flatter plateaus and deeper pockets, allowing the plants to grow out and give a more natural appearance by obscuring the structure beneath. With mature palms, Phormium and *Zamia furfuracea* retained, the transition and shock was lessened, and some of the more effective original impact conserved.

On the terrace below and perpendicular to the rock garden, Marilyn mercifully removed a lacklustre and formulaic bordered lawn, creating a modern minimalist promenade instead with a double border of native and Mediterranean herbaceous and woody plants and shrubs, gravel and staggered paving. With a limited palette of plants and materials refining textures and colours, repeat plantings add rhythm and grasses, sensory movement. The path concludes with a small and sheltered rockery and gallery for succulents and cacti (Various *Echeveria*, *Crassula* and *Bryophyllum* spp.), the theme continued in the balcony troughs above where the species may be more tolerant of the heat, exposure and limited soils. After a season in the ground - and formative aftercare -, the planting has begun to establish well and put on an impressive amount of growth (Marilyn used mycorrhiza at planting, geotextile weed matting and provided information for a formative maintenance regime) but will benefit from maturity with age. Species and varieties that particularly caught my eye here and in the rock gardens included *Tulbaghia violacea*, *Gambelia speciosa*, *Acca sellowiana*, *Crithmum maritimum*, *Euphorbia characias* and *E. rigida*, and *Portulaca* spp.

The design itself is outwardly quite contemporary, with formal and minimalist influences reflecting the architecture of the villa and the modern settings, and the gardens will be maintained to further highlight this. The rock garden is arguably quite stylised, as opposed to naturalistic (Which could sit uncomfortably with the modern setting), and the individual plants along the promenade will be pruned to be kept as such, insuring the gravel below and spacing remain features of the design. Whilst this is an interesting idea, I do find the native vegetation more effective and appealing when it is allowed to mature and form its natural Matos habit, with dense, intermingled mounds and colourful tapestry carpets. Nevertheless, this is the client's vision and the plants will be less likely to self-set and propagate through the matting which will ease this maintenance.

Although it may not be to everyone's taste, perhaps this will make an interesting twist on the use of native wildflowers and Marilyn's formative aftercare should increase rates of establishment and decrease maintenance and water consumption as the client desired.

The owners have interestingly acquired the neighbouring plot of land recently (A future investment and to stop development as much as anything else, I imagine.) and the new garden being designed should be an interesting annex and addition to the garden space, which felt somewhat out of proportion to the house. The new garden being created, a design mixing a formal structure and symmetrical layout with naturalistic planting, should counteract this, rebalancing the two elements and bringing the garden into equal weight with the property. The design Marilyn is working on centres around a native wildflower meadow with four corner beds surrounding with transplanted Olives and mixed natives. An outer path will navigate the boundary from the old promenade and offer adventitious views across the garden and out to the wider landscape, whilst a line of Judas trees (*Cercis siliquastrum*) will mark and screen the streetside boundary. Whilst both spaces make use of the open views and landscape beyond the boundaries (With sea and coastal views from the rock garden), its potential as a borrowed feature in the new design interests me more. The area behind the space is old, reclaimed agricultural land with mature Carob and Olive trees, but the lack of maintenance and disturbance since has allowed the wildflowers to take a hold again. This could make an interesting juxtaposition and point of comparison to me, with both perhaps containing similar species but one being entirely fabricated and more idealised, and the other more wild and free. Either way, I will be interested to see the results and will look forward to updates from Marilyn.

Alvor Garden

Another expat garden between Alvor and Penina, this was one of the last we would visit during our trip and is another of Marilyn's Waterwise clients in the Western Algarve. The redesign made excellent use of, and revitalised, an otherwise unremarkable and costly 350m² lawn, creating a refreshing and dynamic contemporary and naturalistic gravel garden in its place with a much broader range and period of interest. The design manipulates and exploits the confined space ingeniously, making shrewd use of a potentially difficult level plane (That some may struggle with or find restrictive.), whilst limiting the vertical elements to create a sense of balance and space across the whole. In the wrong hands or poorly realised this could feel underwhelming or lacking but here it feels understated and nuanced, allowing more attention to be focused duly on the plants and planting. New Mediterranean species, including *Viburnum tinus*, replaced older, shady conifer hedging and a sweeping line of native *Lavandula* species edges an unobtrusive border towards the back and one side.

The real heart of the garden though is the compositional planting groups and selections, with a half dozen or so dense, rounded clumps spread relatively evenly across and set-off by the gravel mulch, leaving small paths in between. Groupings are arranged so as to make use of a degree of natural grading with shorter species tending to be towards the edge and taller species more towards the middle. Stouter compositions were then also placed nearer the house and veranda, and taller ones towards the back of the garden to create a similar effect across the wider vistas. Already ablaze with a rich diversity of contrasting and complementary species and varieties, colours and textures, shapes and forms, habits and styles, large found rocks and stones help unify the theme and create proportionality in the modest palette, adding further height, architecture and texture to the compositions etc.

Walking around the paths, the flat plane and single dimension are forgotten, the displays bursting with diversity, life and abundance, and carefully considered to ease and intrigue botanic observation and appreciation. Unedged and thick with a mixture of native and Mediterranean perennials, herbs and grasses, the beds almost recall the hunting and observation of wildflowers in the natural Matos landscapes but in an extremely stylised and contemporary fashion. The client remarked during our visit that they were always discovering new aspects and details to the planting throughout the season, and given the relative space, this goes to show that discerning design work can achieve a great deal regardless of circumstances and perceived shortcomings. Personal favourites amongst the dense planting here included selections of *Salvia*, including *S. 'Bee's Bliss'* and *S. 'Royal Bumble'*, *Thunbergia*, *Sideritis*, *Ballota pseudodictamnus* and *Euphorbia melitensis* as well as more common but still impressive species such as *Echium* and *Cistus* etc.

A single specimen tree and modest pergola with swags befit the stripped back design, carefully balancing proportion and pragmatism in the vertical horizon, introducing structure and choice climbers without detracting from or dominating the design. Fragrant Roses, Jasmine and Honeysuckle, including native *Lonicera implexa*, adorn the open structure creating a rustic scented walkway that compliments the free and open space of the design more than anything else.

Unfortunately, running out of film before the previous garden, I was unable to try and capture my perspective and viewpoints here. Regardless though, I particularly appreciated the simple but innovative fusion and cohesion of naturalistic and contemporary elements and styles in the design, with the space, layout, order and limited palette reminding me of more modern designs whilst the mixed, varied and uninhibited planting introduced more naturalistic influences. There is an impressive and particular harmony and equilibrium between these elements and a particular eye for detail and dynamism in its planting and intricacies that help create a design that is both modern and timeless at the same time. Being only a relatively recent transformation, there is time for the planting, garden and qualities to mature further, and there is potential for further development as well. The current design only takes up what could perhaps be called the back garden and sits rather at odds with the front and side gardens, driveway and productive area, which appear somewhat tired and dated in comparison. Given similar care and attention, redesign and renovation, uniformity could be achieved across the wider area and add to the interest, potential and intrinsic benefits of the garden space expanded. Like Marilyn's other projects and renovations, the process was treated with the same diligence, sensitivity and aftercare, and plants that started out as plugs barely a year ago have now established remarkably and firmly set their roots in the improved soil with limited but effective irrigation. The success of the design and its realisation and construction stand testament to Marilyn's passion, skills and expertise and all the more so in fact for her ethos whilst doing so.

Veteran Trees

Alongside garden visits and wildflower hunts, Rosie would also take us on veteran tree hunts, timing and circumstances permitting, and with a keen interest and passion for many tree species, I was enthusiastic to say the least. Perhaps the most striking and noticeable feature of many was of course their size and magnitude, but not necessarily in the manner with which you might first expect. Given the relatively short growing season, high temperatures, limited rainfall and vulnerable soils etc., many of the trees we visited, when compared to similar or equivalently aged specimens in the British Isles, for instance, were significantly and distinctly smaller than expected.



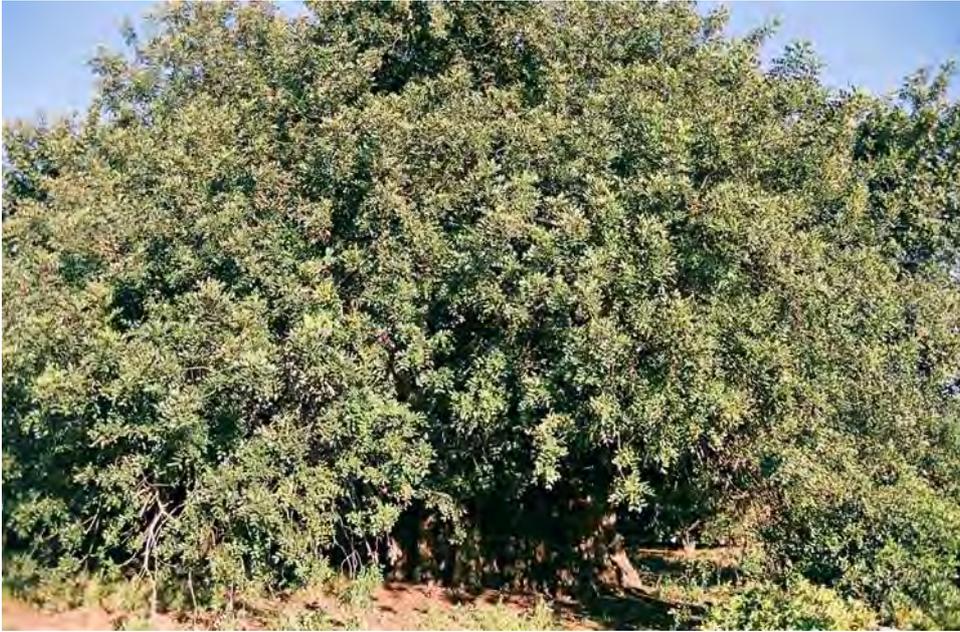
1000 year old Olive tree; presumably pollarded

Impressive nonetheless, it was comforting to discover a recognised list of sorts and a relative degree of respect for such elders, sometimes incorporated into modern developments and land uses rather than felled regardless of their often more unusual locations.

Likewise, it was interesting to discover businesses, services and markets for transplanting established and mature trees. Perhaps less common in the United Kingdom, it was quite remarkable with many mature Olive trees, amongst others, frequently transplanted for sale rather than felled during changes of land use etc. Although many different species would be intolerant of such disturbance I am sure, this is evidently quite common with dry culture trees around Portugal.



650 year old Quercus ilex subsp. rotundifolia



Ancient Carob with 25m canopy; on agricultural land

Conclusions

This being my first dedicated study trip abroad, it was invariably always going to be both indelible and profound, but it was also simultaneously challenging and an intense learning experience at the same time. In hindsight, travelling down to the Algarve after spending the best part of a week working in the parks of Sintra, I was underprepared for the experiences to come. The lush gardens and landscape of Sintra had already shattered any preconceptions of the climate and countryside but we were left with little time to explore the wider environment and ecosystems that would help put the experience and landscape in perspective and context. Somewhat spent after the working week and travel, the successive placement was set to remedy this wholeheartedly and resolutely, giving us the superlative and unforgettable opportunity, amongst everything else, to experience and witness the full opulence and incomparable spectacle of the Spring wildflower display and for this, I am eternally grateful. If we had visited Sintra only or had chosen to travel later in the year - when many conventional and seasonal holidaymakers choose to visit - we would never have been able to experience and fully appreciate the full range, diversity and seasonality of the native flora and landscape. Nothing can prepare someone for the sight that is Cape St. Vincent at peak season and I am pleased that I in fact walked into this blind, so to speak, as it made the moment and experience all the more transcendent, emotive and immersive. This was undoubtedly a high point of the trip for me and I couldn't recommend it more to anyone interested in horticulture and the natural world etc.

Nevertheless, as with any testing and unfamiliar experiences and journeys, there will always be a fair share of complications and lessons to be learnt for next time; not that these would have ever outweigh the positives and benefits to be reaped from such endeavours though. The trip left me truly bettered, informed and inspired on many and multiple levels, personal and vocational. After a somewhat disheartening and difficult start to the year, I was personally quite warmed, encouraged and re-energised by the environmental aspirations, influences and passions of the predisposed individuals we met, and feel more determined, motivated and encouraged than ever to continue communicating and practising the rationale and disciplines since returning. My general and prior

experiences of day-to-day operational function and practice within the industry is that such complementary approaches and ideologies often fall second to other narrower goals and targets; flippantly forsaken for perceived complications, priorities and time constraints, for example. In reality though, and with great misfortune, there seems to be innumerable recurring misconceptions around such practices and an associated lack of understanding and self awareness. Such misunderstandings aren't necessarily restricted to the industry though and similar fallacies exist within the public domain as well, and it could be argued that the industry is simply meeting public demands and expectations. Ideally, a cultural shift and change in perspective and attitude is needed across the whole system entirely. On the other hand though, with an increasing awareness of our effect and dependency on the environment, and the effects of resource pressure and potential climate change not fully understood or anticipated, such sustainable philosophies and strategies may take on a whole new relevance and priority in the future naturally and inevitably.



Ash tree in Vivian's garden

Gardens such as Margaret Jackson's, and those designed by Marilyn, furthermore experiment with the potential for sustainability to be incorporated into contemporary and popular design - with a degree of compromise - broadening horizons, potential appeal and success rates at the same time, but there are lessons to be learnt from the direct practices and forward-thinking work of groups such as MGAP and Waterwise. Such pragmatic principles and design work could pre-empt and herald the model future of garden design with sustainability fundamentally at its very core and not out of precaution or preference. In an industry and discipline where communication and open discourse seem as important as ever and mutually beneficial, the trip was a brilliant opportunity to network and converse with like-minded individuals and organisations, and has hopefully helped foster and strengthen the potential and future relationship between MGAP and the PGG as well. With much admiration and respect for their work, I will be endeavouring to keep in touch with Rosie, Gerhard, MGAP and the others in the future, and am particularly interested to see how their current and prospective projects progress and develop with time, especially the new botanic gardens at the Quinta which I would love to be involved with more and would gladly donate further time and energy to given the opportunity. More especially so after our stay and working days when it became increasingly evident that the Quinta and its ongoing projects were somewhat understaffed and

overstretched. I became increasingly concerned over the week that the farm needed an assistant and/or a regular source of labour and physical support and whilst Gerhard is a capable and driven man, there is arguably too much for him and his immediate supporters to comfortably maintain and it would be a serious shame if this affected any of the ongoing or potential future projects, especially given their contemporary relevance and importance. I have met many inspiring, positive and impassioned independent projects over the years and many have unfortunately struggled with the same or similar issues, sometimes to dire consequences. The Quinta is just the most recent to reiterate and drive home the many obstacles that such autonomous enterprises must – and do - overcome to persevere and succeed, and here we come full circle to the importance of networking and mutual support again.

The idea of non-intensive, low-input/maintenance and low-impact gardening is still relatively downplayed, undiscussed and unpublicised in the horticultural sector and global mainstream media in general, and visiting wild and experimental gardens such as Rosie's has me intrigued and curious about the potential for such designs and theories to be applied in different geographical situations, with the blueprint theoretically applicable to and unrestricted by variations in climatic regions. Perhaps it is due to our rich cultural history of plant collecting and cultivation in Britain, and/or our comparatively and generally accommodating, manageable climate, that natives and wildflowers are often eschewed in favour of more showy and brash species, varieties and cultivars, but much like Portuguese natives they are threatened. In more extreme climates, however, or in potentially changing, unstable and future conditions, such influential ideologies offer practical solutions to real and problematic scenarios and should be given due attention and consideration accordingly. Either way though, wildflower meadows and similar designs appear to be having a resurgence in popularity (The shape of things to come?) and I have faith that the alluring, subtle and understated beauty of wild and parent species have the potential to seduce many more and help bring environmental issues further into the forefront of public conscience and discussion. I have been especially eager ever since to experiment with sustainability and British natives myself and given the opportunity to do so in the future, would look to such gardens and experience for inspiration. Similarly, I will continue exploring and hunting wildflowers across the British Isles for inspiration and education as there is nothing remotely comparable to finding a plant, population or community (Fungi and fauna included) blooming and blossoming in its natural habitat, and revealing and hinting at its preferences, attributes and potential etc.

Perhaps one of the largest areas I struggled with was the actual study of climates and geology, analysing this in relation to its effects on the endemic wildlife flora and habitats we visited. This is something I have never done before and whilst I also struggled to find data relevant to the sites and landscapes we visited (Poorly translated websites didn't help!), I wasn't entirely confident with how to set about comparing them either, given the complex nature of their interconnected intricacies and multifaceted workings. Alas this is still something I am not especially confident about but working in, experiencing and studying the challenging conditions of the potentially hostile climate, the wildflower and garden tours reinforced and underscored the inherent value and potential of microclimates, and we were able to observe Portuguese natives flourishing in, and favouring, the relative shelter and protection of the Matos vegetation and habitat, for example. Likewise, gardens such as Burford's also harness the innate advantages of shelter, aspect, orientation and resource availability to cultivate and encourage cool, moist shady areas, whilst the historic gardens around Sintra have long exploited the comparatively mild maritime climate created by their situation to help cultivate exotic and tropical species from around the world. These mild microclimates were arguably comparable to the coastal

habitats of the Algarve which seemed more amenable than the harsh conditions further inland. Whilst these aren't revolutionary realisations or practices (Microclimates have long been exploited on the opposite end of the spectrum to cultivate tender species in Northern temperate climates, for example.), it is nevertheless beneficial and insightful to witness their potential in different situations and climates. Similarly, some of the gardens and natural landscapes also helped reinforce, and were great examples of, the potential and relevance of context and setting within horticultural study and design with genius use of borrowed landscapes and features.



Imposing parasitic Orobanche on sandy clay soils

Given the often derivative, diluted and formulaic interpretation and depictions of Mediterranean Gardens and styles outside their native soils (Comparable with other appropriated geographical and vernacular styles, eg imitation Japanese Gardens), I was also particularly appreciative and attentive of the evolution and diversity of elements and styles in the gardens we visited. From the hyper contemporary designs of Margaret and Marilyn to the congenial and anomalous spaces within Rosie and Burford's garden's, nobody felt compelled to resort to archaic crutches or cliches. Most seemed to in fact push and challenge the designer and visitors to question preconceptions and assumptions of what gardens can and should be. Whilst they may incorporate recognisable elements and familiar species of Mediterranean styles, they were never overstated, overused or employed without due consideration or creativity and this was both insightful, inspirational and revelatory.

For me personally, you cannot better or surpass the value and quality of physical, hands-on practical experience and our itinerary of tasks, tours and visits gave us many appropriate opportunities and environments for physical and practical learning across the varying disciplines of horticulture from wildflower botanising to garden design etc. I have long felt that I learn best in such a fashion, with theory and practical study most effective when supporting each other and in conjunction. To have studied the Mediterranean climate, flora and gardening heritage purely theoretically wouldn't have given me the same appreciation and understanding that I feel I have now. Whilst I could have been more prepared, studying and researching more in advance to better ready and inform myself prior, I definitely feel the experiences have helped reinforce and instil elements of my horticultural training so far which have arguably been out of balance and more theoretical than practical unfortunately.

Likewise, whilst many of the practices and techniques Rosie, Marilyn, Gerhard et al champion are relatively well-known, and simple best practice and common sense (Appropriate planting, correct and thorough aftercare, maintenance and mulching etc.), it was beneficial to see such theories in practice in different climates and to be able to analyse the results and outcome in person.

The itinerary was resolutely ambitious, far-reaching and comprehensive, spreading multiple garden and wildflower studies and tours, presentations and working days, over a relatively wide and distant area and all within a reasonably short period of time. Whilst there is no doubt I left with a broad overview that met my expectations and aims for the trip, in the context of the available and allocated time, the grand ambitions were always going to be pushed and stressed during certain scenarios and I could easily have benefited from and spent more time on any, and all, the trips we took. Whilst this is somewhat unavoidable on such tours, if you are relatively inexperienced or a slower learner, then extended programmes can often help give a better appreciation, understanding and depth to educational endeavours, whilst also allowing additional time to pace exploration and study etc. On the other hand though, and in all fairness, many of the sites, such as the national parks, are so extensive and inexhaustible in themselves they arguably require dedicated and individual study and surveying in their own right. Whilst we would undoubtedly have benefited from extending the trip and incorporating the few remaining territories that were beyond the scope of a tight schedule - such as the mountainous Serra region and habitat of Monchique - this would have taken the trip into whole new realms and loftier parameters, and the experience can always act as the foundations for further studies and projects in the future. Perhaps starting with the ongoing and wider work of related and influential figures such as nurseryman and designer Olivier Filippi (Who pioneered the Mediterranean Waterwise movement and ethos), research could continue into the horticultural activities and practices of other geographical regions of Mediterranean climates, for instance, and relate them to my experiences in Portugal.

Nevertheless, such trips will always be at the mercy of circumstances and timing, and whilst we were visiting during the peak wildflower season, we were also visiting after an uncharacteristically dry winter, and this would invariably affect the very displays and communities we had travelled to experience and study. As a consequence, Spring flowers and geophytes were particularly subdued and reserved and the display comparatively forlorn and short lived. Perhaps I would have been as equally enamoured with Rocha da Pena as I was with Cape St. Vincent, had I seen it after a normal damp Winter. Nonetheless, these wildflower and national park tours were highlights and defining moments for myself, regardless of the diminished displays, and I would have been interested to dedicate further time towards studying and discussing their management and context within a wider remit and criteria of modern conservation. With the threat and effects of development increasing, much to the degradation and detriment of the region's countryside and wildlife, this would have been of equal interest to me, and I am keen to try and comprehend their prospective future. The fate of these ecologically important and sensitive sites rests with their ongoing management and protection, and it is imperative that given broad and current trends, correct sustainable and sensitive conservation takes a reasonable precedence and/or priority over some of the other park objectives. During our visits, this was inevitably on my mind and I was disappointed not to find much readily accessible information or interpretation relating to the relevant management, rules or regulations etc. Whilst I would have found it revealing and beneficial to do so though, the feasibility of actually contacting and conversing with the appropriate authorities would probably have been somewhat unrealistic and difficult given the the potential language barrier and necessary networking that wasn't especially available to us.

Perhaps the biggest shortfalls, however, were my own and I have learnt much from my first study trip, with many things I would do differently, or wouldn't repeat, if I were to try and undertake a similar tour again in the future. Some of the hardest challenges and obstacles I have encountered since starting out in horticulture relate to the practical study and botany of plants themselves. The sheer volume and diversity of plant life and species can be intimidating to those who don't take to and absorb theoretical and academic study easily or don't readily have access to the means or facilities to educate yourself practically. The effect can furthermore be compounded by a multitude of deceptive and unforeseeable pitfalls. Personally, I find I am more likely to remember a plant if I work with it frequently and cultivate it myself physically, but working exclusively in a single garden with the same plants can also end up inadvertently narrowing your outlook, especially if the garden doesn't operate a progressive mindset and introduce new plants often. This would be one of the reasons why I applied for the PGG traineeship and for study trips such as these. Likewise, garden fashions and trends, both historic and current, can lead to a relatively narrow range of similar species being cultivated across the board, even in different gardens, limiting exposure to the diversity of different species whilst also creating nondescript and forgettable planting schemes. I think it may also be fair to surmise that the more adaptable, better performing and hardy varieties of plants are more favoured and frequently cultivated as well, driving out and limiting diversity in much the same way. Even if I am personally quite fond of a species, if I do not encounter it often enough, the name and defining features can be forgotten, making broadening one's knowledge base more difficult and problematic. Having only especially worked in the British industry and sector so far, I have invariably become more familiar with species suitable and hardy enough for this particular climate and going abroad, or even just visiting unorthodox or plantsman's garden, can be somewhat of a shock and enough to make you realise how limited your plant knowledge actually is. Travelling around Portugal and visiting such a diverse range of gardens and habitats felt very much like one of these moments and I felt exposed to and overwhelmed by the whole new palette of unfamiliar and alien species, and whilst this was quite exhilarating, it was also quite frustrating as well, trying to constantly keep up and abreast with everything during a busy schedule. There is no doubt that I was relatively underprepared and inexperienced for such a trip, and wish I'd had more time to study in preparation. Although my taxonomic and identification skills began to improve after a few days, if I could have studied more beforehand, my attention and focus could have been balanced and spread over other related areas as well. Unfortunately though, I was struggling to find time to prepare and I wasn't entirely confident about what to expect or how much to prepare either. The film camera would become a hindrance here as well unfortunately, restricting my ability to document findings and points of interest simply whilst moving through the landscapes. After a few excursions, it would become clear that it wasn't as easy for me to identify plants from my limited records or recall certain features or elements of importance. Either way, I would not underestimate such a trip again and would definitely consider a digital camera an invaluable and practical tool for such reasons.

On the other hand though, I might struggle to feel I'd had a real or genuine encounter if I experienced the whole trip through and behind a notepad or camera, and would like to think there are certain benefits to living in the moment, for want of a better expression. With Rosie, Marilyn and Gerhard practically leading us and taking us on tours, so to speak, I do feel there is a certain decency, politeness and respect in giving someone your full attention and engaging in conversation rather than treating everything as a presentation or exhibition. Whilst a certain medium and balance between the two is probably best practice, I have always preferred to try and physically and emotionally engage with a space or medium when studying or trying to interpret and understand it. Though the end results this time weren't arguably ideal, I do feel my experiences were authentic and sincere, even if I

may have left myself down, failing to maximise certain academic and studious elements and opportunities on the trip. As I mentioned before though, there is still always potential for my experiences and work thus far to act as a starting point or platform for future projects and further research, and I am always known to be somewhat hard on myself!

Overall and in conclusion, I found the trip truly insightful and thought-provoking to say the least and an excellent appendage to the preceding placement in Sintra. The two placements supplemented and complemented each other perfectly, contextualising experiences and assisting critical comparison and analysis, whilst the exhaustive schedule and itinerary gave us a broad overview and experience of regional and vernacular gardening cultures and practices, and an appreciation for the progressive relevance, heritage and future of horticulture within the country. Having now experienced and witnessed the climate for myself, I feel I have a much greater appreciation for its endemic species, many of which are cultivated outside and beyond their native climate and range, and would feel more comfortable and knowledgeable cultivating them for this very reason. The wildflower hunts and tours of the natural parks have revitalised and rejuvenated my passion and made me fall in love with plants and the natural world in even more, and the connections we have established can only be of ongoing and future benefit to all those involved. With all this in mind and everything discussed before, I think it may be fair to say that the trip was a success and achieved its aims and aspirations despite the few aforementioned shortcomings, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in making this life changing trip happen for all us. Wishing the Merlin Trust, Marilyn, Rosie, Gerhard, MGAP and the PGG the best in the future and the best of luck with all their future endeavours. On a final note, I would also thoroughly recommend the trips, experiences, people and organisations to anybody interested in Mediterranean gardening, horticulture and landscapes and would only encourage them to get in contact if they are thinking of organising a similar experience for themselves in the future. Contact details for the relevant individuals and bodies can be found on the websites referenced in the bibliography and you can contact me on rob.burstow@gmail.com anytime. I have many other photos I didn't include due to formatting and ident. issues (Either too small to appreciate or I couldn't work out what they were!) so please also feel free to email if you would like to see anymore of my photos or would like to see them uncompressed. Thanks again!



Scented Jasminum species smothering garden wall in Rocha

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