

Water Water Everywhere

by Peter Parker, Daily Telegraph, 3 August 2002

In a quiet corner of Herefordshire, a few miles from the Welsh border, Richard Pim has created a wonderfully natural-looking water garden in the 2.5 acres surrounding his small early 19th-century mill-house. Built on the Curl Brook, a tributary of the River Arrow, Westonbury Mill was grinding corn until the 1920s. Pim suspects that it was never very efficient, and the brook now flows unimpeded beneath one corner of the house. From the terrace you look out over a series of lushly planted ponds, channels, streams and islands to the fields beyond, where cattle graze beneath the trees.

A hydrogeologist, Pim has spent much of his life abroad, evaluating water management for other people. This left little time to consider the possibilities of the water flowing through his own land until, five years ago, he cleared out the millpond and widened part of the stream that fed it. He then hired a small digger for a week in order to extend a large pond he had made for wild duck 10 years earlier.

"It took three days," he recalls, "so I spent the rest of the week sculpting the ground as the mood took me. There was no real plan, but I had a wonderful time digging trenches and moving dirt around. Not having much idea what I was doing, I then went through the catalogues of two nurseries specialising in water, bog and marginal plants and bought one of everything, which I planted into dense clay."

This, he admits, was not altogether a success, but there were surprisingly few casualties. He subsequently dug a lot of sand, compost and well-rotted manure into the ground, and the plants began to thrive and multiply.

The old millpond contained a deep black silt covered with two inches of water, which made it a perfect natural bog garden. Early in the season large swathes of skunk cabbage, bright yellow *Lysichiton americanus* and white *L. camtschaticensis* thrust up among the bullrushes, along with three varieties of king cup: the single and double forms, *Caltha palustris* and *C. palustris* 'Flore Pleno', and the large *C. polypetala*.

Then comes a show of white, blue, purple and yellow irises. In mid-summer there are masses of starry, baby-blue water forget-me-nots (*Myosotis scorpioides*), yellow *lysimachia* and *mimulus*, tall water-buttercups (*Ranunculus lingua* 'Grandiflorus'), bright purple loosestrife and the coarse white daisy *Senecio smithii* growing among duck potato, *Sagittaria latifolia*.

Several of these plants now do rather too well. "You reluctantly have to exercise some sort of control," Pim says, attempting to find the path through the bog, "otherwise things get choked and disappear."

The millstream flows between banks planted with hostas, geranium and startlingly scarlet *Mimulus cardinalis*. Towering over them are several varieties of *ligularia*: *L. dentata* 'Desdemona', *L. przewalskii* and *L. x hessei*. "I rather like their huge, crude, glorious flowers," Pim admits.

Numerous *primula* supply more bright colour: *P. vialii*, with its red-tipped lilac pokers; orange and red hybrids of the giant cowslip, *P. florindae*; and several varieties of candelabra *primula*, including the light violet *P. beesiana* and the pink-orange *P. bulleyana*.

This spring Pim got "carried away in a Suffolk nursery" and bought 25 different types of *hemerocallis*, which he has planted among ferns, red and pink *astilbe*, maroon-leaved *Lysimachia ciliata* 'Firecracker', several varieties of *filipendula*, and large-leaved *Podophyllum peltatum*. These lead to a three-year-old plantation of *Gunnera manicata*, which Pim hopes will soon grow tall enough to create a "jungle walk".

Beyond this is a bank planted with wild flowers - campion, meadowsweet and comfrey - intended to form a link with the agricultural landscape beyond the boundary hedge. To one side, wooden

walkways over channels and bog areas link three small islands, in the centre of which is a cairn fountain. Water trickles through a bright green and yellow mat of Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*) past geum, sisyrinchium, pulmonaria, coloured grasses and the brightly variegated leaves of *Houttuynia cordata* 'Chameleon'.

Pim is still adding new features. He has constructed a living willow tunnel and a gravel mound planted with small conifers to remind him of his time in the arid regions of the world. Most striking of all is a circular castellated tower made with stone. This will eventually contain doves, and gargoyles will spout water that is, most appropriately, carried to the top by the old millwheel.