

my favourite PLACE

MELBOURNE HALL & GARDENS, DERBY

By Andrea Jones



PHOTO: ANDREA JONES

'It's a little piece of heaven in the middle of the country'



One of the world's foremost garden photographers and author of *The Garden Source*, Andrea Jones loves to return to her special place at Melbourne Hall & Gardens, near Derby. www.andrea-jones.co.uk

I first visited Melbourne Hall in May 2016, and the gardens were mindblowing. Atmospheric mists were rising off the lake and the sea of candelabra primulas was stunning. You get very good light there and fantastic sunsets; I think because there's so much water in the area.

It's known as one of the best surviving 18th century English gardens. The owner, Lady Ralph Kerr, is an established artist with a wonderful eye for colour, mixing perennials I would never have thought of. The borders beside the Millstream are a mix of lemon, lime and lilac, with yellow tree peonies and soft blue irises combining magnificently.

Over time I've got attached to it. I've explored it with my camera, but the planting is ever-changing.

The very beautiful birdcage is not a birdcage at all, it's a wrought-iron arbour designed by Robert Bakewell. When a fountain recently broke, they discovered that it was an original elm pipe that had sprung a leak - the fountains were installed in the 1700s!

I particularly love the arboretum, which includes a daimio oak - *Quercus dentata* 'Carl Ferris Miller'. I was fortunate to meet Carl in Korea about 20 years ago and it was wonderful to find one of his trees in this splendid garden context. It retains its leaves for ages and the colour is extraordinary in autumn light.

There's the most fabulous wobbly yew hedge and tunnel that allows shafts of light to illuminate the path beneath.

The evergreens were originally formal but became less so due to manpower shortages around World War One. I love these layers of history and structure; the formality, the beautiful wobbly hedges; the painterly colours in the border and amazing trees that are dotted all around.

What I love about Melbourne Hall more than anything else is the people. I travel a lot for work and this oasis of warm, friendly people, fascinating animals and beautiful gardens is like driving off the motorway into Narnia, a little piece of heaven in the middle of the country.

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