

LUCIE WILLAN

A self-professed plant addict, Lucie is head gardener at the Mediterranean Garden Society's headquarters, Sparoza Garden, in Greece

PORTRAIT RICHARD BLOOM

Earliest gardening memory My grandmother, Joan, was a keen plantswoman. I have vivid memories of exploring her glasshouse, playing with her alpine troughs and sitting among the pheasant's eye narcissi in her orchard.

First plant love *Primula auricula*. There is something about their delicacy and painterly quality that I find very seductive, particularly when displayed in beautiful old terracotta long toms in an auricula theatre.

Who has inspired your career? Victoria Wakefield took me under her wing and was very kind and generous with her time and knowledge, introducing me to many new plants in her wonderful garden at Bramdean House in Hampshire. Claire Aberly, formerly senior gardener at Sissinghurst, has often pointed me in the direction of a new adventure. She was the one who suggested I come out to Sparoza.

Favourite landscape I am constantly inspired by the diversity of the Greek landscape, but I grew up on the edge of the South Downs and am a chalk girl at heart. It is where I feel most at home and where I travel to in my dreams.

Worthwhile tips Travel to see plants in the wild – you can learn so much about growing plants by seeing how they choose to place themselves. Always carry a notebook and containers for cuttings and seeds. Take photos so that you can record findings, and track developments in the garden.

Dream plant destination It would be a dream come true to travel the Silk Road, and around Iran in particular, to see the *Oncoclytus* irises, Persian alpines and fields of *Eremurus*.

What principles have guided your attitude to gardening? I think of horticulture as the only living art form and gardens are very personal forms of artistic expression. I've worked almost exclusively in historic gardens and they're often very different from contemporary gardens in their guiding principles I love researching the history of gardens, the preoccupations of their creators and their plant collections, and thinking about how these spaces should be gardened.

In what direction do you see horticulture heading? I hope that horticulture will continue to become greener and more sustainable, and that the huge increase in chemical prices might encourage horticulturists to question chemical use.

Do you have any particular career goals? There is an extraordinary diversity and wealth of Greek flora but there isn't an established horticultural tradition in Greece and there is very little done to educate people about this incredible natural inheritance. If I can persuade visitors to Sparoza that they can create beautiful, natural, sustainable, ecological gardens by using drought-tolerant and native plants and rethinking their use of lawns, then I will be happy.

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Read more about Sparoza in the February issue of *Gardens Illustrated*. 