

A Fine

The vegetable garden on Maria and Wouter Eshuis's property near London, Ont., yields produce like arugula, potatoes, asparagus, beets and strawberries, used for Maria's AGA cooking demos and meals for their B&B. The pair sourced the house's new limestone cladding at an Ontario quarry and installed it themselves.

Styling by Sasha Seymour



Romance

A LUSH, ENCHANTING SWEEP OF GARDENS
IS CARVED FROM A DERELICT FARM
IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO.

*Text by Jennifer David
Photography by Ted Yarwood*



Casting an eye over the charmingly loose and diverse gardens that surround the sprawling limestone farmhouse and its cluster of picturesque outbuildings, it's hard to imagine this rural Ontario spread as anything but the idyllic setting it is today. But in 1981, when Maria and Wouter Eshuis first set eyes on the 56-acre farm on the edge of London, a very different scene greeted them.

“There were many tents pitched on the gardens, and there were old farm implements and broken beer bottles everywhere. The house was a total party house,” Maria recalls, pointing out that the property is less than 15 minutes from the University of Western Ontario. “There was no lawn at all — just junk everywhere.”

Leaving behind a typically tall, narrow urban house in The Hague, the Eshuises set their sights on buying a farm — somewhere to raise a family and act as a base for their stable of businesses, which include an enchanting bed-and-breakfast, a dealership for luxe, all-natural Hypnos beds, a horse transportation service (no longer in operation) and their most prominent company, which sells and installs coveted AGA cookers from England. They had initially looked for a property in France, but after vacationing in Canada, began looking here as well and eventually chose southwestern Ontario because they like the hilly terrain around London, enjoy the defined seasons and were able to buy a larger property here.

The pair were taken with the property despite *CONTINUED ON PAGE 216*

Illustration by Melissa Sweet




Scented by dianthus, lavender and roses, the pretty pea-gravel pathway that leads from the main house and barns winds among rockeries and an old stand of cedars before arriving at the 170-year-old guest house (shown) and pool. The grounds around the pool are slightly hilly and hard to cultivate, so Maria and Wouter incorporated rocks and railway ties to create terraced gardens. Roses, Pickering Nurseries.

ABOVE: On the covered porch off the main house, an old desk, freshened with a coat of white paint, and antique benches offer the family and their guests a roomy alfresco dining area overlooking the formal gardens. Glasses, Crate & Barrel.

OPPOSITE, TOP: In the parterre-style formal garden, 16 boxwood squares hold roses, poppies, peonies and delphinium. Cast-iron urns set on clean-lined bases punctuate the garden. A new building beyond houses Wouter's workshop, a new horse barn and a garage. It's painted in Falun red paint, an environmentally safe powdered paint that's mixed with water, linseed oil and dishwashing liquid. Paint, Swede Paint Enterprises.





On the slope that rises from the flagstone pool deck, a loose mix of roses, daisies and geraniums worthy of a Monet canvas basks in the sun. Eventually, the young Alberta spruce will offer some shade here.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:

Though Maria toyed with the idea of putting in an all-white flowering garden, she ended up allowing some pale pink poppies into the scheme in the 16 boxwood squares of her formal garden. Perennials, Parkway Gardens.

TOP CENTRE: Leggy, untamed boxwood hedging filled with profusions of white- and pink-flowering plants contrasts the formal layout of the European-inspired parterre garden.

THIRD ROW, LEFT:

A luminous peony glows in the evening light. Peony, Parkway Gardens.

BOTTOM LEFT: Tall metal obelisks made by Wouter and large black urns add definition to the segmented garden on the north side of the house. Blush pink Oriental poppies bob in the foreground. Urns, Loblaws.

BOTTOM CENTRE: A Christmas gift from a neighbour, a metal plaque on the main house records the year (1982) the Eshuises took possession of the property, Belle Vie, and began their extensive transformation.

BOTTOM RIGHT: On the south side of the house, a wisteria-shaded porch overlooks mature boxwood hedging and the sloping rock garden that falls away from it.



One of Maria's favourite views takes in the old greyed barn through a stand of mature spruce trees.

LEFT: On the south side of the house, where wisteria wraps part of the porch in lush vines, a generous, boxwood-trimmed rock garden filled with hostas, hydrangea, forget-me-nots and campanula accommodates the sloping terrain. This porch is a favourite spot for family and guests. Boxwood, Hillen Nursery.

