

A photograph of a formal garden. In the foreground, there are terraced hedges made of green boxwood, interspersed with numerous tulips in shades of red, pink, and purple. In the background, there are large, rounded topiary trees and bare, golden-brown trees, suggesting an autumn setting. The overall scene is a well-maintained, classic European garden.

AN INTIMATE TOUR  
OF THE PRIVATE GARDENS  
OF EUROPE

# ADVENTURES IN EDEN

CAROLYN MULLET



# Finca Las Tenadas

COLMENAR VIEJO, MADRID

A SHORT DISTANCE north of Madrid, Finca Las Tenadas is home to an elegant, contemporary garden with plantings that are fresh and light as air. Enclosed on three sides by a renovated sheep barn, the garden completed the transformation of this property into an up-to-date event venue for celebrations of all kinds.

Owner Jaime Calderón asked gifted Spanish designer and plantsman Fernando Martos to design the three-quarter-acre garden with lots of open space—and it had to look good immediately. Fernando's plan was simple: twin rectangular gardens of slightly different sizes, united by a handsome iron Welcome Pavilion with breezy, wattle walls and roof covered in fragrant star jasmine and wisteria. "This is the heart of the garden," the designer says now.

Inspired by the design of Paley Park in New York City, Fernando planted a grid of *Gleditsia triacanthos* 'Skyline' in the center of each rectangle to provide soft, overlapping areas of shade. Long reflecting pools line one end of each of the gardens. "Water elements are always relevant to my gardens," he says. "I like the way they reflect plants and also the relaxing and refreshing sound they make." He laid buff-colored compacted gravel mixed with limestone dust throughout the garden—the perfect soft and natural surface for uniting the whole place.

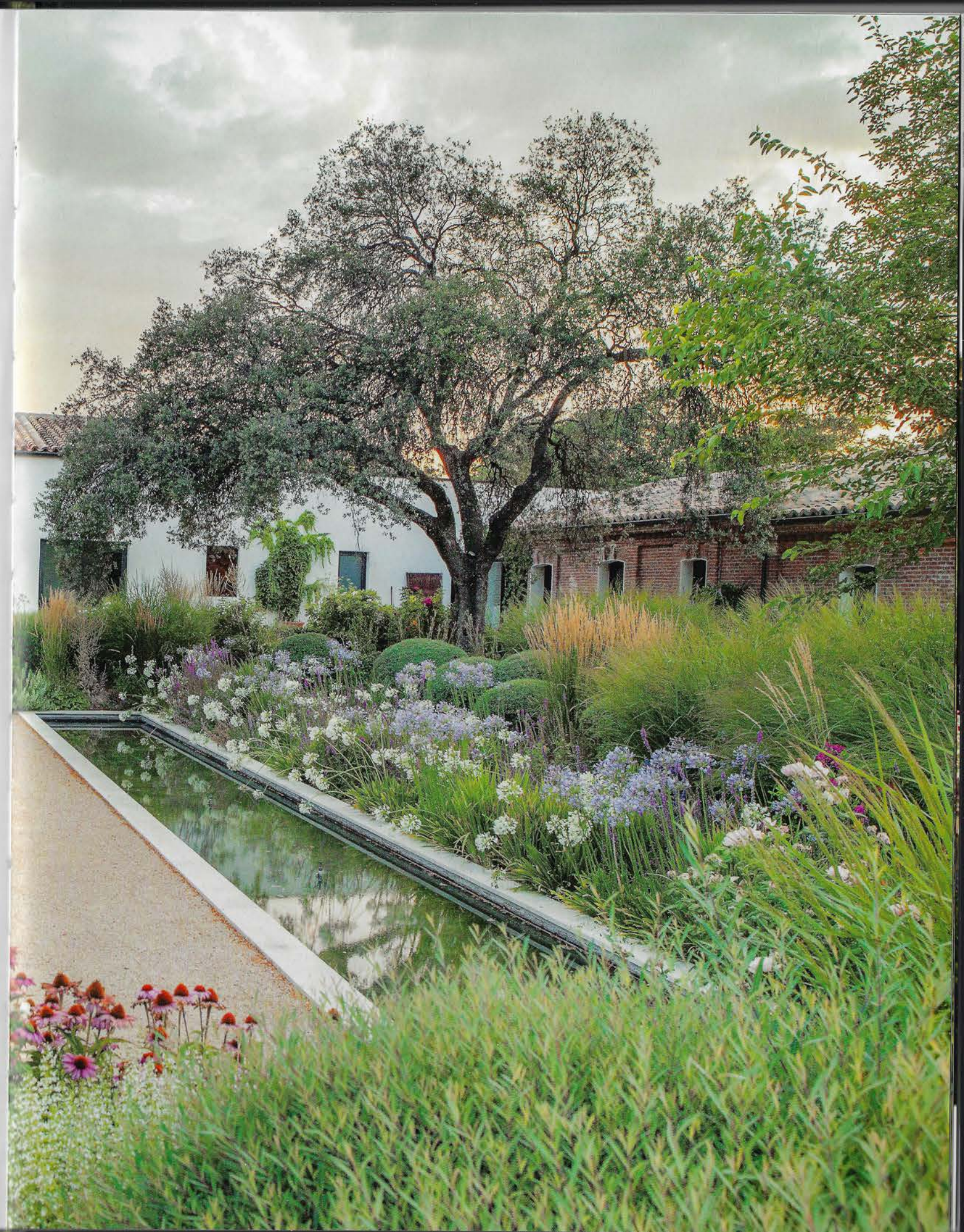
Fernando cleverly lowered the grade at the centers of the gardens so that each planting bed slopes upward to enhance the views of its contents. Inside the deep beds edged with limestone—the material that also frames the barn's windows—is a refreshing plant mix. *Salix purpurea* 'Nana' pruned into refined gray domes contrasts with an alluring medley of naturalistic perennials and fine-textured grasses. *Panicum virgatum* 'Squaw' and *Nassella tenuissima* set a gossamer tone. Flower color comes from rugosa rose cultivars, Russian sage, daylilies, purple coneflowers, sedums, and agapanthus. The reseeder *Valeriana officinalis*, *Verbena bonariensis*, and verbascum fill gaps randomly in the complex planting for an even more natural look.

After years of patient experimenting with perennials and grasses, Fernando has compiled a list of plants that, with the help of drip irrigation, are not only resilient in the Spanish climate extremes, but display all the other qualities he wants for the gardens he designs. He was one of the first in his

country to test whether it was possible for perennials common in England to survive the long periods of heat in his homeland. His interest in perennials formed after he worked as a gardener at Newby Hall in England, a country house known for having one of the longest herbaceous double borders in Europe. After three years there, he had fallen in love with perennials and grasses and was captivated by their naturalistic look, their changing character throughout the year, and their ability to move in a breeze.

The garden at Finca Las Tenadas epitomizes Fernando's ongoing effort to forge a new kind of planting style that fuses an alluring, loose naturalism with strong, structural elements. The atmosphere here is contemporary, artful, and breezy. Alfresco celebrations have never had it so good.

**OPPOSITE** Fernando placed several reflecting pools in the garden to mirror the sky and surrounding flowers.







The breezy Welcome Pavilion is the heart of the garden.

SPAIN

280

281

FINCA LAS TENADAS





Beyond the vine-covered wattle walls of the Welcome Pavilion are trees planted in a spacious grid where tables are set for outdoor dining.

**LEFT** Fernando designed the garden to include an existing holm oak, which reigns over the garden.