

Paul Bangay's
must-read
gardening book?
*The Education
of a Gardener* by
Russell Page.



Not so formal

Garden Marlborough welcomed Australia's celebrated garden landscape designer Paul Bangay as keynote speaker. Here's what he had to say.

WORDS & PHOTOS GAYNOR STANLEY

ON TRENDS

Famous internationally for his gardens of timeless classical elegance, Paul Bangay says "wild, casual and relaxed is definitely the trend". Curves and softer plantings in gardens that are as natural as possible is where everyone wants to be nowadays, he says. His design style has evolved accordingly and is evident at Stonefields, his personal home, featuring a formal garden created from a paddock in the Central Victoria highlands. Consequently, he finds himself "rewiring my brain to not sit down and draw perpendicular straight lines" when beginning a new plan. On the flipside, it is much easier to angle to a view with curves than straight lines.

Ten years ago, people didn't want productivity in a garden and now that's a must, he says, adding a vegetable garden would be his focus if he ever designed another garden for himself (Stonefields is on the market as he and his husband scale down to something more sustainable).

Climate change has necessitated a move to embrace a lot more Australian native plants, mixing them with Mediterranean species light on water requirements. Lawns are becoming unfashionable, and if clients really want one, he advises they "just let it go brown when it doesn't rain".

ON WRITING

Paul Bangay considers himself not only a designer but a writer. "Gardens are all-consuming, so writing about them is a beautiful release. It's cathartic for me."

Paul devoured gardening books from age 10, his passion ignited by what he saw in books by the likes of Vita Sackville-West and pioneering Australian garden landscaper Edna Walling. As he was inspired by them, he hopes his books inspire his readers – even if they take just one sentence or one plant idea from the book.

ON INFLUENCERS

The first was his gardening-obsessed mother and her mission to rewild a property the family moved to at Wilsons Promontory, Victoria, during his childhood. He recalled his three siblings and himself each being given a sandpit to play in. While the others did just that, Paul's sandpit became a testing ground for garden design ideas – first he threw seeds in it, then turned it into a glasshouse, and later added a stream.

Vita Sackville-West's ideas influenced him greatly, and it was a "dream realised" in 1985 when he opened his first shop in Melbourne, featuring a landscaped Italian courtyard where he could achieve the patina of old stone walls interconnecting with plants that she spoke of.

His mentor and biggest inspiration was David Hicks, considered one of the most influential garden designers of the 20th century. They met and became friends when Bangay won a scholarship to England to intern for Hicks in 1994. "From this amazing teacher, I learnt to marry interior architecture with the garden."

Kiwi Gardener was a guest of Garden Marlborough and Scenic Hotel Marlborough (scenichotelgroup.co.nz), an upscale hotel ideally located right next door to the Garden Marlborough hub on Seymour Square, the departure point for most day tours. We joined one of the five coaches a day on the iconic East Coast Tour (gallery overleaf). This visits the region's grandest gardens located in both coastal and wine valley locations. Many East Coast Tour-goers return every year to see what's changed in their favourite gardens.

In the Macfarlane family's home garden, the formal lines of the public Winterhome soften.

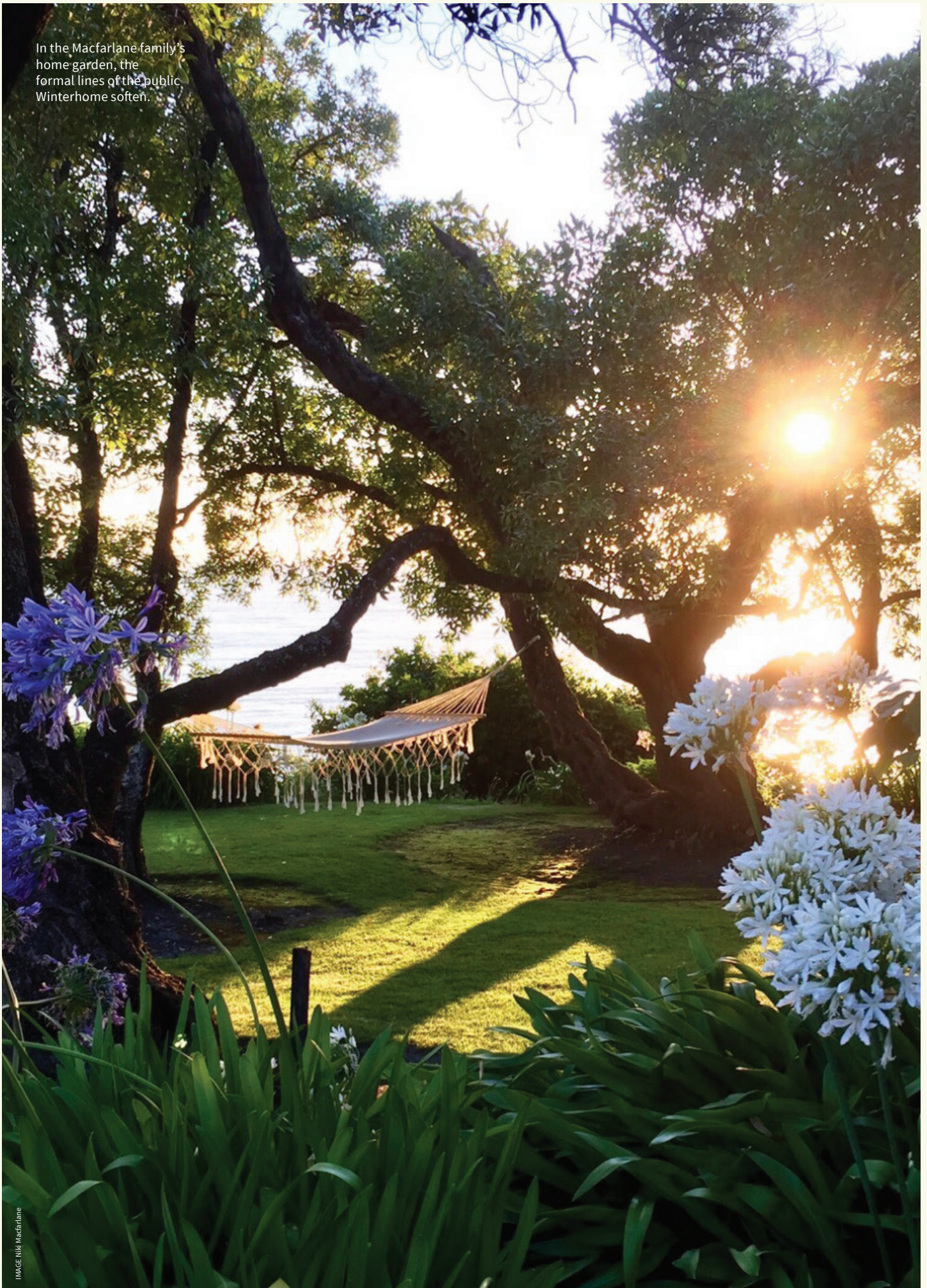
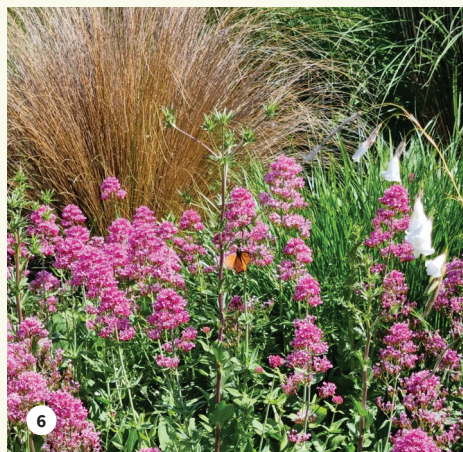
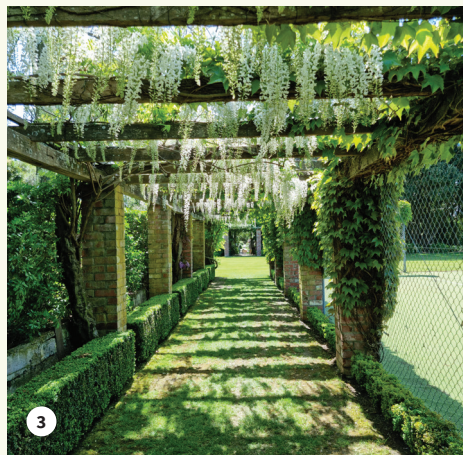


IMAGE: NIKI MACFARLANE

Garden Marlborough's East Coast Tour highlights





1. An alley of soft pink hawthorns, planted 31 years ago, makes an enchanting approach to Barewood's garden pavilion. **2.** The cypress avenue is painstakingly twined to retain the trees' shape in the strong winds Winterhome experiences at Kekerengu. **3.** Winterhome demonstrates Paul Bangay's principle that it's always much nicer sitting (or strolling) under a vine than a solid roof. **4.** Carolyn Ferraby's Barewood potager illustrates perfectly the trend to productive, yet decorative, gardens. Irregularly laid paving is a device Paul Bangay recommends to lend age to a garden. **5.** No straight lines evident in this hedge at Ha He Naca. **6.** Paripuma is moving away from a manicured garden to natural habitat, and recently created an outstanding habitat for butterflies. **7.** Wind in the willows at Barewood. **8.** A weeping elm at Ha He Naca, surrounded by Awatere Valley vineyards. **9.** Poor Knights lilies and an old whaling pot make an arresting centrepiece in Paripuma's grand avenue. **10.** Native plantings in a formal garden define Paripuma's spectacular coastal setting. **11.** Wisteria and wicker beckon at Barewood.