

PIET OUDOLF MASTER OF THE WILD

THE DUTCH LANDSCAPE DESIGNER, A LEADING FIGURE IN THE NEW PERENNIAL MOVEMENT, IS NOW THE SUBJECT OF A NEW DOCUMENTARY. HE IS CHANGING HOW WE THINK ABOUT HORTICULTURE.



VOORLINDEN
GARDEN
AT MUSEUM
VOORLINDEN,
THE
NETHERLANDS.



PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

“With the stress on our environment,” says Oudolf, “people want to be more related to nature and come closer to the wild. It’s very much today that people are more conscious about what we do to nature.”

AT HOME
PIET
OUDOLF'S
GARDEN IN
HUMMELO,
WHERE HE LIVES
WITH HIS WIFE.



HIGH LINE
IN NEW
YORK, WHICH
TURNS TEN THIS
YEAR.



One might hardly believe that just a few metres above the bustling streets of New York City sits a natural oasis of calm and greenery. But sure enough, a walk on the High Line - the elevated walkway populated with hundreds of different plant species, which this year celebrates its 10th anniversary - transports you to a place where the concretes, tarmacs and industrial structures of the big smoke seem to drift away behind a flourish of biodiversity.

The designer behind this meandering layout of natural landscape was the Dutch gardener Piet Oudolf - a man whose level of global influence and cultural relevance is rare for those of his profession. His vision of natural

beauty has captured the imagination of architects, designers, urban planners, ecologists and horticulturalists around the world, who have called on his unique skills to bring the authentic essence of nature and green life into a variety of spaces.

Oudolf is considered one of the leaders of the New Perennial movement - a creative horticultural wave that uses herbaceous perennials and grasses planted in tight, undulating formations, creating a feeling of the wild, to artistic and dreamlike effect. While an artist uses oils, a paintbrush and a canvas, it is trees, lawns, flowers and shrubs that make up the tools of Oudolf's craft. Londoners may have seen his handiwork at the gardens of the Serpentine Gallery, while those in Chicago might have wandered through his Lurie Garden in the Millennium Park. Closer to home, Oudolf designed a classically inspired garden for the Voorlinden art museum in Wassenaer, Holland.

A new documentary, *Five Seasons: The Gardens of Piet Oudolf*, provides a rare glimpse of the working life of this visionary plantsman, shining a light on his pioneering ideas of what gardens and public spaces can be. Filmmaker Tom Piper follows Oudolf around the world over the course of a year, letting us watch, through his eyes, how life begins, blossoms and eventually wilts and passes on, only to give way for



PIET OUDOLF
IN A STILL
FROM THE NEW
DOCUMENTARY
BY TOM PIPER.

PIET'S FAVOURITE PLANTS

Baptisia leucantha. Also known as White Wild Indigo, this rounded, multibranching perennial tends to blossom in June, and stay attractive into the winter. Spikes of white, pea-like flowers come out of the ends of the branches, complemented by bluish, three-part clover-like leaves.

Amsonia 'Blue Ice'. This is a short, bushy plant with small, dark green leaves that go yellow in autumn. It produces clumps of blue, star-shaped flowers, that sit on slender, leafy stems. Grow them in June and July.

Monarda bradburiana. Lavender-pink tubular flowers grow on this compact plant, also known as eastern bee balm. The aromatic grey-green leaves are sometimes used in teas, while the flowers tend to attract a range of butterflies.

Astrantia 'Roma'. These deep pink flowers sit on tall stems above a mound of green leaves. They bloom best in May and June - but they nearly always produce a second flush of flowers in the autumn. A colourful addition to any garden.

Sporobolus heterolepis. This graceful, slow-growing and long-lasting grass produces mounds of foliage topped with heads of a darkish pink flower. It grows from June until August - but it remains fragrant and attractive until the winter.

the next cycle to begin. We are taken on a wandering journey around many of Oudolf's most intriguing works, including his own garden in Hummelo and the public works he has created in New York, Chicago and the UK, as well as several key places of inspiration - like German industrial parks, a Texas wildflower explosion and the deep woods of Pennsylvania.

Speaking to me from his home in Hummelo, the Netherlands - where Oudolf moved with his wife Anja in 1982 - we discuss some of his most remarkable works to date. The designer is perhaps most famed globally for his work on the New York High Line - but it is a far more intimate garden, tucked away in the fields of Somerset, England, that he describes as one of the best gardens of the last ten years. This was a project for the Swiss art dealers Hauser & Wirth, who commissioned him to design the meadowy grounds of their Somerset gallery.

It seems that, since then, Oudolf has become something of a go-to for Hauser & Wirth's garden designs. They also brought him on board to rethink the landscape of the Eduardo Chillida outdoor museum and sculpture park in San Sebastian, northern Spain, which the Swiss art gallery helped to reopen to the public this April, after around eight years of semi-closure. Visitors to this late Basque artist's monographic

museum over the coming months will see this garden shapeshift and blossom into life, adding colour and texture around Chillida's abstract metal and stone sculptures that sit on the 11 hectares of outdoor land. This year, Oudolf is also working on designs for his new garden in the Belle Isle district of Detroit, as well as for one of the care centres of the Maggie's cancer charity in London.

Today, a decade since the High Line opened, this kind of garden design has come to play an increasingly vital part of urban planning. The phenomenally successful landscaped walkway model (which some will argue in fact began with the Promenade Plantée in Paris in 1993) has been replicated in several different cities around the world, from Sydney to Seoul. Just this summer, the architects behind the High Line, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, are unveiling the initial phase of a new project called The Tide, a 5km linear park planned to run along the River Thames in London. The first section, located on the Greenwich Peninsula in the south-west of the city, features 9m-high raised walkways flowing through floating gardens of pines, silver birch and wild grass, and dotted with artworks by the likes of Damien Hirst and Allen Jones. Although Oudolf is not involved in this project, the echoes of his work on the High Line resonate through it. And as more and more new landscaped spaces like these open in cities around

GARDENING FOR WELLBEING

Green spaces are not just important for the environment - they can also play a key role in our personal wellness. Research published by Harvard University shows that people who have access to green spaces live healthier lives, with lower rates of physical and mental illness. Not only does the physical activity itself of gardening encourage a better frame of mind, but simply observing and contemplating a garden can help to reduce stress and anxiety levels. Initiatives like Growing Health (in the UK) are dedicated to promoting the benefits of gardening for mental health, and 'green therapy' is becoming an increasingly important part of patient recovery and rehabilitation processes around the world. Even the healthcare director of meditation app Headspace has been vocal about how gardening and mindfulness are a perfect match.

the world, one feels compelled by the need to bring more greenery into the urban context. London has launched its mission to become a 'National Park City', with half its areas green by 2050, while Paris is planning to green 100 hectares of buildings by next year. With global warming becoming an increasing threat to human and animal life, the urge to bring biodiversity and urban life closer together has never been greater.

"With the stress on our environment," says Oudolf, "people want to be more related to nature and come closer to the wild. It's very much today that people are more conscious about what we do to nature." This does not mean that his task is rendered an easy one. Quite to the contrary, designers like him are under greater pressure than ever to ensure the sustainability of all their practice - a matter that often revolves around how the garden is to be looked after in years to come.

"We are making a wilderness that is not really wild - it is composed," he explains. "That's why you need good people who can maintain the garden - it won't take care of itself. This is even more complicated than actually making the garden."

It is a reminder of the fact that public garden projects do not always go down well with everyone. The ill-fated Garden Bridge in London was a plan to build a new bridge across the river covered in flowers and trees - but plans collapsed due to lack of funds, persistent planning issues, political conflicts and financial recklessness. It was recently revealed that nearly £50m of public money was spent on this project that never actually came to be.

It is thought that a major failure of this project was its lack of focus on the public, coming to represent little more than a vanity project for a privileged few. Instead, it seems that an unwavering dedication to the public's interest is key for successfully connecting with others through horticulture. "The most important thing for me is working in public," Oudolf tells me, "because you connect so many people with gardening. It can be somewhere rural or in the city - it's all about context." While he has created many spectacular gardens for private residences, it is ultimately the projects that touch the lives of vast amounts of the public that really make Oudolf tick.

The structure of the meditative and intimate *Five Seasons* documentary, in which we follow the changing textures and colours of gardens over the course of the year, accentuates the poignant role of time in Oudolf's work. With work that requires such a deep connection with the cycles of the earth, Oudolf possesses a profound sense of humanity and mortality - it is, after all, a job in which one is constantly reminded of the fragility of life, as well as the inevitability of death. Indeed, for Oudolf, dead plants and trees are often some of the most breathtakingly beautiful. "Beauty is in so many things you wouldn't think of," he says in the film. "I think it's the journey in your life to find out what real beauty is, and also discover beauty in things that are, on first sight, not beautiful."

SERPENTINE GALLERY
ONE OF PIET OUDOLF'S GARDENS IN LONDON.



WHO SAID THAT TIME MACHINES COULD NOT BE LUXURY?



Transcantábrico Gran Lujo • Transcantábrico Clásico • Tren Al Andalus

Do you remember when you used to watch that classic movie that happened in a train and you imagined yourself sitting there? Luxury was your traveling companion and the infinite landscapes your amusement. There was not an equal experience.

Now, imagine making that trip for real. Imagine traveling in a classic. www.renfe.com/trenesturisticos

renfe