

A view  
through the  
woodland to  
the clipped  
parterre

AUTHOR AND GARDEN MAKER  
ANNE WAREHAM MUSES ON  
CREATING HER AMBITIOUS WELSH  
GARDEN AND ITS FUTURE CARE

# *Thinking Weddwl*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES HAWES

**BY ANNE WAREHAM**

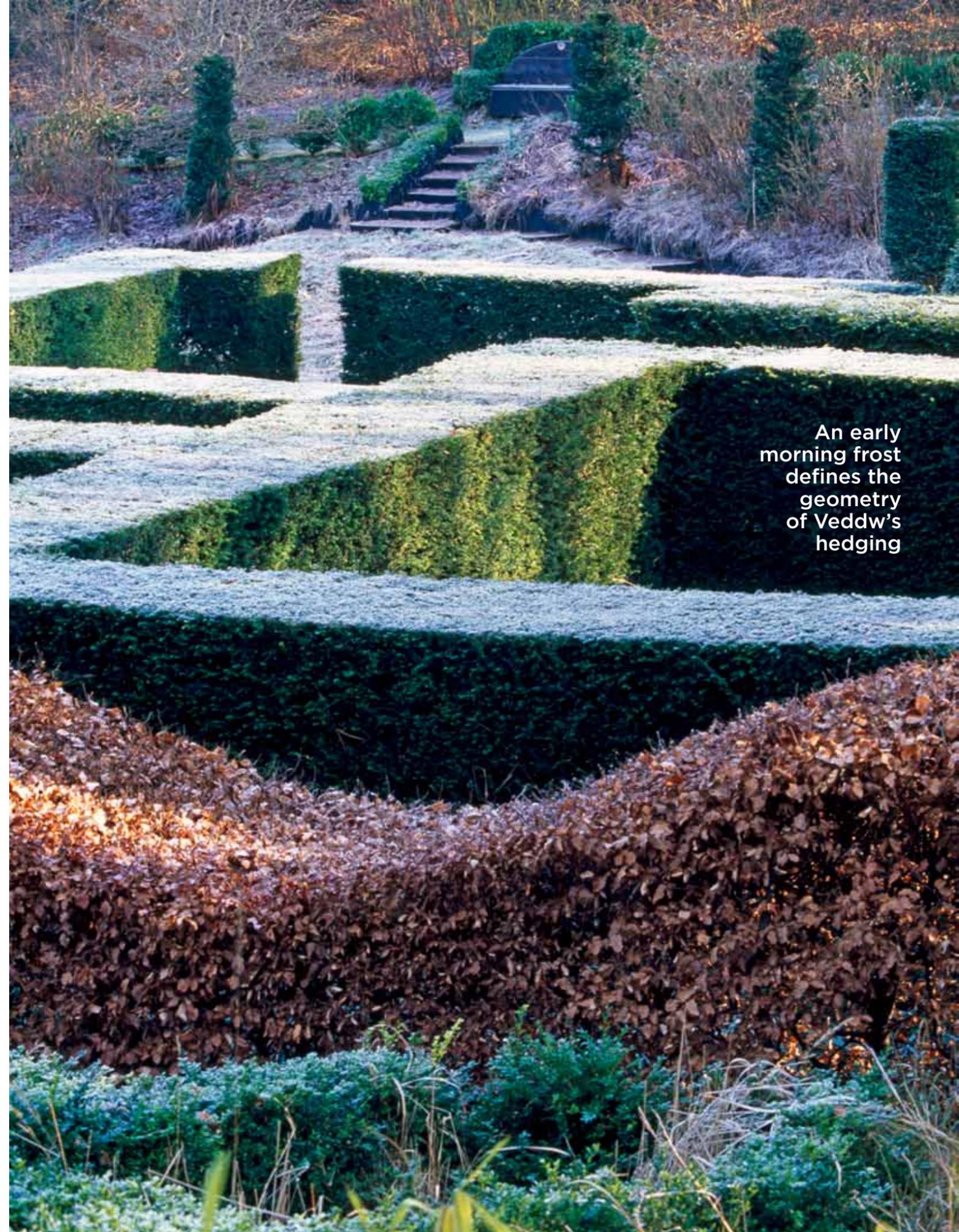
could start by telling the usual garden story—about how we left London for the Welsh borders to make a garden on two acres of field with a two-hundred-year-old, rather ugly house in the middle. About how I had discovered mulching

after deciding that digging two acres was a little too demanding (good old Ruth Stout).

I could go into the endless trials and tribulations of doing all of that with practically no money or help, and with a husband who wanted me to finish the first bit before moving on to the next (not recommended—you'll be fiddling about with a tiny garden forever and never realise the grand vision. You have to bite off more than you can chew and then tolerate the mess and complaints for some considerable time, until the plants begin to fill out and the hedge cutting begins ... and then never ends).

I could talk about opening the garden to the public and waiting for nobody to come.

Well, I could (or just did) produce the usual British garden story that inevitably finishes with



An early morning frost defines the geometry of Veddw's hedging



*“Bit-by-bit I began to know something about the last two-hundred years in the Veddw”*

familiar, well-worn tips about how to keep slugs down or kill the neighbours (no, not that last one really—just seeing if you are still awake).

But I think the garden-making at Veddw actually became interesting when I read about Little Sparta HYPERLINK “<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/>”<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/> and realised that a garden can be more than decorative and more than somewhere to garden in, which seems to be many people’s ambition. I knew what I wanted and what the garden needed. I began to add words and to try to put people in touch with the history of the site.

From the time I had arrived in this rather curious

place—neither English, nor Welsh, and not a village but a settlement—I had been working at discovering all that I could about its history, in an attempt to make sense of it. I was embarrassed and humiliated repeatedly by discovering how little I knew, but bit-by-bit I began to know something about the last two-hundred-years in the Veddw. I’m still working on several previous millennia.

The land—the same that is now ours—was taken over from the Lord of the Manor’s Waste by squatters who managed to live off it and some local casual work in the woods, farms, and wireworks. They graduated from a turf and mud cabin into the stone cottage and cow shed where we now live, and they obtained a huge parchment lease from

The bench at Veddw chronicles its name and spelling over 200 years



Clipped hazels  
in early spring  
amid masses of  
narcissus in the  
meadow



the Duke of Beaufort, granting them tenure. I discovered such leases and a document saying that they were living “chiefly on potatoes and the coarsest kind of bread” and “exposed to peculiar temptations, they have been accused of dishonest practices, and of those acts of petty fraud, which often prevail amidst such a population.”

It was clear that I should acknowledge and honour these people and their hard lives on the land where they had struggled and no doubt suffered. And so I have added words to the garden—on a gate, on seat backs, and on memorial stones. Words that remind us of our predecessors.

We have come to realise, too, that we must confront ourselves; we are as temporary as they were. However much this feels like “ours”, we are not here forever. We plan to acknowledge our transience, too.

Given that, it has still always seemed essential to me that we make the beauty of the garden our first priority—we live in it, after all. We have attempted to make that beauty by shaping and delineating the garden with hedges, which contain small gardens and a reflecting pool, where both



Left: The reflecting pool in early spring  
Above: A memorial stone by Catriona Cartright stands in the meadow

The black conservatory wall sets off simple seasonal plantings in galvanized pails

*“...we make the beauty of the garden our first priority.”*

meanings of the word are relevant. We have also—true to the spirit of honouring the history of the land—kept large areas of the original meadow, gardened to keep it as close as possible to the meadow on which our predecessors would have kept their cow (we know there was a cow, as the census somewhat idiosyncratically mentions it in 1890: “an agricultural labourer’s widow lives here. She keeps a cow). These areas of grassland now grow fine grasses, wild orchids, and native wildflowers while also offering a peaceful, open break from what would otherwise be a rather too-busy, flowery garden.

I have read a great many stories about making gardens, often with similar challenges and obstacles as our own. I have read much less about people tackling the next, frightening stage. How will we maintain it in our retirement and old age? The hedge cutting is already a remorseless taskmaster, though one that provides enormous year-round delight. Making and maintaining a garden like this demands endless creativity and adaptability; as I hate to leave the place even for a short holiday, I am not likely to leave it to make our lives easier. Sometimes the thought terrifies me, and sometimes—just sometimes—I think we have created a dreadful, devouring monster out there.

