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DECEMBER 2005  
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# GARDENS

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CAROL KLEIN • WINTER SCENT • SEASONAL DECORATIONS

## INTERNATIONAL DESIGN

DUTCH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT LODEWIJK BALJON LETS HIS PLANTING DO THE TALKING, BRINGING A SENSE OF CASUAL INNOVATION TO A MORE FORMAL ARCHITECTURAL FRAMEWORK. WORDS BY TIM RICHARDSON

DESIGNER: LODEWIJK BALJON

BASED: AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

SPECIALISES IN: ANALYTICAL MODERNISM WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ELEGANCE AND LOOSENESS



ROWS OF WATER-FILLED STEEL TANKS PROVIDE LIGHT WITHIN THE GARDEN AND EACH TANK PRODUCES A DISTINCT REFLECTION FOR ADDED INTEREST.



**PROFILE** Lodewijk Baljon has consistently pursued the approach of methodical academic study. After graduating in landscape architecture in the early 1980s, he joined the Amsterdam firm

B&B before returning to university to complete a PhD exploring different approaches to the practice of design: "I wanted to get a grip on contemporary attitudes to landscape design," he recalls. This was when Baljon began to design gardens for private clients, and to advise architectural firms about the landscape elements of their work; he found his analytical background particularly useful in such collaborations. His main project from 1990 to 1997 was for the City of Amsterdam, where he was an advisor in planning a development of 5,000 houses.

## PHILOSOPHY

Baljon cites his tutor Hans Warnau as an influence, since he encouraged the enrichment of Modernist compositions with an infill of plant material. In recent years, he says, he has been influenced by Piet Oudolf and the New Perennials movement.

While at first glance his work appears Modernist in essence, Baljon confesses to a disillusionment with the functionalist aspects of this design creed. "My training was very pragmatic and oriented towards function," he says. "No one was talking about the 'meaning' of the garden or how people perceive it. For me, it wasn't elegant enough. I like straight lines but I also know that you need to step back and add looser elements." His solution to the problem of style is a flexible attitude that allows for collaboration and compromise, an emphasis on elegant and often expensive materials, and a reliance on plants. "In architecture, decoration is usually

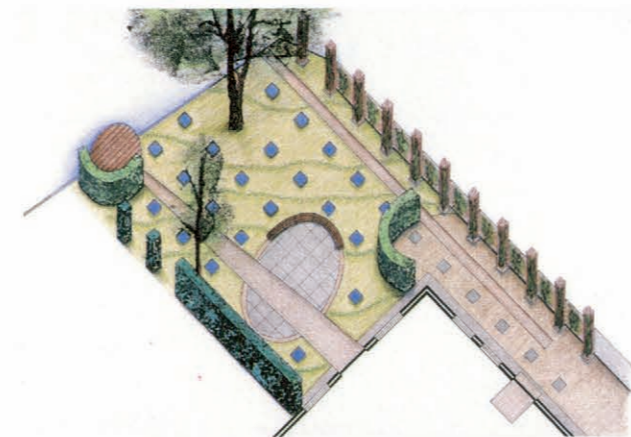
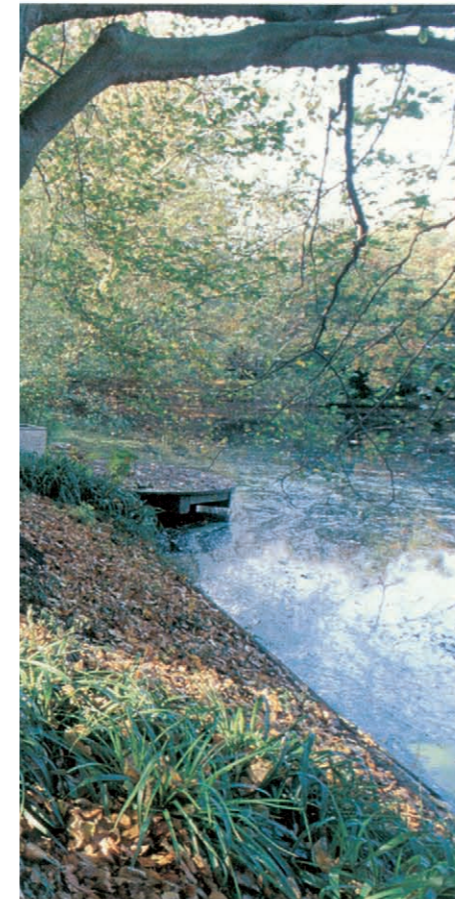
an add-on, but plants are a decorative element in their own right," he explains.

## TRADEMARKS

Baljon's signature look is very much based on the concept of looseness, provided chiefly by plants, within a formal architectural context. "I don't want to make it too severe," he says. His plantings don't soften Modernist lines, rather they create an enriching and dynamic contrast. Key features include planting roses intermixed with grasses and fruit trees: "If there's an opportunity, I try to create an orchard, whether it's in a private garden, a public park or an office building. As well as the fruit, there's an abundance of flowers, autumn colour (if you choose well) and, in a small garden, you can introduce a sense of rhythm."

## CONTACT DETAILS

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CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE LEFT: THE DESIGN WAS BASED AROUND THE ONLY ORIGINAL FEATURE – AN IMPRESSIVE BEECH TREE; THE CURVED BENCH CONTRASTS WITH THE RECTANGULAR GRID OF TANKS; A DIAGONAL PATH CREATES ANOTHER STRONG SHAPE; WOODEN COLUMNS PLANTED WITH IVY CONNECT THE GARDEN WALLS AND THE HOUSE; BALJON'S ORIGINAL PLAN DEMONSTRATES PURE GEOMETRY.



## PRIVATE GARDEN, WASSENAAR, THE HAGUE

This private garden in a wealthy suburb is set behind an old stable block now converted into individual houses, on the site of what was a large country estate. Baljon maintains it is vital to retain links with the domestic garden scene, and still designs two or three private gardens each year. "Contact with plant material is the basis of landscape architecture," he says. "You have to be confident using soft and tender green materials." This theory would have been a controversial message to deliver to the Harvard University landscape school, where Baljon lectured last year.

This garden's only original feature was a massive beech tree, which shaded it and obscured views out over the pond that comes right up to the garden's edge. Baljon did not want to get rid of this stately tree. Instead, he decided to introduce light and movement into the garden by using a rigorous grid pattern of galvanised-steel water tanks as reflective elements, bisected by a diagonal path leading to an oval deck overlooking the pond. "You could use mirrors, but of course water is much more natural," Baljon explains. "The tanks link the house with the pond, and the reflections in them are all different – the sky, the leaves of the tree, and so on."

The planting of ferns and ribbons of *Luzula* grass, which snake across the ground plane are intended to create a feeling of looseness as a contrast to the strong geometric elements of the design. As a finishing touch Baljon aimed to unify the walls of the garden with the ground level by introducing wooden columns planted with ivies against the white stucco house.

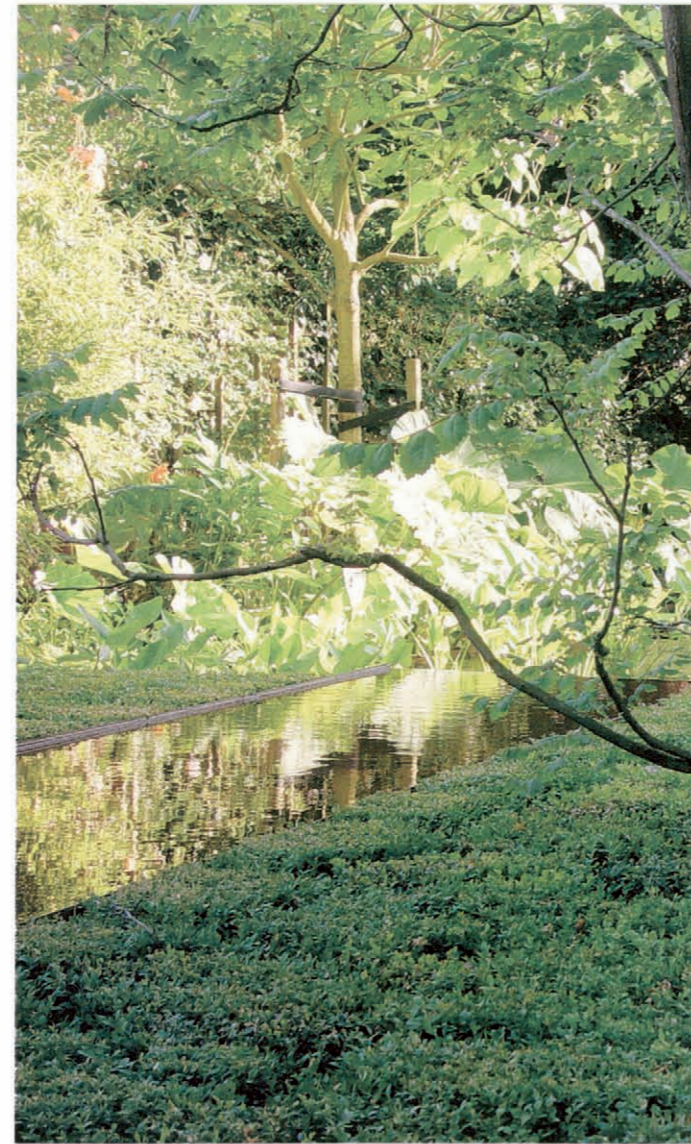
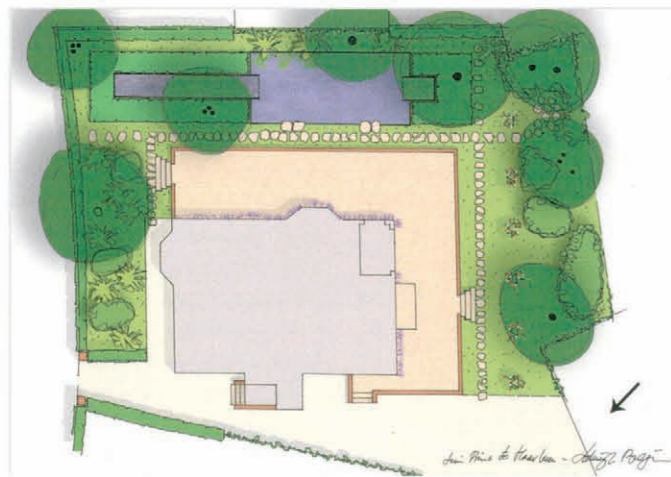
# PROJECT SHOWCASE

## PRINS GARDEN, HAARLEM

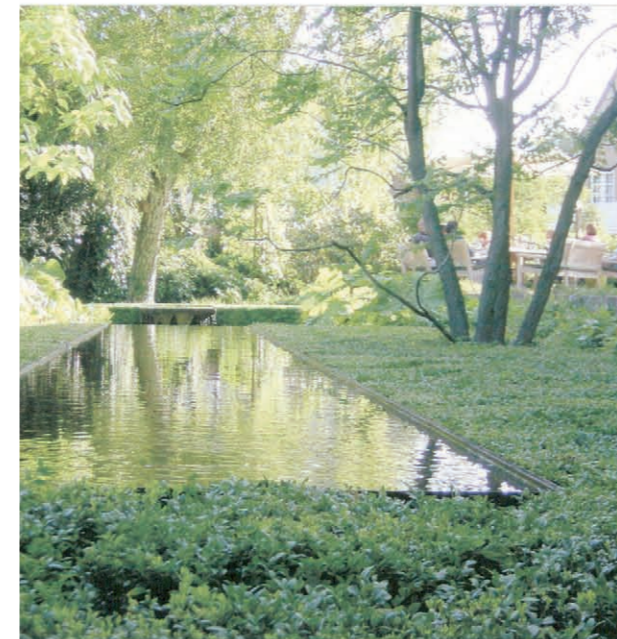
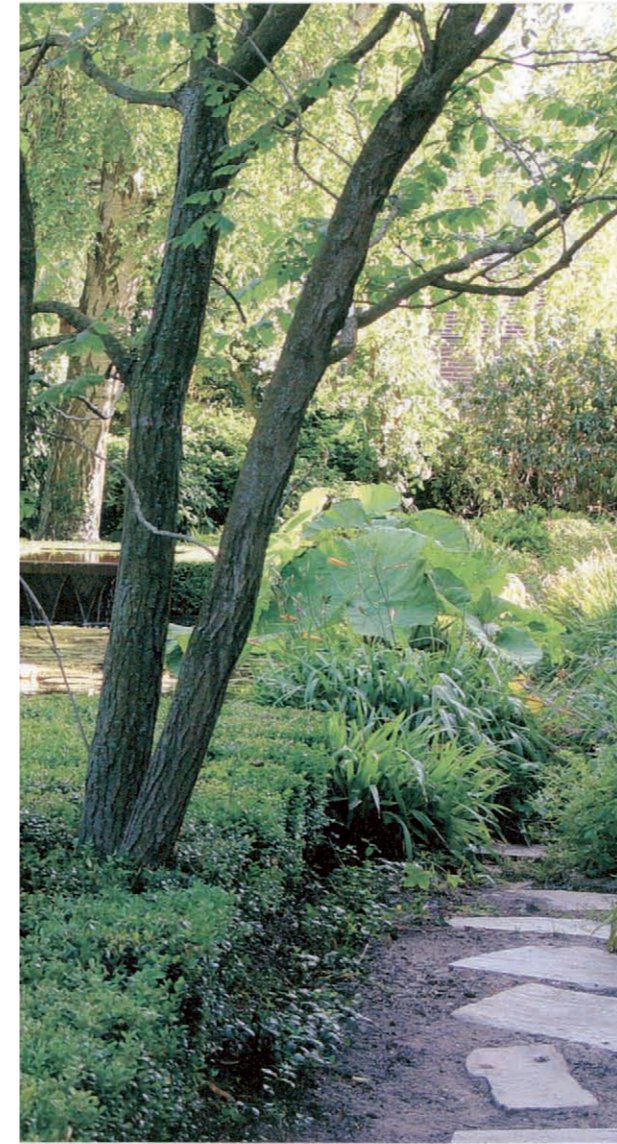
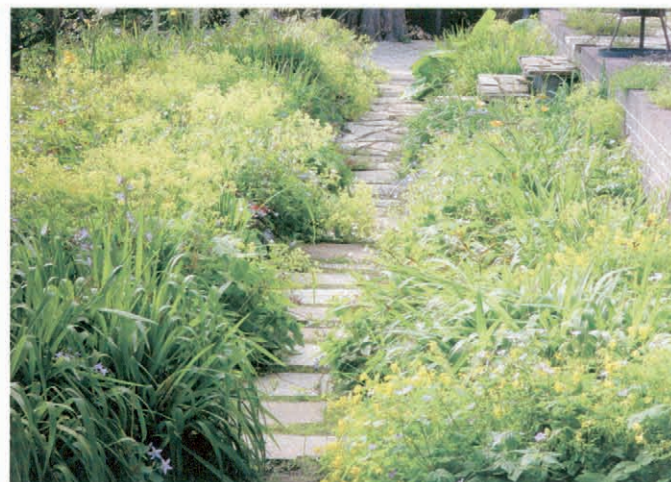
The problem at this site was the small size of the garden compared with the substantial house (the result of previous owners selling off land). The space available was a strip of grass encircling the property, with the added complication that it was 60cm lower than the level of the house.

Baljon decided to create a paved terrace of yellow stone around the house, as the owner (a personal friend) "likes to have lots of people round". But the problem of the strip of garden remained. "I thought, let's have a big pond rather than a small lawn," says Baljon of his decision to introduce one long and one short canal on different levels, linked by a cascade. The

discrepancy in level between house and garden has been dealt with by the addition of a 'floor' of clipped box hedge through much of the garden, while the perimeter, previously a yew hedge, is marked by bamboo plantings – "much lighter green, a rougher texture but with movement". In other parts of the garden, Baljon has used what he calls "rough plants". These are perennial plantings inspired by the work of Penelope Hobhouse, with whom he has collaborated. "She has huge plantings of perennials," he says, "most of them semi-woodland: hemerocallis, geraniums and grasses – sturdy, tough things with long, narrow leaves."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: GLASS-LIKE CANALS WERE USED INSTEAD OF IMPRACTICAL AREAS OF GRASS; A DISCREPANCY IN LEVELS WITHIN THE GARDEN GAVE RISE TO THE CREATION OF A 'FLOOR' OF BOX HEDGE, SEEN HERE SURROUNDING THE UPPER CANAL; LAVENDER SCENTS THE PATHWAY; BALJON EMBRACES PERENNIAL PLANTING.



## COMPANY HEADQUARTERS, ZAANDAM

This was one of Baljon's first solo projects as a landscape architect and it was unusual in that he collaborated with the architects from the outset. The brief was to create a linking space between the company's main car park and the office building with its brick forecourt. He has exploited the sharp change of level to dramatic effect.

When visitors or employees leave their cars, they are faced with an imposing walkway of regular concrete pavers (coloured to resemble bluestone), leading straight up to the HQ and bordered by a sloping lawn.

"You have this tremendous impact of green grass," Baljon says. Lines of pear trees flank the walkway, creating a rhythm that makes the space seem bigger and a dynamic sensation that is particularly affecting.

The journey upwards is easy, with 'lazy' steps of just two or three treads. The trees and surrounding yew hedges also provide valuable shelter from strong winds in this coastal area just north of Amsterdam. At the top of the walkway is a colourful garden with lavender, irises and roses, which Baljon envisages as a place to linger.



TOP: BALJON HAS EXPLOITED THE CHANGE IN LEVELS TO DRAMATIC EFFECT. BOTTOM: A TAPESTRY OF BRIGHT AND LUXURIOUS PLANTING.