



Truly, an English Garden in Gloucester!

It is unusual perhaps but it is not an anomaly to find an English sensibility in a garden designed to be at home in Tidewater, Virginia. Carol Wilson moved to Gloucester County from Williamsburg a few years ago and has created in “Little Wisley” a reflection of what she has admired during her frequent garden tours of England.

The name “Little Wisley” is a curtsy to the Royal Horticultural Society’s Wisley Garden in Woking, Surrey. Wisley is both a demonstration and a trial garden making it a Mecca for keen gardeners for over a century. Carol’s garden shows what amazing beauty can be created in a scant three years.

When you first enter some gardens, you move quietly as if you were trespassing on someone’s dream. The first impression a visitor has of “Little Wisley” is the wall enclosing the house and providing the space between house and wall where Carol’s garden flourishes. The English have an understanding of walls, perhaps because they inhabit a tight little island. Walls capture light and warmth for tender plants or provide needed shade as well as prevent deer from dining on the landscape.



In our spacious land we are slower to understand the wisdom of walls. In Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” the neighbor knew only that ‘good fences make good neighbors.’ And they do. It may go against the grain of the American spirit to admit the limits that a wall imposes. Oddly, that is the value! Your responsibility ends: you are freed from taking charge of everything in sight.



At ‘Little Wisley’ the soft white of brick-crowned adobe walls is the perfect background for the ‘white garden’ in front of the house. It was inspired by the famous white garden of writer, plantswoman, Vita Sackville-West at Sissinghurst. Carol’s white garden features roses, pencil slim evergreens, low-growing gardenias, grey stachys and nigellas. Colors progressively deepen and change as the plantings continue around the house.

It is so curious to see something as familiar from pictures as nigellas for the first time in white! Called by two contradicting names, devil-in-a-bush and love-in-a-mist, blues seem to be pictured most often for this self-seeding annual. Carol’s white garden has white nigellas in abundance, echoing the white of the tall larkspur that also self-sows. It isn’t just the saucer-shaped flowers of the low-growing nigella that attract attention but the bouncy terminal seedpods. They decorate the plants like pale parasols- neat!



Every detail of the garden contributes to the charm of the whole: the old-appearing brick paths, David Austin's English shrub roses, the parterres that are balanced without geometric rigidity as the spaces flow into one another circling the house. As the bloom colors change, so do the foliage tones deepen, as seen in the elegance of smoky-leaved ninebark etched against the wall. Handsome ironwork in art and gates, antique stone, and the sound of water and bees give a

sense of timelessness to this young garden. Carol Wilson's garden reflects not just the incredible amount of hard work involved in the preparation of the soil and the actual planting, but it reflects, too, the slow realization of a dream never truly meant to be finished.

