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## Taking time to smell the roses

**Heather Russell** enjoys healthy roses in mixed planting.

*Rosa* 'Lady Emma Hamilton' particularly caught my eye.

While I admit that roses are lovely, and that the form, colour and perfume of the flowers is very beautiful, I have to be honest and confess that I'm not a great fan. Does this make me a Philistine in a nation of rose lovers? It probably doesn't help their cause that my garden soil is not to their liking, with many roses succumbing to black spot and rust over the years.

With new rose gardens recently established in Cliveden and Glyndebourne in the South, I may well be in a minority. Certainly I wasn't sure what I'd make of the new rose garden at Wynyard Hall<sup>1</sup> in County Durham, when I visited on a Press Day in July.

This garden is the realisation of Sir John Hall's dream. A lover of the rose since a boy, Sir John, now 82, is a miner's son from Northumberland who 'made good' as a property tycoon, past chairman and owner of Newcastle United Football Club and, since 1987, owner of Wynyard Hall, an early 19th century mansion. A whole new village, a golf course and business

park have been built there, and the Hall is now a successful luxury hotel and a venue for weddings and other events.

Sir John aims to have the 'largest rose garden in the country': already 3,000 roses supplied by David Austin have been planted within the old walled garden, and over the next 5 years 3,000 more will go in outside, linking with the woodland walks.

The garden's designer, Alistair Baldwin<sup>2</sup>, completed the construction and planting for the walled garden in only 7 months. By using the 20ft drop in height diagonally across the site, the garden has been tipped

toward the visitor entering the garden, with a grid of raised beds walled with galvanised steel distressed to resemble lead. Walking round each bed you have a changing view of the plants, first from above and then at a more intimate level. Wooden pergolas and towers provide structure and height in the top half of the garden, with lawns providing areas of calm. The sound of water is constant, with pools and rills throughout.

A garden solely of roses I find indigestible, so I was relieved to see that groups and drifts of herbaceous planting separated clumps of roses by a ratio of 40 to 60.



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Two-year-old planting outside the semi-permanent marquee.

<sup>1</sup>Wynyard Hall lies between the A1 and A19 near Stockton on Tees.

Although small and unlabelled, I recognised many of the perennials as the best of their kind and often difficult to find. He got this Hardy Planter's approval.

When choosing the herbaceous plants, Alistair said that show stoppers were out; the rose's shape is prime, with the plants between chosen for spikes, buttons, tall vertical whips, froth and foam, all to complement and reinforce the colour of the roses.

I recognised many grasses, including tall Feather Reed-grass, *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster', and my favourite, Autumn Moor Grass, *Sesleria autumnalis*. They should all work well together to provide a long season of interest. Structure is provided by enclosing beech hedges, clipped yew balls within the planting, clipped hornbeams and a copse of *Cercidiphyllum*. These will make a strong contribution as they develop and grow and, judging by an area planted last year, this garden will be well worth visiting in the next few years.

However, the rose is star here, the 3,000 plants of 140 varieties arranged for a bold colour effect diagonally across the garden. Michael Marriott, the David Austin designer and a great rose fan, was also in attendance, and he told me that in 22 years he has never

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Left to right: Michael Marriott from David Austin Roses; Sir John Hall; Alistair Baldwin, garden designer.

used chemical sprays on his roses at home. He said that the answer is to concentrate on keeping the roses healthy – and presumably choosing strong, disease-resistant varieties. He recommended using SB Plant Invigorator, a spray which is advertised as 'non-chemical and non-biological' to control pests and mildew. (At home, rather than spray, I've kept just the five healthy roses. Continuously flowering 25-year-old 'Compassion' is now suffering from black spot – her future is in doubt.)

The David Austin catalogue recommends planting roses with mycorrhizal fungi, feeding twice a year, and using a particular brand of 3-in-1 systemic insecticide and fungicide especially formulated for roses. When I commented

on the large number of ugly, defoliated bushes I had seen in the rose beds at Alnwick Garden a few years ago, Michael attributed it to poor care. I believe that there has been an improvement since the Alnwick gardeners returned to using cow manure as mulch. Michael said "The Wynyard design is a wonderful mixture of roses and perennials. By mixing roses with other plants you get a longer flowering season and it will help to keep the roses healthy".

I am hoping that the pretty pink rose, a gift from the event, lives up to its disease-resistant description, and if so I just may want to plant more roses amongst the perennials in my garden. But I will certainly be going back to see if the garden at Wynyard lives up to its promise. 🌹

**Heather Russell** is chairman of the NE Group. Her garden at Bolam, Northumberland, is filled with all manner of plants, her favourites up to now clematis and grasses – but roses may yet get a look in.

<sup>2</sup>Alistair Baldwin has a trade nursery near Thirsk, North Yorkshire, growing a large selection of plants and enabling him to monitor and select the best. His plant list is impressive, but fifty is the minimum order! [www.colouryourgarden.co.uk](http://www.colouryourgarden.co.uk)