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BEAUTY AND THE FEAST

Magical GARDENS, incredible INTERIORS and Christmas ENTERTAINING

TEXT **CLARE FOSTER**
PHOTOGRAPHS **NGOC MINH NGO**

When interior designer Veere Grenney purchased this villa overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar in Tangier, its garden was an untamed wilderness. With the help of talented friends, he has transformed it into an elegant series of terraces with eye-catching planting that enhances the breathtaking views

Cliff hanger



OPPOSITE The villa looks out over a series of formal terraces carved into the steep hillside. Stone paths skirt geometric beds, where clipped evergreens provide a framework for a relaxed planting scheme designed by Christopher Masson. This includes a cruciform of clipped santolina and *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum', with the continually flowering *Rosa x odorata* 'Mutabilis' at its centre. **THIS PAGE** The raised swimming pool was carefully designed to avoid the roots of some existing palm trees. Plumbago edges the steps that lead up to a tower by architect Cosimo Sesti

A photograph of a garden featuring a stone path leading to a lily pool. The pool is filled with lily pads and reflects the surrounding trees and sky. The garden is filled with various plants, including potted yellow cannas, and is framed by a dense canopy of trees. The sun is visible through the trees, creating a starburst effect.

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and roses with more EXOTIC *plants*

A square lily pool, surrounded by pots of yellow cannas, reflects the trees and sky on the middle terrace, with wide beds stretching away towards the pool garden. The elegant planting features clipped domes of *Teucrium fruticans*, carissa and lentisco, which contrast with white-flowered *Raphiolepis umbellata*, China roses, salvias, plectranthus, *Tulbaghia violacea*, echiums and seeded annuals, including helianthus, tithonia and orange and primrose-yellow clivias under the palms in the distance

The narrow, hilly streets of the Vieille Montagne in Tangier give nothing away, but behind these walls are some of the most sought-after properties in Morocco...

Perched high on the edge of the rocky hillside overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar, these romantic villas became fashionable in the early 20th century, particularly among the British, who enjoyed the cooler air and sea breezes, as well as the breathtaking views.

Interior designer Veere Grenney fell in love with Tangier in the Seventies; when he first arrived from New Zealand, he was drawn to the like-minded people as much as the place. Having holidayed here for many years, he finally decided to buy a house and, in 2012, a property on a spectacular cliffside plot came on the market.

‘It was a modest little cottage, but had over a hectare of land, so it had potential,’ says Veere. It was originally owned by American heiress and artist Marguerite McBey but, perhaps content to sit and look at the view, the most recent incumbents had spent little time on the garden. There were some fine old trees, including a grove of palm trees, and signs of a few paths winding through the vegetation, but otherwise nobody had been brave enough to tame the land: ‘The cliff was as steep as the Amalfi coast, wild with overgrown mimosa. The view of the ocean was hardly visible.’

The only solution was to carve a series of dramatic terraces out of the cliff. Initially Veere worked with his friend Umberto Pasti on the layout of the garden, devising an elegant, largely symmetrical scheme with wide steps and generous borders, a central lily pool and, in the wings, a glamorous swimming pool raised above the ground to save the roots of the established palm trees. He also commissioned the architect Cosimo Sesti to design an ornamental gazebo on the upper terrace, as well as a wonderful Rapunzel-like tower that rises up among the palms in the pool garden.

For help with the planting, Veere turned to another old friend, Christopher Masson, who is still involved with the garden’s development. ‘Christopher is such a brilliant plantsman. He has worked a lot in southern Spain, so understands the climate and plants,’ says Veere. Within a framework of clipped evergreens, the planting is dramatic and colourful, mixing English hollyhocks and roses with more exotic plants that thrive in the Moroccan climate. With interest in every season, the plants are arranged in large groups for maximum impact: a whole bank of orange clivia; a spectacular grove of scented daturas; and eye-catching drifts of cosmos or salvias. ‘Everything is on a huge scale, so the planting has to be, too,’ says Veere. Colours are bold rather than recessive, with masses of blue flowers to reflect the colour of sky and sea. Agapanthus dance about on the top terrace under shady pomegranate trees, while pale blue plumbago clammers across the whitewashed walls.

The weather can be mixed in this maritime eyrie, so Veere incorporated an enclosed courtyard into the building’s design. Featuring a porticoed loggia with shutters that can be closed against the wind, the courtyard is a quiet haven with an Islamic feel. Along the length of the loggia and in the rooms themselves are terracotta pots filled with geraniums, and vases of flowers from the garden. Bringing the outdoors in is very much part of Veere’s style and he harks back to house and garden doyenne Nancy Lancaster: ‘She always used to say that every good house needs to be supported by a great garden and this is very much the idea here’ □

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ABOVE Clipped teucrium hedges lining the steps contain borders of roses and annuals, such as *Ammi visnaga* and white cleomes. BELOW Veere’s dog Nancy on the grassy terrace above the pool, shaded by palms and banana plants



ABOVE LEFT The view from the top terrace of the new pavilion on the bottom orchard terrace and the sea beyond. ABOVE RIGHT The enclosed courtyard is based on an Islamic-inspired design with a bubbling fountain in the centre and clipped orange trees for shade. BELOW LEFT Multi-stemmed pomegranate trees are underplanted with agapanthus on the top terrace in a scheme by Umberto Pasti. BELOW RIGHT The ornamental gazebo on the uppermost terrace provides shade for dining

