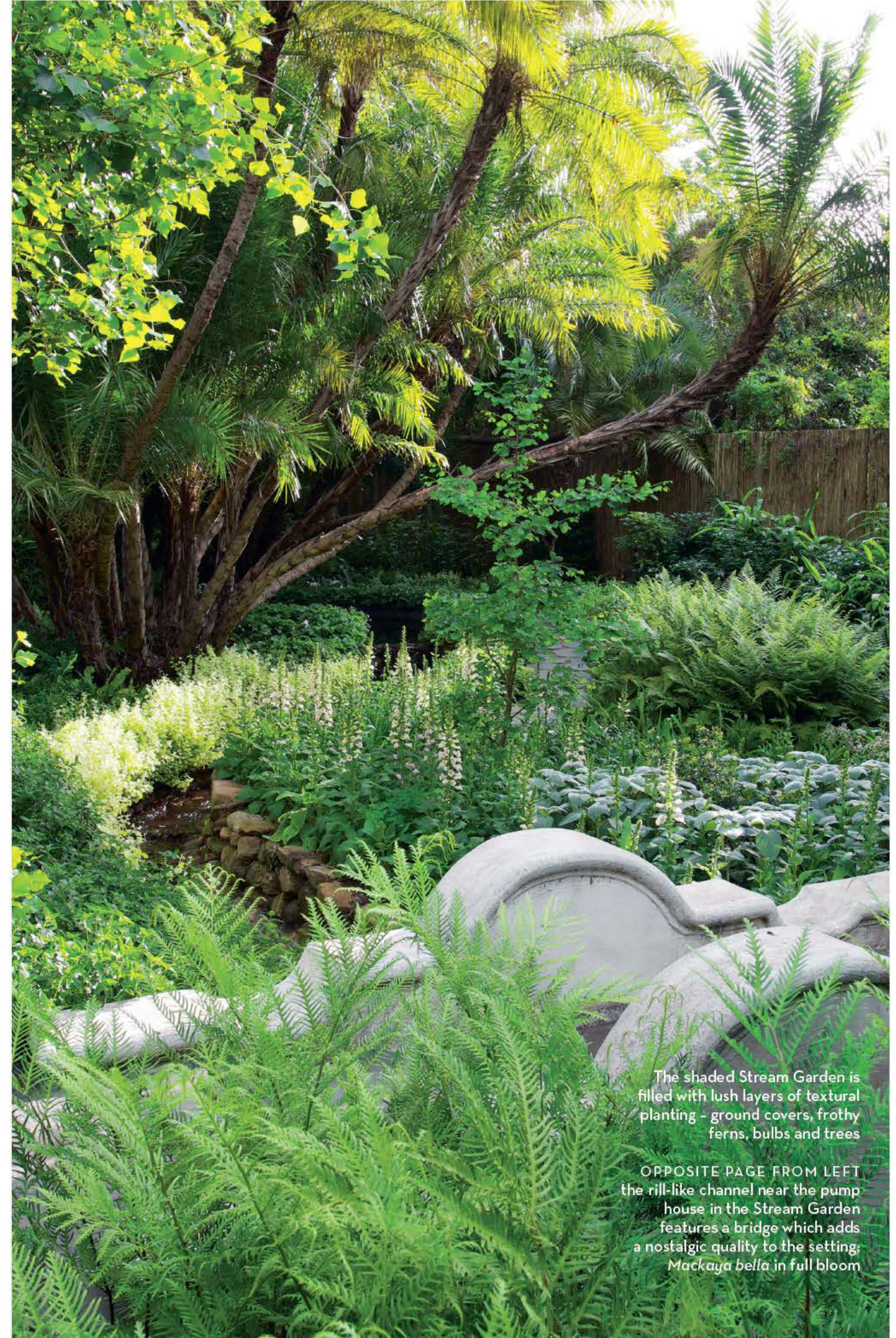


A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT



THE LATEST ADDITION TO THE HISTORIC STELLENBERG GARDENS IN KENILWORTH, CAPE TOWN, HAS TAKEN A DISTINCT STEP AWAY FROM THE PROPERTY'S FAMOUS FORMAL DESIGN MANTRA

TEXT CATHERINE DE VILLIERS PRODUCTION HEIDI BERTISH
PHOTOGRAPHS MIKE HALL

The shaded Stream Garden is filled with lush layers of textural planting - ground covers, frothy ferns, bulbs and trees

OPPOSITE PAGE FROM LEFT the rill-like channel near the pump house in the Stream Garden features a bridge which adds a nostalgic quality to the setting; *Mackaya bella* in full bloom



A path of randomly arranged pieces of black slate meanders past the allée of old Lombardy poplars



The Stream Garden's Planting Palette

In keeping with Stellenberg's renowned planting ensembles, the palette consists of subtle white, green and grey hues, while an ocean of vegetation adds lavish layers of texture and shape

1. Midnight-hued canna leaves add a touch of drama. These form plants are grown for their leaf texture and shape only, so the flowers are cut off 2. Shade-loving *Streptocarpus cyaneus* planted in combination with *Helleborus orientalis* and

Dechampsia cespitosa is one of owner Sandy Ovenstone's favourite planting combinations in this area 3. Sandy's beloved plant, the *Crinum moorei*, was given to her as a gift by the late Pam Barlow 4. Indigenous *Galtonia candicans* flower in autumn



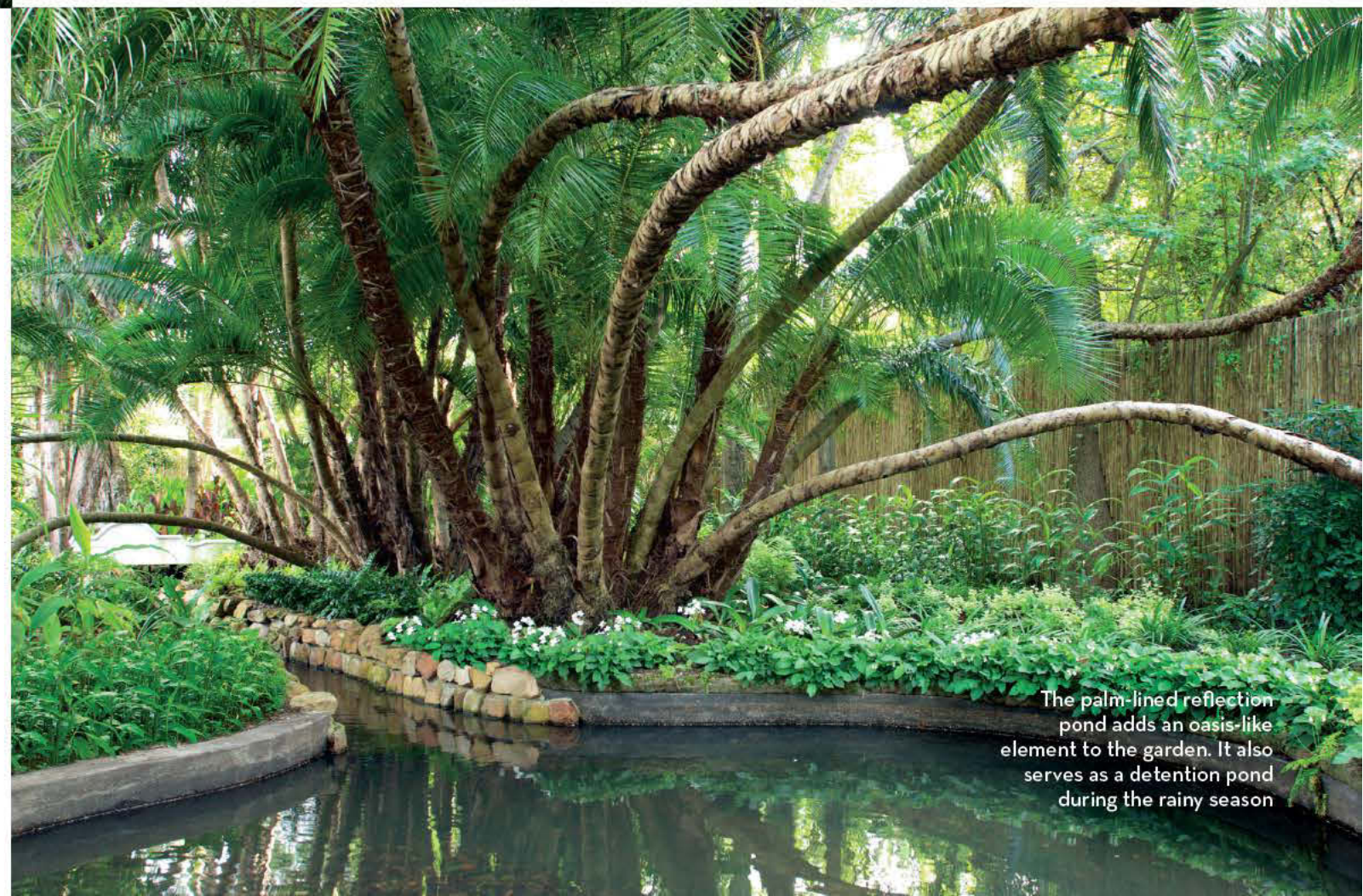
Pink shade-loving begonias offer a rare moment of colour

This Stream Garden, with its meandering slate path, cobbling stream, soft, muted palette of whites and greens and tapestry-like shade planting has an almost primeval feel to it. Located on the western side of the property, it was an unexpectedly delightful project for co-owner Sandy Ovenstone.


The new area came about in 2011 after Sandy's husband, Andrew, was inspired to do something in the jungle-like space. Prior to that, it hadn't been touched for more than 40 years – 'apart from the occasional clearing of the scrub and general maintenance,' says Sandy. 'Andrew suggested that we clear the area to see whether it had potential. Also, the stream next to the poplars overflowed each year, which presented a problem,' she recalls. So the vision behind the design had both aesthetic and practical roots.

'When we started clearing, we discovered a treasure trove of amazingly architectural *Phoenix reclinata* palms that had been hidden for many years,' says Sandy. It added instant structure and provided a green backbone on which to base the design for the rest of the area. 'The Lombardy poplars that were planted in the 1940s added another structural dimension,' she recalls. 'We're lucky to have inherited these plants as they became key elements in the evolution of this sublimely restful area.'

However, it's the meandering rock-lined furrow that forms this area's pièce de résistance. 'We decided to redirect the existing stream to the reflection pond. It now flows gently through the palm trees to the formal rill, past the pump house that contains ▶



The palm-lined reflection pond adds an oasis-like element to the garden. It also serves as a detention pond during the rainy season



The muted tones of cream arums and foxgloves complement the viridescent scenery. Sandy says that she's particularly fond of the layering and texturing that creates a feeling of being cocooned by nature

OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP In their search for light, the palms took on an arching, twisting and winding form. Andrew suggested adding latte boundary fencing. 'It's natural and looks wonderful. This is what makes it a town garden'



a well before it passes beneath two bridges and flows into the reservoir and thence downstream,' she explains. In keeping with Stellenberg's history and heritage, the two bridges that traverse the stream were built to match the existing bridges' design. 'They were left to age naturally and are now more settled,' says Sandy. Yet another visual focal point is the winding slate path that runs along the allée of Lombardy poplars framed with a mix of violets, hellebores and grasses. 'I would never have imagined that this combination would work so well,' she notes.

The evolution of this boggy area involved a fair amount of trial and error, Sandy notes. 'It's a learning curve. We soon realised that some plants grow better than others in this soil.' Some of the most successful planting ensembles were quite unexpected, says Sandy. Two of her favourites are the flowering foxgloves and *Galtonia candicans*. 'They make such an impact,' she reflects.

Despite the successes, Sandy admits that she initially struggled to come to terms with adding a shaded garden to the property's distinctly formal design. In the end, however, she thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of creating the Stream Garden. 'The plants were completely different, which was quite exciting,' she says. It's a clear indication that one should work with (rather than against) nature to produce the best results. Now the garden showcases nature in its purest form – calm, serene and visually striking.

To visit Stellenberg Gardens and the nursery contact ☎ 021 761 2948

