



# florescence

the world's most beautiful flowers

Clive Nichols

Noël Kingsbury

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# Introduction

Noël Kingsbury

Clive Nichols's flower portraits leave the viewer with no doubt of the passion he feels for his subject, a passion that has led to a deep understanding, both of the plants and of the people who grow them. He has been one of the UK's foremost photographers of gardens and plants since the early 1990s, when garden photography started to emerge as a distinct discipline, illustrating a growing number of magazines and books. Gardening has always been the British national passion, but in the late 1980s and early 1990s British gardeners began to export their expertise. The development of cheaper high-quality photographic reproduction and the growth of consumer lifestyle publishing resulted in a flood of books built on the flair and knowledge of gardeners and designers who had turned their hands to writing. Thanks to the size of the market for English-language books, such names as Penelope Hobhouse, Rosemary Verey and Roy Strong became internationally known. Two photographers in particular, Jerry Harpur and Andrew Lawson, established garden photography as an art form in its own right; Clive Nichols got his reputation up and running very soon afterwards.

There was nothing in Clive's childhood to suggest his future career. Born in 1962 in Grantham, Lincolnshire, he started photography during his degree in Human Geography, worked for three years as a chef in an Italian restaurant, then turned to travel journalism. He found it difficult to make a living, and, casting around for gaps in the market to exploit, realized there was little good garden photography. 'I knew absolutely nothing about plants and gardens', he recalls; 'in fact, I hated gardening when I was young. My father tried to interest me, but he didn't have any luck.' The first place he ever photographed was the National Arboretum at Westonbirt in Gloucestershire: 'I loved the trees.'

Clive was simply the right person in the right place at the right time. 'From my first publication in 1988 my career got going fairly quickly,' he recalls. 'Within five years of starting I was making a pretty good living. I got into all the quality consumer magazines: *Homes & Gardens*, *House & Garden*, *Country Living*, *Gardens Illustrated*, *Garden Design*.' Travelling and working outside were all part of the appeal for him, and he began to sell to foreign magazines, as well as the 'more upmarket British ones', which also took good overseas gardens.

During the course of his career, Clive has done all the photography for some fourteen books, including two on colour: one with the leading American garden writer Tom Fischer (*The Gardener's Colour Palette*, 2010); the other with Nori and Sandra Pope, the Canadian couple who created what was for a period (1988–2005) one of the most acclaimed gardens in the UK, Hadspen in Somerset (*Colour By Design*, 1998). Clive has also undertaken one of the greatest challenges for a photographer – explaining his craft – in *The Art of Flower & Garden Photography* (2007). Having had two children (aged sixteen and eighteen at the time of writing), he has put his parental experience into two books aimed at gardening parents: *Great Gardens for Kids* (2002) and *How Does Your Garden Grow?* (2005), both with Clare Matthews.

Creative people do not have a good reputation for being tidy or organized, but Clive's sense of order is key both to his success running a business and to his photographic style. His office is among the neatest of any garden professional I have met. In that he has been greatly helped by his wife, Jane, who has a reputation as a very efficient businesswoman. He likes order: it and composition 'are natural to me; a sense of order gives me a style that is clean and simple'. Among the first gardens he shot were Wollerton Old Hall in Shropshire, Sir Roy Strong's The Laskett in Herefordshire, and Versailles,

