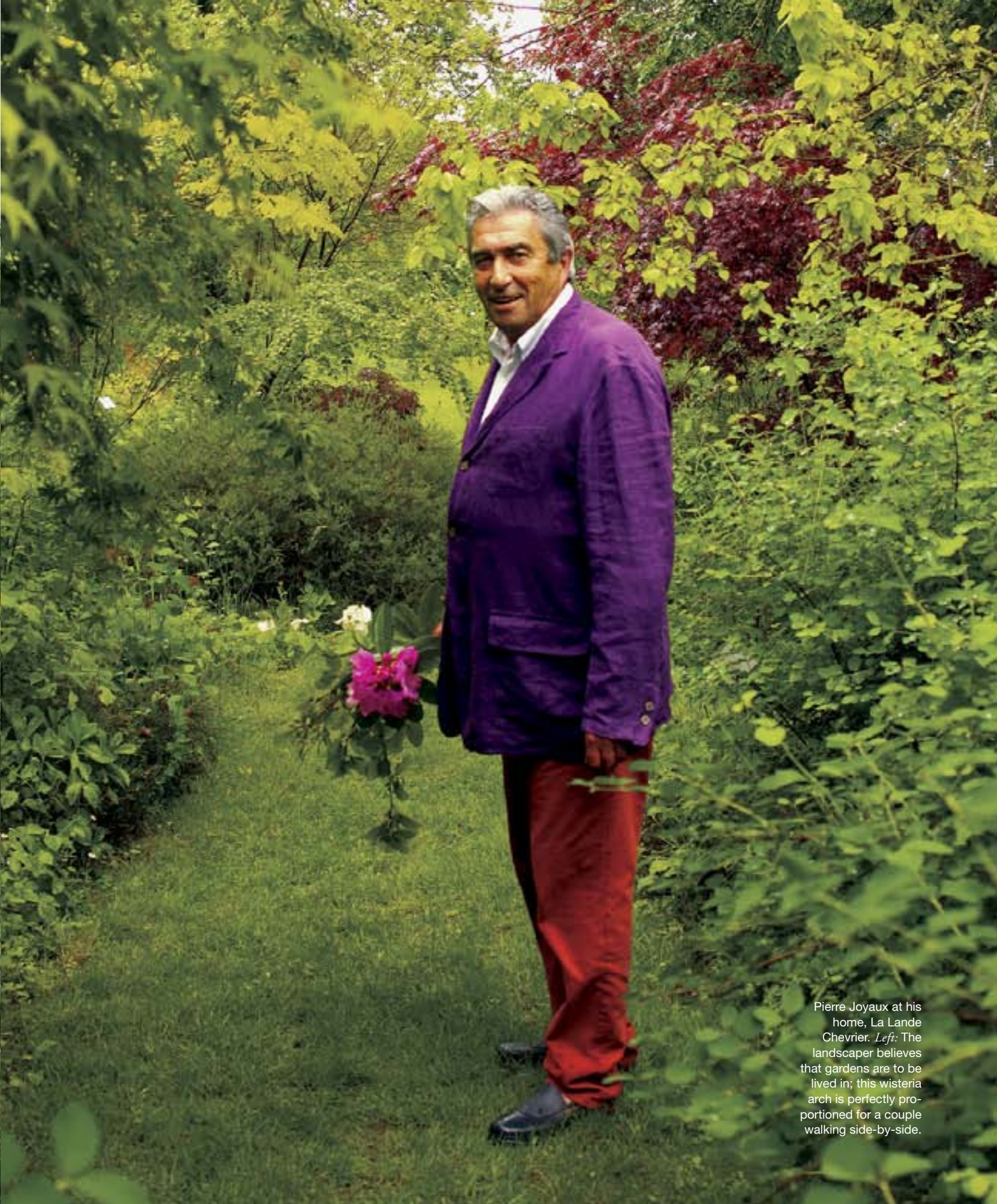


WATCHING HIS  
**gardens  
grow**

PIERRE JOYAUX HAS DESIGNED HUNDREDS OF GARDENS—AND EXPECTS THEM ALL TO BE THRIVING A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW. *by Heather Stimmler-Hall*



Pierre Joyaux at his home, La Lande Chevrier. *Left:* The landscaper believes that gardens are to be lived in; this wisteria arch is perfectly proportioned for a couple walking side-by-side.

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**MUCH LIKE** the château gardens he designs, Pierre Joyaux is larger than life. A tall man of considerable presence, his eyes blaze with energy as he recounts yet another anecdote, his broad yet elegant

frame in almost constant motion as he punctuates his stories with lively gestures and eruptions of laughter. It's easier to imagine him on stage at the Paris Opera than quietly contemplating the best placement for a boxwood hedge or adding the final delicate touches of watercolor to plans for a client's garden.

What's immediately obvious to anyone who meets Joyaux is that he is passionate about what he does. Specializing in 17th- and 18th-century gardens, he has designed, restored or re-created hundreds of landscapes gracing châteaux and country manors in France and abroad. His years of experience have given him the boldness needed to successfully pull off the transformation of frighteningly large spaces, expertly bringing order, elegance and drama to even the most daunting terrain.

And yet he doesn't take himself too seriously. His business card reads simply *Jardinier*—perhaps because Joyaux didn't intentionally set out to become a garden designer at all.

"Like most men, I got to where I am now because of the women in my life," he admits. A horticulturalist by training, he and his late wife, Marie-France, originally ran a nursery in the Berry region (south of the Loire Valley). When it came time to plant their own gardens at La Lande Chevrier, their country manor next door, Joyaux found himself in the position of designer by default. "My wife had a huge collection of plants but was afraid of placing them in the gardens, so it was up to me to decide where to put them," says Joyaux. "I learned a lot from that experience."

In the early 1980s, he received his first real commission from

Princess Marie Sol de la Tour d'Auvergne, proprietor of the historic Château d'Ainay-le-Vieil and president of the New York-based French Heritage Society ([frenchheritagesociety.org](http://frenchheritagesociety.org)). "I have a private cottage on the grounds and was looking for someone to help redesign its garden," relates Tour d'Auvergne. Specifically, she wanted someone who knew *palissage*, the French art of training trees into desired shapes by pruning and attaching branches to a supporting framework.

But in those days, there were few gardeners in France who knew how to do this. "Then I heard about Pierre Joyaux," continues Tour d'Auvergne. "So I stopped by to talk with him and visit his garden." Convinced he could carry out her vision, she eventually hired him not only to design the cottage garden but also to completely restore the vast grounds of her medieval fortress château.

"She kept insisting that I do the job, but I had never designed a landscape before!" recalls Joyaux. He eventually gave in, and the two worked closely together, starting in 1985 with the design of the rose garden. Together they tracked down some 180 varieties, creating the first private *roseraie* of its size in France. "We searched all over for heirloom varieties," says Tour d'Auvergne. "I even went to England and found some there." Her confidence in Joyaux certainly paid off: She unveiled his handiwork during her husband's birthday party, a huge event with many illustrious guests. "It was perfect," recalls Joyaux. "Everything was in bloom... talk about luck!"

After the success of the *roseraie*, word of Joyaux's talent soon spread, and he began working on some of the most prestigious properties in and around the Loire Valley—Château La Buissonnière, Prieuré Notre Dame d'Orsan, Château de Bellechasse, Château de Gien, the Jardin du Centre de la France, the Jardins de La Commanderie.... He would later be asked to work on castles in Normandy, *bastides* in Provence, manors in Dordogne and Cognac, and several estates north of Paris near Chantilly. Joyaux has also received commissions from

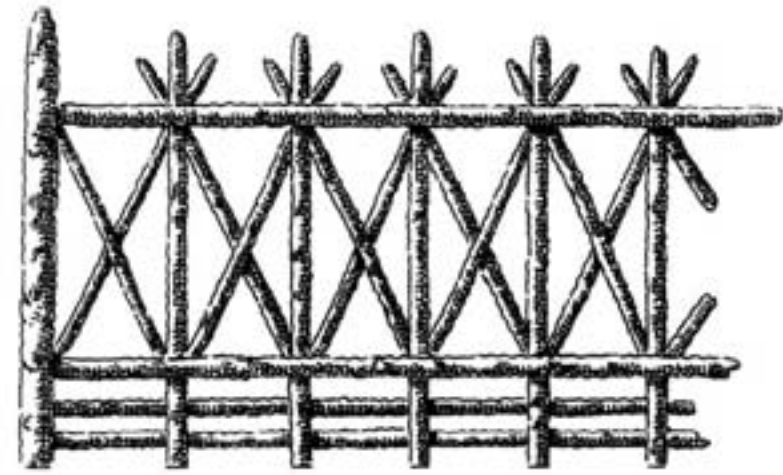


*Opposite page, top:* A mixed border running along a basin planted with lotus, part of the expansive garden Joyaux designed for Lorraine de la Valdenne in Dreux. *Below, left to right:* Joyaux often surrounds garden benches with fragrant plants; at Ainay-le-Vieil, a hornbeam arbor provides a play of light and shadow; Joyaux's plans for a client's garden; yew topiaries grace the canal at Ainay-le-Vieil.



A photograph of a beautiful garden. In the background, a white brick house with a dark tiled roof is visible. The garden is filled with various plants, including large white flowers, purple flowers, and green foliage. A wooden bench is positioned in the foreground on the left. A brick path leads from the foreground towards the house. In the middle ground, there is a circular brick pattern on the lawn. To the right, there is a wooden trellis structure covered with greenery. The overall scene is peaceful and well-maintained.

“I NEED TO walk the garden,  
DESIGNING IT IN MY HEAD AS I GO ALONG.”



outside France, designing the botanical gardens for the University of Lomé in Togo and kitchen gardens in Lebanon.

Given that he has no formal training in landscape architecture, some would say that his is a natural talent, but Joyaux dismisses the idea. “It’s taken me 21 years of experience, passion and hard work to get to this stage in my career,” he says firmly. “Of course, it may look effortless now, but believe me, I wasn’t always so sure of myself.”

In fact, it was another woman, the Marquise de Brantes, who helped Joyaux develop his new vocation. This American-born chatelaine, who has lived for 40 years at the Château Le Fresne (near Vendôme) with her French husband and children, met Joyaux at one of his gardening workshops. “We became good friends and ended up working together on her *potager* at Le Fresne,” he says. “She taught me to have more confidence in my abilities.”

**IN 1990**, Joyaux returned once again to Ainay-le-Vieil, tackling the restoration of its historic walled gardens, called *chartreuses*. “Pierre knows how to read and analyze the original layout of a garden,” says Tour d’Auvergne. “He has an innate sense of how people should move through the main axes,” she adds. “He’s also extremely creative.”

This creativity was given free rein in the *chartreuses*. Each of its five “rooms” is surrounded by 13-foot-high stone walls and connected by archways, and Joyaux gave each one a different theme. In the Sculpted Orchard, pear trees are trained into wide arches over the paths, while apple trees take on whimsical shapes such as fans, spindles, umbrellas and even chandeliers. Some are pinned flat against the walls, while others are freestanding “baskets” held up by hidden lattice and wire supports.

In the Meditation Garden, an immense yew hedge has been artfully transformed into a children’s playhouse, and in the Cloister Gardens,

live linden branches form a magnificent Gothic arch, Joyaux’s favorite shape. He achieved this bit of vegetal architecture by planting the trees in rows and attaching them at their crown when young.

Yet another *chartreuse* shows off the quintessentially French style developed by Le Nôtre in the 17th century, with formal lattice trellises, cone-shaped yews and elaborately patterned boxwood parterres that resemble intricately embroidered carpets. Surveying it all (and serving as the unifying focal point) is the statue of Pomona, the Roman goddess of gardening.

While Joyaux has re-created some gardens with total historical accuracy, most clients appreciate his clever concessions to modern-day practicality, given that the cost of upkeep is now so much higher than it was when these châteaux were built. At Ainay-le-Vieil, for example, yew trees that appear to be in wooden planter boxes turn out, upon closer inspection, to be growing in the ground. “They’re easier to maintain when you don’t have to water them every day,” he says simply.

Clients also enjoy his trademark whimsy. Along the elaborate canal network at Ainay-le-Vieil, for example, Joyaux planted Bald Cypress, a species first brought to France for Marie Antoinette’s Trianon gardens. He evokes the tree’s native Louisiana habitat with a rustic wooden bench and some lifelike waterfowl statues—all that’s missing is the banjo music. Over in the rose garden, meanwhile, a break in the foliage reveals a contemporary sculpture. Joyaux says that many of his clients, especially the younger ones, prefer having some touches of modernity to keep things fresh.

**JOYAUX WORKS** only on private gardens, never public parks or municipal gardens. He’s a people person, designing gardens that fit not only the architecture and the climate of a property but also its owner’s personality. “In the end, I make sure the owners feel like they’re the ones who designed the gardens, not me,” he says.



After getting to know the owner, he gets to know the land. “I walk,” he says, in describing how he approaches his work. “If I design the plans in my office, they feel too static. I need to walk the garden, designing it in my head as I go along.” This can become quite a hike, given that Joyaux has worked on gardens ranging from eight to 173 acres. He then returns home to create the immense watercolor plans he presents to the client.

First, he concentrates on the lines, perspectives and shapes that will form the permanent skeleton of the garden through generations, not just seasons. The importance of structure and proportion—the backbones of traditional French garden principles—are described in great detail in his book, *Structures Végétales ou “la Rigueur Sauvage”* (Du May, 1998; currently out of print). “Remember, your children and grandchildren are the ones who will have to take over the upkeep,” he says. “It’s all about the structure; if you have the perfect skeleton, it will survive no matter what flowers you use to decorate it.”

Joyaux insists that the same rules that guide his work on expansive properties can be applied to any garden—even to an apartment balcony. “People tend to make the same mistakes,” he says. “First, their landscaping fails to respect the architecture and scale of the house. These must complement one another; gardens should be the backdrop for the house.”

The second mistake is designing a garden around non-native plants. “No one knows where plants come from anymore,” he laments. “People buy whatever catches their eye at the nursery and then wonder why it doesn’t grow. If a garden is going to survive 100 years, you can’t use exotic plants.” He concedes that exotics such as bamboo or olive trees can be used as decorative embellishments, “but decorating and gardening aren’t the same thing.”

The third mistake is bad timing. “Don’t plant a garden full of flowers that bloom when you’re not there,” he cautions. “Most people plant for spring flowers, but by the time July arrives—just when it’s perfect weather for sitting outside—there’s nothing left to see.”

Joyaux’s style shows a clear preference for foliage over blossoms. He thinks gardens should be peaceful, with flowers serving as decorative accents, not the central focal point. “The longer I’m in

*Above, left to right:* A gate made of chestnut branches that Joyaux crafted for his daughter’s herb garden; a sketch of a traditional trellis design; raised square beds enclosed in woven chestnut branches, a technique dating back to the Renaissance; a poem in the *potager* Joyaux created for the Château de la Buissière.

*Right:* Joyaux often uses chestnut stakes to create five-foot-tall “teepees”; when covered with roses or other climbing plants, they resemble obelisks.



“A GARDEN WITH too many flowers  
IS LIKE A WOMAN WEARING TOO MUCH JEWELRY.”

*Left:* At Château de Poulaines, Joyaux dealt with the sloping terrain by creating separate terraces connected by steps. A narrow canal leads from one to the next; as the water runs down the steps, it splashes over plants, releasing their perfume.

this profession, the fewer flowers I use. A garden with too many flowers is like a woman wearing too much jewelry,” he says, comparing his style to that of a couturier who has spent years perfecting his little black dress. “If you focus just on the flowers, you’ll have a mediocre garden,” he says with a shudder. “There’s nothing worse than mediocrity in a garden.”

**A VISIT** to La Lande Chevrier, an ivy-covered country manor dating back to the 16th and 18th centuries, is a good way to see how his style developed. “You’ll be disappointed when you see my gardens,” he warns. “They’re nothing extraordinary.” It’s true that, at just under four acres, they are much smaller than the vast château landscapes he usually designs, yet they perfectly embody many of his gardening principles.

Stretched out along a long, narrow plot between the house and the surrounding fields, it’s almost impossible to see the actual boundaries of the gardens. The visitor is drawn in through a maze of hedges, grassy paths, hidden groves and surprising perspectives. Every turn seems to reveal two more possible paths through the trees, flowering shrubs and carefully trimmed hedges. The life-like statue of a lone duck greets visitors in one clearing, a classic vegetable garden in another. Hydrangeas and antique roses offer bright spots of color among the dramatic green foliage of maples, decorative grasses and hornbeam hedges. Chemical-free since the day he planted them 30 years ago, the gardens are alive with butterflies, bees, birds and critters skittering beneath the bushes. Their constant buzzing mixes with the sound of a wind chime in one grove and the softly clanging bells of Joyaux’s herd of sheep grazing peacefully in the field beyond.

One of the most charming aspects of Joyaux’s garden is that it isn’t perfect. There are weeds, some of the shrubs need pruning, and wild plants are allowed free rein as long as they behave. “I have to constantly tell the gardeners not to clean things up too much,” he says. “I prefer to have the ground covered, even by grass or weeds, than to see bare dirt.” The overall effect is one of relaxed elegance—the garden version of shabby-chic—that feels more comforting than intimidating. It’s as if you have stumbled upon a formal garden that has been allowed to languish while the owners are on vacation. “I don’t charge a fee to visitors,” says Joyaux. “I don’t want to feel like I have to make this place look a certain way just to impress tourists. If they like my style, great. If not, they didn’t lose any money.”


The gardens at La Lande Chevrier are meant to be lived in, not just looked at, and when not traveling for his work, Joyaux likes to enjoy the typical French garden lifestyle. “To design gardens that you can live in, you have to live in the gardens,” he says. Indeed, his garden is an extension of the house, with several shady seating areas and a hammock hanging from two trees on the patio. Outside the kitchen door, a long table with rough-hewn wooden benches

serves as an al fresco dining room. During the summer months, it is always set with colorful striped place mats, elegant candelabras and fresh bouquets of flowers and foliage. “Preparing and cooking good meals, decorating the table with flowers... this is all part of the *art de vivre au jardin*,” he says. The garden also extends into the house, with bouquets of every shape and size decorating each room. “I love making bouquets,” he says. “I’ll use whatever I find—grasses, branches, flowers, leaves....” Some are in dramatic vases, while others are arranged in simple silver cups or even Champagne flutes.

His daughter, Catherine Joyaux, has inherited this particular talent from her father and has made a career in floral decoration. While she typically creates dramatic arrangements and décors for weddings, receptions, gallery openings and other special events, she is sometimes commissioned to decorate gardens her father has designed when they are to be used for festive occasions. These days, she divides her time between Paris and La Lande Chevrier, where she has made a home in one of the converted buildings next to the main house, keeping an eye on the property while her father is abroad.

“**I’M MOVING** into more of a consulting role now,” says Joyaux. “It gives me the freedom to travel more overseas.” He’s currently working on projects in Lebanon, Palm Beach and Washington, D.C., giving owners advice on how to improve or transform their gardens rather than actually designing or managing the properties himself. For those who would love to import a bit of 17th- or 18th-century French garden style, Joyaux’s hands-on experience with the real thing is invaluable. And his ability to adapt designs to suit the owners’ specific needs and desires means that they won’t be stuck with “exotic” gardens that feel out of place.

Those who want to benefit from Joyaux’s experience first-hand may attend his Jardin Ecole workshops, which he launched a decade ago. They are typically held at La Lande Chevrier, but next year, he will also give several classes in Washington, D.C. Along with an overview of the history of gardens, he teaches students how to draw plans and the basics of *palissage*, as practiced by Louis XIV’s famous gardener, Jean-Baptiste de La Quintinie. “I accept no more than 12 participants to keep it personal and allow for a lot of Q&A,” he says. “I also like to pass along a few tricks of the trade that I have picked up over the years and that people can easily use in their own gardens.”

As he chats enthusiastically about the project, it is obvious that Joyaux’s contagious joie de vivre will inevitably leave a far more lasting impression of the French garden lifestyle than any lesson possibly could. 

*For more information about the Jardin Ecole or visiting the gardens at La Lande Chevrier, contact Pierre Joyaux, La Lande Chevrier, 18270 Saint-Christophe-le-Chaudry, France. Tél. 33/6-10-11-45-32; Fax 33/2-48-56-65-88; E-mail: pierrejoyaux1@aol.com.*