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Designing For Death

Words by **Jane Stark** (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/contributors/jane-stark/>)

Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf designs for all seasons, embracing winter ‘garden death’ with enthusiasm usually reserved for spring and summer. No drab dead winter perennials for Piet. No dead-heading and cutting back. He celebrates the beauty of a dying seed head just as much as their flowering forms.

Piet Oudolf's (<http://www.oudolf.com/piet-oudolf>) designs are characterised by self-seeding, mass planted drifts of structured grasses and perennials. Unconventionally, plants are chosen for their structure and texture when devoid of colour. Seed heads of grasses are a favourite autumn and winter feature. The effect is all naturalistic meadow and nobody embraces seasonality quite like him.

“If you make a four-season garden you have to accept decay and see the beauty of it. It's about the texture and shape, the seed heads and the skeletons. So instead of using the scissors you use your eyes. **Piet Oudolf**

Piet Oudolf is the living embodiment of the ‘New Perennials’ landscape movement – or at least was deemed so by The Royal Institute of British Architecture Journal. And they should know, having awarded him an Honorary Fellowship.



(<https://www.facebook.com/ThePlanthunter>)



From Twitter

Tattoos, beards, AND flowers. An interview photographer Brock Elbank by @ambercre (<http://twitter.com/ambercreswell>) on TPH: <http://t.co/9vASBNVIJZ> (<http://t.co/9vASBNVIJZ>) 23 hours ago (<http://twitter.com/ThePlanthunter/statuses>)

DIY Love-O-Saurus. Make one for your Valentine! #guaranteedtogetyoulaid (<http://twitter.com/TPHplay>) <http://t.co/ojLy0TKXhd> (<http://t.co/ojLy0TKXhd>) <http://t.co/TL2w0v8M44> (<http://t.co/TL2w0v8M44>) 23 hours ago (<http://twitter.com/ThePlanthunter/statuses>)

Well there you go. Hydrangeas are hallucinating! r nabbing 'em in France & police are in a fix <http://t.co/q26oZxHwga> (<http://t.co/q26oZxHwga>)

The New Perennials philosophy, which drove design thinking in 1838-1935, was rooted in a reverence for 'wild nature'. Since the early eighties, Oudolf has deftly put his own stamp on this movement by introducing colour into the equation. He is a nurseryman and garden designer, and has the skill of an impressionistic artist in the way he uses rhythmic drifts of colour and textural combos. His gardens must be exquisite in the wind – enough to make you sway. As the May 17, 2013 issue Architectural Digest article wrote; 'Mother Nature may make meadows, but Piet Oudolf perfects them!'

“ It has taken more than three decades of experimenting, refining and mastering his palette of plants which both live and die well. Oudolf's definition of a gracefully departing plant seems to be distinctive seed heads and a great skeleton. Oh, to die as beautifully as an Oudolf garden!

As a garden designer, I have drooled over images of the master of the afterlife's work and questioned the antipodean relevance of his designs and methods. What about our lack of extreme seasonality in coastal areas, our limited southern hemisphere perennial selections, and the relevance of the meadow in an urban environment? Still I persist, determined and itching to embrace his relaxed aesthetic.

Having grown up in a climate defined by four discrete seasons and now living in temperate Sydney, there are times I have yearned to swap seasonal continuum and balmy air for a crisp cracking jack frost, seasonal distinction and the beauty of a frozen seed head.

“ Whilst a frozen seed head in Sydney is highly unlikely, I've discovered seasonal change a-la Piet is achievable. There are many examples of plants that shine in autumn and winter with showy seed heads and swaying rhythms, if only they were planned for in the first place and left alone to hold their heads high!

I've explored the plant palette too. And it's true – our perennial diet is limited compared to our northern friends (that's another topic completely!). However, many perennials and grasses do traverse cool to temperate climes, and work beautifully with some of our own indigenous species. Those that work best are not rampant seeders and rooters (one of Oudolf's key criteria – necessary to maintain the design integrity).

Here is my favourite (and non-exhaustive list): Achillea, Agonis flexuosa, Anigozanthos, Diets, Echinacea, Echinops, Euphorbia, Gaura, Helianthus, Lavandula dentata, Lomandra, Miscanthus, Poa, Pennisetum, Phormium tenax, Salvia, and my favourite Sedums.

What about the meadow? Does it have a place in an urban environment where space is limited and outdoor living so essential. Why not? How about an Oudolf inspired courtyard with not a paver in sight?! Instead, imagine the space intensely planted with swathes of seasonally changing textures and colours, incorporating seating, a crushed granite floor and a habitat for our birds and bees.

From seedling to seedhead – Piet Oudolf's naturalistic aesthetic suits our relaxed lifestyle after all! But oh for the luxury of space to create a meadow of frosty skeletons!



Image from: <http://i-am-light.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/piet-oudolfs-winter-landscapes.html>

days ago
(<http://twitter.com/ThePlanthunter/statuses>)



(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/how-to/how-to-kill-plants-2/>)

How To Kill Plants (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/how-to/how-to-kill-plants-2/>)

Not everyone is interested in hunting plants but they love them. Some may be interested in hunting plants. Thats fine. Each to their own etcetera. So, accordance with the topic of death, here is The Planthunter's sure-fire guide to killing plants...

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(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/harvest/food-shelter-recipe/>)

Food as Shelter: A Recipe (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/harvest/food-shelter-recipe/>)

In our homes there exists an inextricable web of experiences, memories and stories that provide with shelter and therapy. These ultimately relate to comfort foods, the chow that makes us feel better when we are feeling down, provides us with a sanctuary when the weather is inclement, and transports us to a bygone time when we are feeling nostalgic.

Harvest

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/harvest/>)
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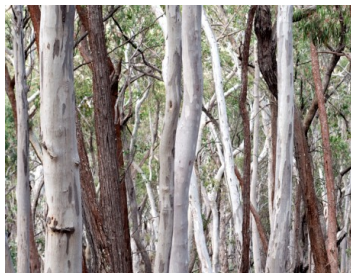
Image from: <http://i-am-light.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/piet-oudolfs-winter-landscapes.html>

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**The
Accidental
Gardener**
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**For The Love
of a Canopy**
(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/botanica/love-canopy/>)

Freddie Mercury once sang 'Open your eyes. Look up to the skies and see.' An old art teacher of mine also banged on about looking up and not just straight

Hope Gardens
(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/gardens/hope-gardens/>)

What does the concept of shelter mean to someone without a home? Is it a distant dream, like getting rich and famous and eating ice-cream for breakfast may be for a Western teenager?

Wendy Whitely has a soft spot for weeds. When the former artist and accidental gardener started clearing a pocket of wasteland alongside a North Sydney railway, those rebellious shoots served as proof that beauty often springs from the most unsightly origins.

Gardens

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/gardens/>)

death

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/death-2/>)

ue 1: Death

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ahead (although not as melodically as Freddie). He was right, however, and I've been looking up ever since.

Botanica

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Issue 3: Shelter

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Or is it something created in the space between reality and hope? Is it a garden?

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Comments

Jacqueline Hill (<http://shiftazine.com>)

December 9, 2013 at 9:38 am

This is a wonderful shift in the definition of a beautiful garden.

I am creative director and publisher of an on line magazine called Shiftazine and would love to run this in my magazine.

Either way, this is very exciting thinking.

Regards

Jacqueline

reply to this >> (</gardens/designing-for-death/?replytocom=33#respond>)

faith (<http://www.postcardsfromthenorth.com.au>) @vaguelyspecific (<http://twitter.com/vaguelyspecific>)

November 28, 2013 at 6:59 pm

Brilliant! I have been looking for discussions of planting for a southern hemisphere version of the perennial planting movement.

Will be following avidly and off to google your list as a starting point!

reply to this >> (</gardens/designing-for-death/?replytocom=15#respond>)

The Planthunter **POST AUTHOR**

December 3, 2013 at 11:14 am

Great! Good luck with your southern hemisphere perennial garden Faith

daniel (<http://www.danielyrrell.com.au>)

November 28, 2013 at 3:37 pm

Good stuff

reply to this >> (</gardens/designing-for-death/?replytocom=10#respond>)

The Planthunter **POST AUTHOR**

December 3, 2013 at 11:14 am

Thanks Daniel!

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