

impact of journalism was fleeting (the proverbial ‘chip paper’), but one of the benefits of the Internet is that many articles are nowadays available online, and for an indefinite period. On my good days I feel like an independent scholar; on my less good days I feel like a hack journalist. Clearly I generally operate somewhere between these two poles. Rule number one is that I never write about gardens I have not personally visited (editors sometimes ask you to write an article, or even entire books, ‘to the pictures’). My critical freedom is also jealously guarded: I do not join judging committees, selection panels or prize juries. This is to ensure that I can remain entirely independent as a critic. As for books, I no longer embark on projects which I want to write – I now have to feel I *need* to write them. The only serious frustration I encounter is when my work is poorly edited or rewritten, then sent to press without consultation – though this is mercifully rare.

My darkest secret is that I do quite like gardening, and have turned my north London garden into a kind of ‘home allotment’ fringed with flowering shrubs and choice perennials. In fact for about fourteen years now I have been having a passionate affair with the alluring Constance Spry in my back garden. ‘Constance Spry’ in inverted commas, that is – a ‘shrub rose of arching habit with rounded, fully double, myrrh-scented pink flowers’. She is much more beautiful than that description implies, and more beguiling, even, than her picture on the Internet. But I shan’t be writing about her any time soon.

The main selection criterion for the articles in this volume is that they should be enjoyable to read. Lengthy pieces, including my articles on historic gardens for *Country Life* and on art for *Apollo*, have been excluded. Barring a few last-minute substitutions, I have left the choice to my editor, on the principle that writers are not usually the best judges of their own work. As the great Dr Samuel Johnson once advised, ‘Read over your compositions, and where ever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out.’ In this spirit I do hope you might meet with one or two things in this collection that you feel a sudden urge to ‘strike out’.

Tim Richardson,
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