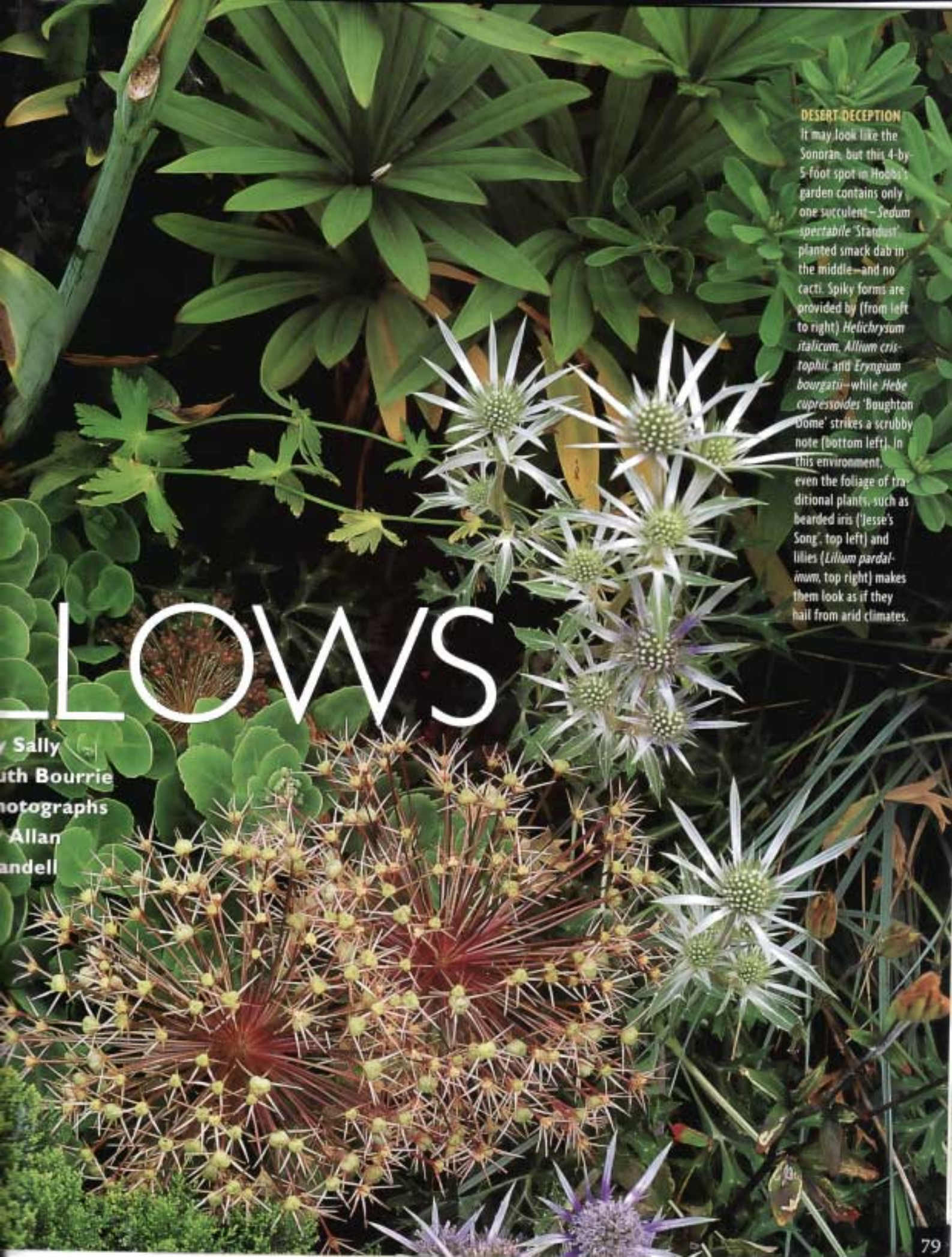
A close-up photograph of a garden bed. The top half features large, vibrant green irises with long, pointed leaves. Below them are various other plants, including a cluster of yellow flowers on the left, a bush of silvery-grey herbs in the center, and several green succulents on the right. The bottom of the image shows a dense, low-growing green shrub. The overall scene is a rich, multi-layered display of diverse plant life.

Thomas
Hobbs broke
boundaries—
of taste and
climate—in
his Vancouver
yard. Now his
hot-hued,
zone-bending
plant pairings
are catching
on like wildfire

STRANGE BEDFE



DESERT DECEPTION

It may look like the Sonoran, but this 4-by-5-foot spot in Hobbs's garden contains only one succulent—*Sedum spectabile* 'Standust' planted smack dab in the middle—and no cacti. Spiky forms are provided by (from left to right) *Helichrysum italicum*, *Allium cristophii*, and *Eryngium bourgatii*—while *Hebe cupressoides* 'Boughton Dome' strikes a scrubby note (bottom left). In this environment, even the foliage of traditional plants, such as bearded iris ('Jesse's Song', top left) and lilies (*Lilium pardalimum*, top right) makes them look as if they hail from arid climates.

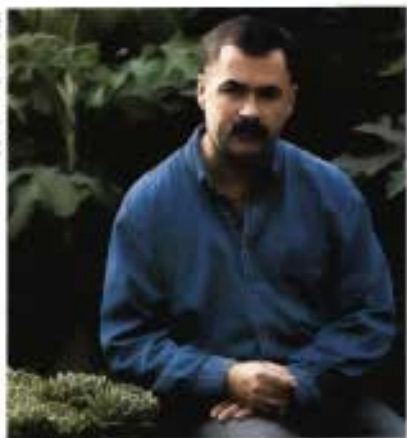
LOWES

by Sally
with Bourrie
photographs
Allan
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icture yourself, the gardener, 12 years ago. Like me, you were probably pampering pastel delphiniums and foxgloves, coaxing roses up a white-washed trellis, waiting for that teak bench to weather, because *this*—sweet and pretty and old—is what gardens were supposed to look like. Maybe, if you were really ahead of the curve, you were already going native. But you sure weren't planting showy tropicals, bizarre succulents, anything bright red, orange, or purple—not if you lived north of zone 10. Thomas Hobbs was. Up in Canada, no less.

It was 1988 when Hobbs, then a floral designer, moved into his Vancouver house, promptly ripped out its traditional Pacific Northwest plantings—rhododendrons and azaleas, some lush green lawn—and began staging audacious vignettes. With a florist's eye, and a florist's remove from harsh, outdoor realities, he paired Asiatic lilies with cannas, verbascum with echeveria, bruised reds with faded peaches and acid greens. Eventually, those vignettes merged into a bold half-acre garden. And ever since Hobbs published a book celebrating his brazen new aesthetic—last year's *Shocking Beauty* (Periplus Editions)—gardeners-in-the-know have been rushing to punch



up their palettes, getting rid of anything too terribly tasteful. Gone are the days of the subdued natural woodland and the painterly watercolor flower border. Good-bye, pastoral English countryside. Hello, vivid Miami.

Hobbs himself shrugs off notions of visionary rebellion, insisting that he never intended to break rules or start trends. It all began, he says, because his house—itsself a local oddity, built by Los Angeles craftsmen in the 1930s—demanded an environment more southern California than southern Canada. As for the plants necessary to create this Hollywood drama, they weren't such a stretch: Vancouver is in zone 8. "Of course," Hobbs adds, "we do get just enough snow to really wreck things."

But some of Hobbs's combinations, those a more cautious gardener would never have attempted, survived the winter just fine. Turns out that supposedly zone-10-hardy baby's-tears will tolerate Vancouver weather, as will cannas. Even zone 11's brugmansia made it, in a warm, sheltered spot on the patio. "Zones are recommendations," Hobbs points out, "and most catalogs and books err on the side of caution. Also, if you live in eight, there may be areas of your garden that feel like

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HOT STUFF Hobbs left, claims that his house's California architecture spurred him to create his hot-looking garden. Above left: At first, Hobbs found this particular corner awkward. But by tiling it, he created a heat-trapping nook for tender plants—and a warm patio for entertaining (a table and chairs are just out of sight on the left). The metal grate near the door covers a mirror, making reflections much more subtle.



COLOR CUES

■ Hobbs believes that palettes should be bold, not boundless. As a florist, he never used more than three colors (plus green) in any one arrangement. His garden groupings, like the one at left, are equally disciplined.

■ When composing a vignette, put your effort—overwintering or planting annually—into one stunning tropical, and surround it with temperate plants in similar hues. In this case, *Canna* 'Pink Sunburst' (1) is the tender standout. Around it, hardy, low-maintenance plants—lilies, sedum, angelica, anemiss, and salvia—become infused with a hothouse glow.

■ Limit the number of colors, then use countless shades of each. Here, Hobbs stuck to the reds, yellows, greens, and whites of the canna's leaves, but the intensity varies greatly. The brash orange-reds of 'Lovelite' lilies (2) and 'Coral Glo' coleus (3), for instance, deepen and become more subtle in the foliage of *Sedum telephium* 'Matrona' (4) and the stems of *Angelica* 'Vicar's Mead' (5).

■ Be adventurous, but don't jump wildly from one color to the next. By placing the canna in the middle, Hobbs uses it as a bridge to connect the hot reds with the cool white of *Anemiss tinctoria* 'Sauce Hollandaise' (6). The golden peach flowers of the Asiatic lily 'Cosmic Blast' (7) further smooth the transition.

■ Shifting shapes keeps things interesting. This limited palette is counterbalanced by a variety of forms. Hobbs purposefully paired the large-flowered 'Lovelite' lily with the smaller anemiss blossoms. The coarse leaves of a salvia (8) anchor the angelica's fine feathery foliage.

BORDER DIPLOMACY

■ Test a plant's limits, but don't make it miserable. Unhappy flora lead to an unsightly garden. True, one member of the medley at right won't tolerate cold (and must be overwintered), but all have similar needs in the summertime—which is why they're grouped together in a dry section of Hobbs's garden.

■ Don't be too rigid in your rebellion. The traditional-looking *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album' (1) has become more plentiful than Hobbs intended. Rather than banish the cottage staple, he used it to his advantage. The mullein's pink-and-white sweetness offsets its darker neighbors and, with Scotch thistle (2), adds much-needed height.

■ Ignore conventional wisdom and site a few tall plants at the front of a border. The skinny stems of *Eryngium agavifolium* (3) don't obscure the back row. And its forward-thinking location shows off its best feature: agavelike foliage.

■ When working with tender plants, don't make things more difficult than necessary. Hobbs planted several species of echeveria (4) up front. Not only do they ease the shift from plants to hard edging, but they're much easier to dig up when temperatures drop.

■ Create pockets of mystery. The blackish *Sedum telephium* 'Mohrchen' (5) brings necessary shadow to this sunny, pastel border.

■ Plant for foliage, not flowers—and a composition will dazzle longer. The mullein and lilies don't star in this show. Rather, the principals are dark sedum leaves, saw-toothed eryngium straps, and delicate *Crambe cordifolia* (6).



FAKING A HOT LOOK

Pick up Hobbs's coffee-table stunner, *Shocking Beauty* (Periplus Editions), for inspiration: Its full-page photos of outrageous combinations from gardens around the world will spur you to break a few rules of your own. Then, when it comes time to break ground, grab the new *Hot Plants for Cool Climates* (Houghton Mifflin). Written by Susan A. Roth and Dennis Schrader, this user-friendly guide demystifies the process of achieving a scorching look in frigid locations. The first two chapters define "hot" style. The last three outline methods: growing in containers, overwintering, and—my favorite, since I'm too lazy to move or wrap anything—choosing hardy plants that only look tropical. Even better, Roth and Schrader have distilled their plant suggestions into handy lists at the back of the book. A few entries seem a stretch (like hydrangeas), but most are spot-on. Here are our favorite temperate "tropicals" culled from their lists, with their (in some cases rather adventurous) zone recommendations. —Sarah Gray Miller

PALMS AND BANANAS

Unless you live way down south, you can forget towering palm trees. But *Trachycarpus fortunei* can reach heights of 10 feet in zone 7a. Two palmettoes (*Sabal minor* and *Serenoa repens*) are hardy in zone 6b, and the nearly trunkless needle palm (*Rhapidophyllum hystrix*) may even make it in zone 5. Of the bananas, *Musa basjoo* is the hardest. Though it won't thrive north of

zone 9, it will survive until temperatures drop below 0°F. Any warmer, Roth and Schrader say, and it just dies back to the ground and reappears in spring.

BAMBOOS AND GRASSES

Bamboos feel almost as balmy as palms and bananas—and they're much tougher. The hardiest are clumpers *Fargesia murielae* and *F. nitida*, A, (both zones 4b–10). Aggressive *Pleioblastus viridistriatus* (z. 5a–9) must be contained, but it has gorgeous yellow-and-green-striped leaves. Ornamental grasses offer a similar look, especially *Miscanthus 'Giganteus'* (z. 4–9) and *Phalaris arundinacea 'Picta'* (z. 5a–9). But we think the best Hot Plants grass suggestion is *Arundo donax* (z. 6–10). Instead of a reedy appearance, this 15-footer sports broad green leaves that look like they belong on a cornstalk.

VINES

Dutchman's-pipe, B, *Aristolochia durior* (z. 4–8), is an obvious, but wonderful, choice. Lesser-known hotties include *Actinidia kolomikta 'Arctic Beauty'* (z. 4–8), which has pink, white, and green foliage; *Campsis radicans* (z. 5–9), with orange trumpetlike flowers; and *Humulus lupulus 'Aureus'* (z. 4–8), which has acid-green leaves.

SHRUBS

In the right environment, the big glossy leaves of *Aucuba japonica*, especially the gold-speckled 'Crotonifolia' or 'Gold Dust' (both z. 7–9), look tropical. *Yucca* is a great substitute for

agave, aloe, and phormium: Try *Y. filamentosa* and *Y. filamentosa 'Bright Edge'*, C, (both z. 4–10), and *Y. rostrata* (z. 6–11). You can also warm things up with ferny foliage, like that of *Rhus typhina 'Laciniata'* (z. 3–8) and *Tamarix ramosissima* (z. 4–8).

TREES

For the feathery look in tree form, plant *Sophora japonica* (z. 6–9). *Aralia elata* (z. 4–9) has more traditional-looking compound leaves, but its variegated cultivars 'Aureovariegata' and 'Variegata' (both z. 4–9) manage to look scorching. For bold, chartreuse foliage, plant *Catalpa bignonioides 'Aurea'*, D, (z. 5–9) or *Paulownia tomentosa* (z. 5–8).

PERENNIALS

Roth and Schrader group perennials by height. Our favorite tall (over 4 feet) ones: *Angelica archangelica* (z. 3–9), for its big, greenish white flower heads, and *Hibiscus moscheutos* (z. 5–9), for single, saucer-size blooms in a range of colors. Of their medium-height (2–4 feet) suggestions, the cultivars of *Kniphofia uvaria* (z. 5–9), F, and *Crocasmia x crocasmiflora* (z. 6–10) have extraordinary hot-hued blossoms, while the oversize leaves of *Rheum palmatum 'Atrosanguineum'* (z. 5–9), *Darmera peltata* (z. 5–9), *Petasites japonicus var. giganteus*, E, (z. 5–7), and *rodgersia* (z. 5–7) are as good as their flowers. Low-growers *Heuchera micrantha var. diversifolia 'Palace Purple'* (z. 4–8) and *Houttuynia cordata 'Chameleon'* (z. 6–11) are all about foliage color.



A



B



C



D



E



F



I



SUBTLE SHOCKERS

■ Small, contained spots along walls provide opportunities for intimate plant combinations, like this one at left, whose subtle tapestries might be overlooked in a deep border.

■ Hobbs was able to create a tropical-looking vignette that's not centered around a tropical. Massed in a big bed, hostas might look like, well, hostas. Here, the cream-tipped leaves of 'Regal Splendor' (1) get a chance to shine. Same goes for the delicate gray-and-burgundy markings of the Japanese painted fern, *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum* (2).

■ Unify the scene, but avoid monotony. When repeating colors, use different shapes; when repeating shapes, change the colors. The foliage of *Astrantia major* 'Ruby Wedding' (3) and *Cimicifuga simplex* 'Brunette' (4), for instance, exhibit nearly identical forms, but the hues couldn't be farther apart. The color match for the cimicifuga leaves comes instead from the astrantia's tiny maroon flowers—which are echoed by the lacy fronds of the Japanese painted fern.

■ Even understated displays require a rest stop. Too much patterning results in what Hobbs calls the "visual pizza syndrome." Here, the astrantia's plain, dark-green foliage offers a peaceful focal point.

■ Beware of white-outs. When Hobbs bought his house, it was painted stark, glowing white. "Gardening against that," he says, "was like planting in front of a big refrigerator. It overpowered everything." Now a deep terra-cotta, the exterior complements—instead of fighting with—his plants.