

BLUEPRINT 336



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PICK OF THE
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RENZO PIANO | PIET OUDOLF | RON ARAD | HENEGHAN PENG

COUNTRY LIFE

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The contemporary art gallery Hauser & Wirth has spaces in Zurich, London and New York. So when it was announced it was going to open an art gallery in deepest Somerset, the question on everyone's lips, was 'Why Bruton?'



Durslade Farm, a loose collection of Grade II-listed farm buildings, stables and piggeries, sits on the rural outskirts of Bruton, flanked by open fields and ancient stone walls. It neighbours Worthy Farm, home of the Glastonbury Festival, to the north and the Palladian mansion of Stourhead to the east, while the prehistoric monument of Stonehenge rests a little further away. It was once a working farm, with granaries, a milking parlour and threshing barn, but it's now the latest outpost of art gallery Hauser & Wirth.

It may seem like an odd choice of location for an international and – let's not forget – commercial art gallery, but it is an area the founders Iwan and Manuela Wirth hold dear. They moved from Zurich to London in 2005, with a plan to return to Switzerland soon after. 'We fell deeply in love with the English countryside and its people,' says the Swiss-born Iwan. 'When we moved to Bruton it was a complete accident. I believe people don't choose places, places choose them.' They already had three galleries in London, New York and Zurich and all in sensitively restored historic buildings. The former Löwenbräu brewery became Hauser & Wirth Zurich in 1996, while the Lutyens-designed former bank became its

Piccadilly gallery in 2003. The most recent one, New York, opened last year in the former home of popular nightclub and skating rink Roxy (see Blueprint 326). In January 2016, there are plans for a Hauser & Wirth in Los Angeles.

The Wirths found Durslade Farm in 2009, bordering on ruin. At first they weren't sure what to do with the space, but it soon became clear that where they went, art would follow. Bruton already had *At the Chapel*, a former chapel converted into a sleek, art-loving hotel and restaurant by ex-Londoner Catherine Butler in the centre of town (Butler will now run the new gallery's restaurant as well). So at first the gallery came from an initial need for an office away from London, then they found that an artist friend wanted to stay, and Hauser & Wirth Somerset was born. 'It was an intuitive process creating an art space in the country,' remarks Iwan. 'We got the sense that there was a huge appetite for culture here.'

They teamed up with Paris-based architect Luis Laplace to transform the rundown stables into a gallery and education space alongside a restaurant, bookshop and office. Argentine-born Laplace first worked with Selldorf Architects, which designed both



1 (previous page) – The former farmyard is marked by Subodh Gupta's larger-than-life steel bucket

2 – The pigsty and old threshing barn have been transformed into contemporary galleries

3 (opposite page) – Phyllida Barlow's new installation *GIG FIBS* a previously derelict farm building





Hauser & Wirth's spaces in London and New York, before setting up on his own in 2004. Previous projects include artist Cindy Sherman's house in Paris and the Wirths' own home, near to the gallery in Bruton. On Hans Ulrich Obrist's recommendation, they also brought in Dutch horticulturalist Piet Oudolf, known for his work on New York's High Line and the centre of Peter Zumthor's 2011 Serpentine Pavilion.

"It really is the fusion of what we're passionate about: art, artists, community, landscape, architecture, and food. It offered us the opportunity to combine all these things in one place," says Iwan. As such, it's much more than an art gallery, it's a bit like being invited into the Wirths' home. "In many ways they are the ideal clients because they're used to working with artists, so they understand that things need to be developed and that things aren't written in stone. The briefing of the project evolved; it was never from the beginning. "This is what we want to do," it was always an ongoing conversation," says Laplace.

The old farm buildings have been renovated and connected with two new wings to create a continuous internal space and an enclosed central courtyard. Visitors enter via the former farmyard,

which is currently marked by Subodh Gupta's larger-than-life stainless steel bucket and a Paul McCarthy sculpture. The former cowsheds, arranged in a horseshoe, house the reception, shop, bar and restaurant, from which visitors can enter the first gallery in the 18th-century threshing barn. Exhibition spaces stretch through five gallery rooms, from the low-ceilinged and intimate pigsty, with its exposed beams and painted brick walls on the west, to the larger and more spacious new gallery to the north. Floors are unpolished concrete and huge oak and glass doors give glimpses of the work outside.

The threshing barn and pigsty have a domestic scale and appear almost as if they have formed around Thyilda Barlow's installation, GIG, the first exhibition in the space. Following on from her commission for Tate Britain, Barlow created a sequence of pieces specifically for the Hauser & Wirth gallery. Lopsided and brightly painted wooden cogs extend up into the rafters, while doorways appear blocked by tightly bound masses of studio detritus. It brings the artwork right to the visitors' eyes and fingertips, so they have to duck and dive to avoid crashing into Barlow's suspended fabric pompoms or cardboard constructions. It's a bit like traversing through tripwire beams. But it's not

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4 (opposite page) - GIG was created in response to the architecture and surrounding landscape of Durslade Farm

5 - Architect Luis Laplace was inspired by precedents of cloisters in the local area

a precious space: Barlow has deliberately orchestrated the pieces so we get up close to her work, and the gallery is perfectly suited for it. Says Laplace: 'I like to bring art closer to people, I like it to be intimate. All of a sudden the art comes to you and you're part of it. It's something I do in people's homes; they don't need to be scared of art. Today when people go to museums they are standing 2m away from the art. My job is to bring art to our ordinary life. Of course art is something precious, yet it can be something very close to you. It doesn't have to be so far away.'

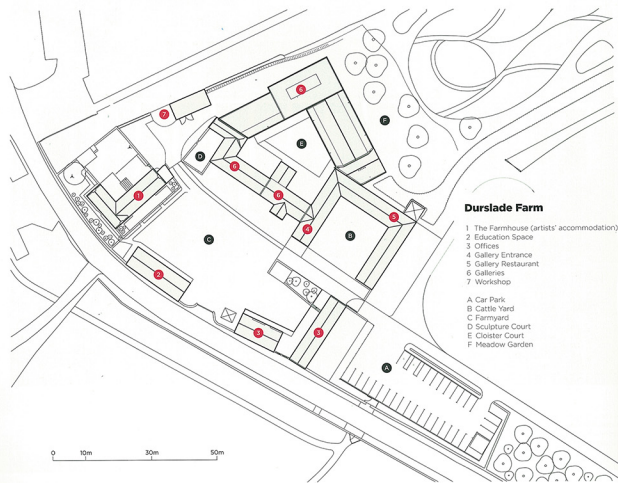
It's certainly a democratic space, without the 'do not cross the line' marks of other galleries. Indeed, the gallery as a whole is rather democratic – open to the public for free throughout the year, and with a strong education programme, including allotments, summer schools and family-focused Saturdays, which will no doubt appeal to the local community.

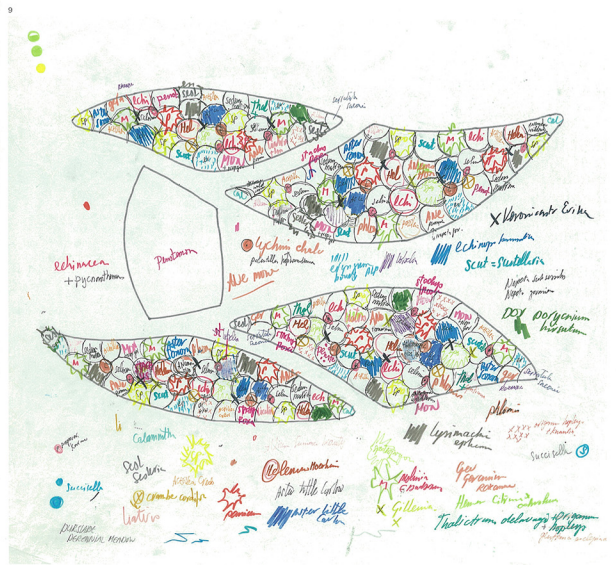
The transition from old to new is a natural one, and the courtyard appears as a surprise after the almost claustrophobic spaces of the old buildings. This is the heart of the project, bordered on two sides by a crisp sandstone colonnade and occupied by Louise Bourgeois' piece Spider. The harsh lines of the

columns are softened slightly with hanging lights and Oudolf's landscaping. With the sun shining on a warm summer's day, it feels like you are in southern Italy, not southern Somerset. 'Cloisters are an architectural element that have been present in this region and I thought it was a good way of resolving and integrating the new buildings,' says Laplace. 'I also went to an English school in Buenos Aires, which had colonnades. I was always a very solitary kid and I liked to walk round the school. The idea is that you navigate from one building to another without realising that you are transporting yourself to another period to another. I want you to feel sheltered.'

On the lawn opposite the gallery, the former farmhouse has been treated completely differently. It was once used as the setting for the film *Chocolat*, with Juliette Binoche and Johnny Depp, but it will now house artists and friends who come to stay, as well as being open to the public. Laplace has kept the memory of the old farmhouse by exposing walls and existing fireplaces, and sourcing vintage items from local markets. Martin Creed's illuminated neon letters that state, 'Everything is Going to be Alright' mark the entrance, while artwork by Roni Horn, Paul McCarthy and Ida Applebroog is dotted around the rooms. Says Laplace, 'It's where

6 (opposite page) – A sandstone colonnade makes the transition from inside to out subtle and sheltered.





I break all the rules of the academy, things cross boundaries, you don't know where the art starts and where the architecture ends. Everything is very ambiguous and you don't know what is good taste, what is bad taste. It's like the dessert of the project.'

Artists Pipilotti Rist and Guillermo Kuitca both spent time in the area as artists-in-residence (Hauser & Wirth has transformed a former brewery in Bruton into artists' studios) and created work for the farmhouse. In the main living space, a film by Rist is projected on to the wall and ceiling, while Kuitca painted cubist-style markings directly on to the walls of the dining room.

'I had no previous image or script in mind but began in one corner of the room and started expanding until I arrived again at where I had begun,' says Buenos Aires-based Kuitca. 'Every day was an improvisation; following the images, hearing as opposed to seeing them, the whole process became closer to a musical composition. This summer, at that particular moment, in Somerset was very warm and dry and though I didn't expect to change my usual sombre palette – the quality of the light seeped into the

painting – sombre tones grew vibrant and bold.' Turner-prize winner Mark Wallinger was the next to take up residence as Blueprint went to press.

Behind the new gallery is Oudolf's 6000 sq m stand-alone meadow, which stakes up a hill and contains more than 26,000 plants. Self-taught, Oudolf's gardens are most famous for their naturalistic planting, with unrestrained swathes of purples, pinks and golds, grasses and structured pathways. His vision for Hauser & Wirth includes a series of paths cut through the vegetation, inviting visitors to wander through the garden, and a pond for moisture-loving plants. If the gallery had been just an art gallery in the middle of the countryside, it wouldn't have worked. The strength of the project lies in the loose cluster of programmes; involving the community, connecting to the landscape, providing a place for people to come, meet and eat. And that could really only happen in Somerset, where the slightly bohemian art set go to escape the chains of London. The garden has yet to mature, but when it does, it will be reason enough to visit Durdale Farm. ▶

7 - Guillermo Kuitca painted directly on to the walls of the dining room in the farmhouse
 8 - Martin Creed's Everything is Going to Be Alright lights up the farmhouse at night
 9 - Piet Oudolf's sketch for the perennial meadow at Hauser & Wirth Somerset



PIET OUDOLF

Dutch landscape architect Piet Oudolf, the man behind the planting on the High Line in Manhattan and Peter Zumthor's Serpentine Pavilion in 2011, talks to Cate St Hill about his garden for Hauser & Wirth Somerset, including the perennial meadow that sits behind the gallery buildings

Blueprint: Tell me a bit more about how you became involved in Hauser & Wirth Somerset.

Piet Oudolf: I had friends in Hadspen House, near here, who were gardening there in the Eighties and Nineties. I also have a lot of friends in England, so in the garden world they all knew me, but now I'm coming to work in the art world.

Blueprint: What was your inspiration for this garden?

Oudolf: Talking with [gallery founders] Iwan and Manuela [Wirth] the brief was that people coming to the gallery should be surprised to find a garden. It was to be an extension, something special that people would come across unexpectedly. So we kept the landscape at the front very easy, like the farmyard that was there before, and this [the meadow] we would make more spectacular. We wanted to create this very dynamic perennial landscape.

Blueprint: The gallery is currently showing some of your preparatory sketches, which show a patchwork of colours and symbols. Talk me through your design process and how you start a project.

Oudolf: I first have an idea and I start to think how it will look. I start with a drawing, bringing a list of plants together that will make the performance. It's like putting actors on a stage; you need particular characters to make it happen.

Blueprint: Your designs are always very natural and unconstrained. How much is down to nature and how much is down to you?

Oudolf: All the plants used here are not competitive, not overseeding, so that is an advantage. They have a longer lifespan than most other plants so they are not annual, or biannual, they don't die after flowering. That's part of the game, they shouldn't push each other out. The meadow here isn't wild, it's all in groups, like you see on the drawings.

Blueprint: Had you worked in England before? Do you think gardens in this country have a national identity, a certain 'Britishness' for example?

Oudolf: They've lost that since I've come here! I've worked in England since 2000 and earlier. Everyone in the plant world knew my name, there was even a time when they thought I was English – people thought I was living here. I was once quoted as 'one of the most important garden designers in England', and I was the only one outside of England!

1 - A sketch – part of a collection on show at Hauser & Wirth – shows how Piet Oudolf plans a garden by using layers of symbols and blocks of colour

Blueprint: Did you have any gardeners or designs that influenced you when you were a young designer?

Oudolf: No, there were people in the plant world who had different ideas. I was influenced by friends; we were trying to escape the traditional way of gardening, which was all about decoration. We tried to create more spontaneity in a garden and gardens that appealed more to people. We tried to put another layer on the design, a deeper, more emotional layer. It's more than prettiness, it touches your soul. If you think of decoration it's about a nice flower, but if you think of gardens as a metaphor then you think of life and how you feel – it's more romantic and it gives you a strong sensation of feeling good.

Blueprint: What are the ingredients for a perfect garden?

Oudolf: The perfect garden needs knowledge and the intensity of what you can bring to other people, and that's not easy. It's like in art: you paint and not every painting is art, but if you can really bring to other people what you feel, that is the secret.

Blueprint: How do you feel about letting the garden go to the public now? Are you protective of your gardens, are they like your babies?

Oudolf: I like children in the garden but not running around without their parents. It's more about the parents who don't respect the garden. But if I was a child I would love to run through here and play hide and seek. You should be aware of how easily you can destroy a garden. Gardening is a never-ending product. You cannot go back to all your gardens. I can take distance but as long as people take care of them; I see them as my babies. But if they don't take care, I can let them go. I also see them as attempts, to try to give people something that they will want to nurture. ■

An exhibition of Piet Oudolf's designs, entitled *Piet Oudolf: Open Field*, is on show at Hauser & Wirth Somerset until October 5. The garden opens September 14.

