



PETERSHAM  
NURSERIES

*photography by Andrew Montgomery*

THE BOGLIONE FAMILY





## PROLOGUE

Lying nine miles or so southwest of London, between Richmond and Ham, Petersham is a place apart. There's no high street as such and, though there are a good number of historic houses and a charming, if somewhat hidden, 18th-century village lock-up, none are open to the public. By car, it would be easy to miss the village entirely, but approach from the river, and the picture is more seductive.

Cross Richmond's pretty green – Henry VIII's old jousting ground – noting the stone arch of The Gatehouse (one of the last surviving traces of Richmond Palace, the much-loved home of Elizabeth I) and head towards the banks of the Thames. Today the frenetic comings and goings of the court are no more (it was at Richmond that Elizabeth received Francis Drake after his circumnavigation of the globe, and here where she and her council of war planned their strategies to defeat the Spanish Armada). Instead, a much gentler pace of life now reigns, with colourful wooden skiffs idling under the fronds of the weeping willows. Ducks squabble over breadcrumbs thrown from the path while a loud splash signals that yet another dog owner will be washing their charge come evening. Beyond the canoe club, the path enters Buccleuch Gardens – in the 19th century, part of the lavish grounds of Buccleuch House – before a metal kissing gate signals another change of pace as we pass into Petersham meadows. Now the scene is more tangibly rural. Once part of the estate of Ham House, just along the river, these meadows have been grazed for well over two hundred years and are protected as part of the view from Richmond Hill looking west towards Hampton Court.

Leave the riverbanks and head inland slightly, past spreading oaks towards a line of trees. Pass through another kissing gate, avoiding the cows that often congregate here, and into a narrow lane fringed by hawthorns, wild roses and ivy. In summer, the trees meet overhead forming a green cloister, where the air is stiller and warmer than in the fields around. Flecks of sunlight dapple the path, beckoning us on to discover what lies at its end...

This is Petersham Nurseries, and this is its story.



BEGINNINGS  
GAEL BOGLIONI

We never thought of becoming shopkeepers. Our involvement in Petersham Nurseries was entirely coincidental. We had discovered the house, whose garden backs onto the nursery, in the summer of 1996, tipped off by friends who lived in nearby Richmond. At the time we were living in South Kensington and, with four young children, we longed for a larger garden for them to play in. I came to see the house first, peeping over the wall to admire the beautiful Queen Anne architecture, and as soon as my husband Francesco came to see it, he too fell in love with it. The position by the water meadows, the views of the river Thames – compared to central London it was like travelling to another country. But the house and garden were all we were interested in. The nursery had been carved out of the grounds of the house in the 1960s and was a quiet, local place with just a handful of plantspeople. We could see its greenhouses from the upper storeys, but in the garden, enclosed in its high walls, we barely knew it was there. Francesco had a successful career with Lloyd's in the city and I was busy bringing up the children. We certainly weren't planning on running a garden centre, and would have been surprised had anyone told us that it lay in our future.

We moved into the house in 1997, by which time it had been on the market for over four years. Built in the 1680s as a lodge for hunting in nearby Richmond Park, from the outside it looked perfect, with a large conservatory on one side balancing the 1920s ballroom on the other and preserving the original symmetry of the building. We threw a party for Francesco's birthday before we moved any of our furniture in but as soon as we started to think about decorating, we realised that the previous owner's heavy chintz curtains, pink flock wallpaper and collection of Roman busts were masking a property in need of complete restoration. We decided to start by ensuring the roof was sound and then to work our way down, rewiring and replumbing as we went.

Both Francesco and I are passionate about detail and it took us five years to bring the house back to life. In consultation with English Heritage, we exposed and restored the original cornicing and conserved the early 18th-century wall paintings by Louis Laguerre. We replaced plasterboard with the lath and plaster walls that would originally have been in the house and worked with Gerry King, a historical paint specialist to create new, naturally pigmented paints that give a lovely flow through the rooms. The fussy curtains at the windows made way for French linens and we covered the rather unfortunate 1980s murals on the staircase with paper, which we then painted

over. Perhaps, in three hundred years, someone might uncover them and think for a second that they've discovered a Michelangelo.

The children were delighted at the idea of 'moving to the country'. The nursery owners, Bob and Annette Collett, were very indulgent with them, turning a blind eye as the kids used the bags of soil and compost as trampolines and crash mats. Bob was a fantastic vegetable grower and our son Harry stuck to him like glue, learning how to plant seeds and how to water, and helping out with propagation. He soon became obsessed with gardening, reciting the plant names in Latin, and spending all of his pocket money at the nursery. Even better, the field at the end of the lane was looked after by Dave Hastings, a farmer who became another wonderful mentor for Harry, telling him about the land and the tides on the river, letting him help out with the cows and encouraging him in every way. He was the inspiration behind Harry's ever-expanding chicken coop (at 36sqm, hopefully it's reached its maximum size now), home to our flock of twelve, mostly mongrel, chickens. When the local trust which managed the land evicted Dave, despite our and others' protestations, Harry sobbed for hours.

Our eldest daughter Lara had just started boarding school, but our daughters Anna and Ruby loved exploring the riverbanks and horse riding in Richmond Park (later on they kept their Shetland ponies, Napoleon and Ginger, in the garden). I was in heaven, too. I grew up in Melbourne, Australia, and even though that's hardly rural, being surrounded by fields, the park and the river here felt much better to me than the congested streets of central London. I've always been passionate about organic, locally sourced, non-genetically modified food and once I had children, I felt even more strongly about the issues, and appreciated the closer connection to nature we had found. Even today, after more than twenty years, I'll still get up early just to walk along the tow path and watch the mist rising off the river. The beauty of the place takes my breath away.





A NEW DIRECTION  
FRANCESCO BOGLIONE

The nursery only became a bigger part of our lives in 2000 when Bob and Annette decided they wanted to sell up. Knowing what London property developers can be like, we bought it just to be sure that no one would be able to build on the land. We were no gardeners and had absolutely no idea what to do with it – had we had four sons who were interested in football, it might have become a five-a-side football pitch. At first, we didn't even have to think about it because Bob and Annette were quite happy to stay on and manage the business, much to our relief. When they finally wanted to retire a couple of years later, our gardeners at the time, the very talented Helen and James Dooley, stepped into the breach – but since they had three young children and lived out in the country, it was clear this could never be a long-term solution. With increasing urgency, we asked ourselves the question: 'What are we going to do with the nursery?'

That same year, 2002, Lara (then just 18) was travelling in India with a friend and Gael and I decided it would be a good idea if I went out to check what they were up to. It was not my first visit to the country. In June 1970, when I was only slightly older than Lara, I'd left my home town of Torino in Italy, in a VW van – back seat removed and a sleeping platform installed – and spent four years on the hippie trail, travelling through Afghanistan, India, West Pakistan (as it was then) and Nepal.

In Afghanistan, for next to nothing, I'd rented a beautiful house with a garden in Kabul, one of the friendliest cities I'd ever been to. Days were spent exploring the markets – the food markets, the metalwork market and the gloriously antiquated Shahzada money market, where dealers sat in a large courtyard clacking their abacuses back and forth, with piles of fraying banknotes yellowing in the sun before them. Nights were for drinking, playing guitar and smoking under the fruit trees. I'd visited the Buddhas of Bamiyan, the monumental sixth-century sandstone figures that have now – outrageously – been destroyed, and the six startlingly blue lakes of nearby Band-e Amir with their travertine dams, the first ever photographs of which I'd seen in *National Geographic* just a couple of months earlier – and still probably the most beautiful thing I've seen in my life.

In Nepal I'd found myself a magnificent little Newari house on the slopes of Swayambhunath, the Monkey Temple, marvelled at the three-quarter size Victorian architecture of Kathmandu's Durbar Square and admired the enormous scale of Boudhanath Stupa, whose surrounding buildings reminded me of Siena, in Italy.

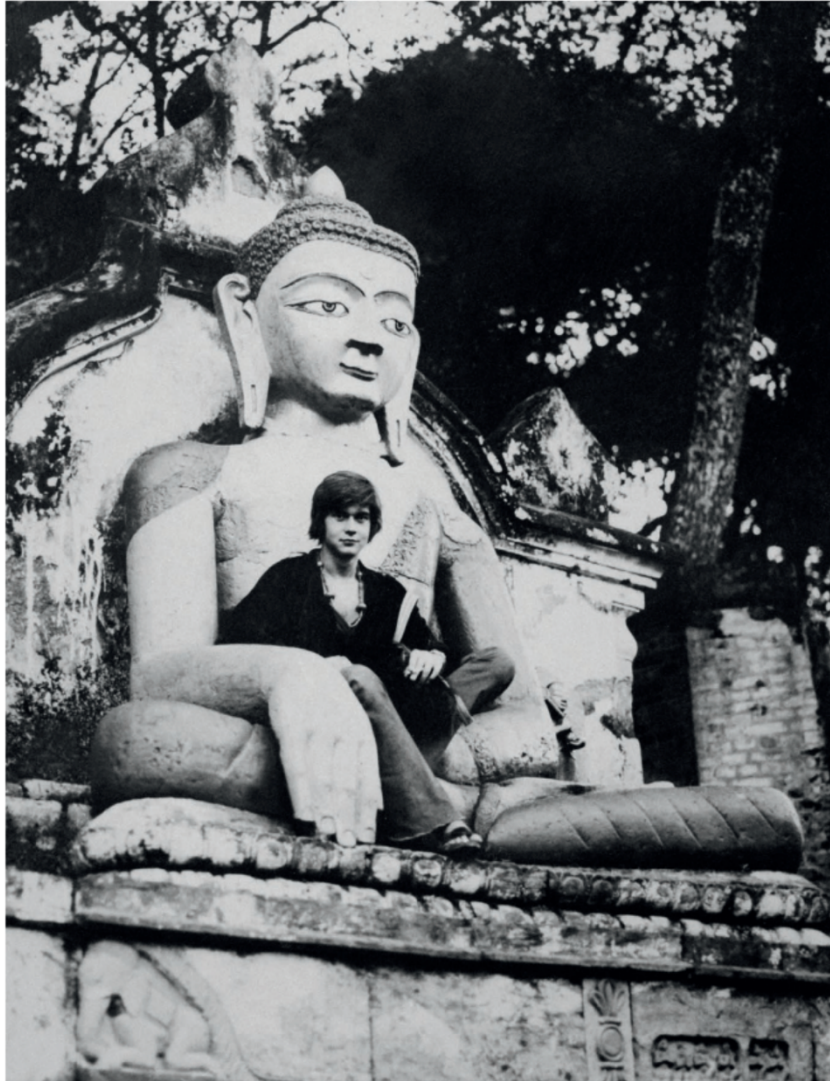
And in India, I'd played at the Delhi Golf Club among the ancient Mughal tombs (one caddy carrying my clubs, another maniacally waving a stick to defend my ball from the monkeys hiding in the surrounding jungle). I'd explored the backstreets and markets of Mumbai, and I'd spent five blissful months in Goa, watching the Arabian Ocean crash against the immaculate, palm-fringed beaches, where fishermen, coconut sellers and masseurs plied their trade. Of all the places I visited, it was the one place to which I vowed I would never go back, as I knew it would become something else.

Luckily, Lara was not in Goa but in Kerala and I – and our second daughter, Anna, whom I'd decided to take along – couldn't wait to get out there. Even though it was more than thirty years since my first visit, nothing seemed to have changed and all my memories came flooding back. But whereas before I could go where life took me without the slightest care, this time the question of the nursery continued to play on my mind. The book I was reading, William Dalrymple's *White Mughals*, made it even harder to forget. With its story of a British East India Company man who started competing with the nobles of Hyderabad to build gardens, I could barely put it down and it had me thinking almost constantly about the connections between India, the English and their love of gardens.

Travelling with just our rucksacks, we ventured all over Kerala and the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, but the place that was to change our lives was Chettinad, a little-known region of sleepy villages and towns populated with once-magnificent mansions. Smaller scale and more modest than the palaces of the maharajahs, they were built by the bourgeoisie, many of whom had emigrated to Indo-China and made their fortunes there as rice farmers and landowners. With the collapse of the British Empire in Burma and the nationalisation of the land, the cash flow dried up and many of the mansions fell into disrepair, but the Chettiar are a proud people and nobody would ever dream of selling their family palace, however difficult the upkeep.

Extremely elegant, these buildings are absolutely unpretentious, and it was in one such house, with a courtyard enclosed by painted teak columns and ornate ironwork, where we ended up staying for a couple of nights. I complimented the owner – a tiny, rather broad old lady – on her home and suggested it was the kind of place *The World of Interiors* might like to feature. 'Quite likely,' she smiled, raising an eyebrow, 'but I prefer *Condé Nast Traveller*.'





#### A NEW DIRECTION

One evening when, chatting with other guests around the communal table, we talked about the nursery and how much I admired Indian crafts, and she suggested she introduce us to her niece, Gomathy, who helped foreign antiques dealers fill containers to ship abroad. My ears pricked up and something clicked. I realised that had the nursery been in Italy, buying things in India would never have worked. There would have been no reason behind it. But England, with its history in India, its culture of eclecticism and the English love of gardening and follies – many of which are themselves inspired by the Indian subcontinent – gave me the cultural justification to do it. No one else particularly cared about my reasoning. I admit, but for me it is important that things are credible and real. It wasn't just this feeling of synergy that jolted me. Thanks to my mother, and specifically a surprise visit she made to me in Mumbai a few months into my trip in the 70s, I already had some experience of buying and selling under my belt.

Unusually for a woman of her generation and social status, my mother Anna had started her own business as an interior decorator to boost my father's income from his insurance firm. She'd drive around the villages surrounding Torino visiting the flea markets and the *rigattieri* – the bric-a-brac dealers – that her own mother had always frequented, having things restored and even making little gifts to sell. Her first shop was in a friend's attic, five storeys up with no lift, but she soon expanded into a larger, ground-floor shop named 'La Goccia'. From the age of about 11 or 12, I remember proffering my unsolicited advice, giving my opinions and negotiating the prices.

So this was the pattern we naturally fell into when I went to meet her (less than 24 hours after she'd mentioned, on one of my rare calls home, that she'd like to come) at the unfinished terminal building of the airport in Mumbai, sitting on her old-fashioned Louis Vuitton suitcases beneath a single electric light cable. She stayed for a month and a half and we went everywhere – Jaipur, Agra and Benares as well as Kathmandu and Kabul – and we had a ball. I remember she spent hours and hours with me in the market in Kabul going through the smelly mutton overcoats that were all the fashion then. Embroidered outside and with the shaggy sheep fleece inside, everybody wanted them and, thanks to her, I was the king of them! I think we bought 150 and shipped them back to Europe. At the Red Fort in Delhi we did something similar when we discovered beautiful 18th-century cloth *pichhwai* paintings representing the various incarnations of Krishna. The first thing of any real value I bought, thanks to a loan from my mother, I realised that back in Italy I could sell them for ten to twenty times what I had paid. And of course, to get me back to Italy, for a month or two at least, had been her mission all along.

Before long, I'd teamed up with two French friends, Alain and Michel, whose parents were upmarket antiques dealers who'd started out in the *Marché aux Puces* in Paris. We rented a house in Anières and between the three of us ran a market stall in the *Marché Malik* three days a week. In honour of Woody Allen's 1971 film, *Bananas*, we called it Afghanistan Bananistan. It was all so simple then – Ariana Afghan Airlines flew direct from Kabul to Paris, twice a week, in just under four hours. Now, the same journey is much more complicated.



I spent my days buying handmade chillum pipes, textiles, Turkmen jewellery and clothes – embroidered shirts from the excellent Afghan tailors, or some of the second-hand clothes America was sending to Afghanistan as aid at the time, most of which ended up at the Nixon Bazaar in Kabul. It was a treasure trove, ten times better than the clothes market at Fortobello, with 1940s muslin print dresses for the girls, proper blue jeans with just the right amount of wear for the boys, and 1930s and 40s ski jumpers with deer and snowflake patterns for all of us when it turned chilly.

Not everything came from the markets. There were still lots of nomadic tribes, known as *Kuchi*, travelling the country then and occasionally we'd ride out to their camps of low, black tents, accompanied on the approach by packs of their enormous, muscular fighting dogs which they'd send to check us out. Then we'd sit on platforms spread with rugs, drinking tea, talking about dog-fighting just as we would football, and trying to make a deal for some jewellery or metalwork.

Even in the heady excitement of my days buying for Afghanistan Bananistan, I think my largest shipment had been a couple of hundred Afghan shirts in an old tin trunk. Now, with the nursery, I had a reason to buy on a much larger scale, and the more I thought about our landlady's suggestion, the more enthused I became. Everything about it felt right. With only two weeks remaining of our trip, we had not a moment to lose, and the next day we set out to meet Gomathy at her place in Chennai. Within hours we were shopping as never before.

Gomathy took us to a hamlet where all the five families are potters and we bought terracotta pots by the hundred. At Mahabalipuram on the coast, famous for its rock carvings dating back to the seventh and eighth centuries, we found entire streets lined with stone carvers and their statues. In their final, polished state, they didn't appeal, but when I saw the rough, unfinished stages, while the stone was still being worked, I was transfixed. No doubt everybody thought I was completely mad, but I begged them to sell me the statues as they were and bought several including a dancing Parvati, the Hindu goddess of love and devotion, a Buddha, and my Nandi, the flying bull that is the vehicle of Shiva; all of which are still in the nurseries today.

When I was buying for Afghanistan Bananistan, it was not value that drove me – although obviously that was a consideration – but beauty, and so it was now. Is something intrinsically beautiful or is it not? And for me, beauty, as well as in many cases being universal, is bound up with an object's provenance, its story, its being very much of its place and time. Of course, you have to have an awareness of what is going on in the world so you don't, as we say in Italian, *scoprire l'acqua calda* (discover warm water – i.e. something unremarkable), but after that, it was beauty alone that guided me, and that guides us now when buying for the nursery.

In the market in the basement of the extraordinary Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai, we found three ancient samovars I thought might come in handy (they did) and beautiful ribbons embroidered with elephants, from which the nurseries' logo eventually developed, and which we still buy today. In Mysore we bought the beautiful antique Krishna paintings that now decorate the restaurant – and which had been entirely bought up by the time we returned for more.

Gomathy took us to carpenters who make the zinc-topped tables now used by diners in the teahouse. She introduced us to makers of the vetiver and canvas tattie blinds seen everywhere in India, which I thought could perhaps divide the space in the greenhouses into self-contained shops, echoing the set up at Chelsea Antiques Market on the King's Road. (In the end we used them as sunshades in the greenhouses and to hide the compost store when we first opened.) We weren't just decorating on an aesthetic level or trying to create a look we'd seen elsewhere: everything we bought, we loved. Lara thought I'd lost my mind but in just two weeks, before I could say Jack Robinson, we'd filled a 40ft container and Petersham Nurseries was reborn.



Pictures from Francesco's travels in the 1970s



TAKING ROOT  
GAEL BOGLIONE

Hard though it is to believe now, back in 2000, when we bought the nursery, the greenhouses were stark white; the floors were concrete inside and tarmac outside, and there was no tea room, shop or restaurant – indeed, the area where the restaurant is now was used for storage. It was functional: the plants were displayed on the floor and you could buy compost, tools and other garden sundries but, for a place so closely connected to nature, there was little romance or beauty.

We wanted the nursery to reflect our beliefs and the way we lived, to nurture and celebrate the environment and to make people feel welcome and inspired. We knew we had a special setting here and we wanted visitors to be able to slow down and savour it. Francesco showed me pictures of a garden centre he'd visited in Chennai – benches and benches of plants above the beautiful red earth, and not a plastic pot in sight. It was heaven.

We started with the floors, replacing the ugly, synthetic surfaces with hoggin – the fine, buff-coloured gravel blend now emblematic of Petersham. People laugh that their friends always know when they've been to the nurseries by the colour of the mud on their shoes. The greenhouses were the next challenge, and it took weeks for the paintwork to be stripped back and refinished in a greenish-black we mixed ourselves. We banished chemical pesticides and, inspired by the Chennai garden centre and Francesco's memories of Goa, where everything that was thrown away was eaten by cows or pigs, we tried to eliminate plastic where we could, potting up plants we'd grown in terracotta or coir pots. Still today, it's an ongoing mission. There isn't a plastic water bottle anywhere in the nursery and we're well on the way to becoming single-use plastic free.

We closed from September 2003 until April 2004 for the final preparations and everything seemed to be going swimmingly, until the end of February when, on his 56th birthday, Francesco underwent a planned quadruple bypass. The surgery went as expected, but a post-operative infection turned out to be fully fledged MRSA and was a severe scare for us all.

Luckily, it could be treated, and I can still remember Francesco now, a few weeks later, sitting on a bench in the nursery in the spring sunshine, giving instructions on where everything should be placed as the container was unloaded. It was quite moving, to see him feeling better every day, in the beauty of the nursery, which was itself coming back to life, surrounded by pieces imbued with memories from his past.

Though I loved the things Francesco had bought in India, I was keen to put my stamp on the business too. We agreed it should be eclectic without becoming a bazaar, and should keep an English and European identity in line with its surroundings and our roots. Francesco is Italian, after all, and I have lived here since I was 17, when I first moved from Melbourne to Paris, having won a competition to work as an in-house model for couturier Nina Ricci.

It was the first time I'd been to Europe, the first time I'd left Australia in fact, and I'll never forget arriving in Paris, standing by the arches near the Louvre and just being blown away by the beauty of it all. My job was overwhelming in an entirely different way. I wasn't very confident in myself and didn't really know what to make of the social whirlwind I was thrown into, which included dinners with famous models and film stars, parties at glamorous clubs and meeting endless playboys with the most extraordinary lifestyles. I remember my speechless horror when I discovered that a couple of them, who lived together, kept a leopard in a cage in their basement, to which they'd feed chickens.

I didn't last long in the job. Apart from feeling out of my depth, I hated having to have my hair done all the time and being endlessly measured and chastised for eating too many croissants – so, after six months, I broke my contract. Always something of a hippie, I headed to Morocco and ended up living with the Berbers outside the village of Diabat near Essaouira. Even though I didn't speak their language and we could only communicate through gestures, we formed a close bond and I ate with them every night. I was the only westerner invited to witness the circumcision of one of their young sons; and with them, I went down to the Sahara where we danced with the Tuareg 'blue people', so-called after their indigo-coloured robes.

When I took up modelling again a few months later, it was to do shoots for editorial and advertising campaigns, which was much more my thing than the world of couture. Rather than being cooped up in the atelier all day, I was sent off to exciting locations, from the South of France to Japan and New York, and had a whole lot of fun.

On a trip to see my father's best friend, who lived in Putney, I realised I felt far more at home in London than in Paris and moved into a houseboat on the Thames near Cheyne Walk. Far from the chi-chi address it has become now, back then it was a relatively cheap, bohemian neighbourhood, filled with interesting people – an American guy there invited me to spend two months at his other property, a dilapidated, vine-covered castle in Jamaica, an invitation I took up like a shot. As you can probably tell, I didn't take modelling very seriously. I respected it and I was very lucky to do so well considering my attitude, but it was a means to an end and if there was an opportunity for me to spend two months in Jamaica – or anywhere else – I was going to damn well take it.

In 1972 I moved in with my friend and fellow Aussie, the journalist and film-maker Lyndall Hobbs, and met her new boyfriend, the theatre impresario Michael White. Sixteen years her senior (I remember saying 'God, Lyndall, he's very old') he, too, became one of my closest friends and was a huge influence on my life. He taught me about culture, about art – he was just incredible. And, because of his work, he seemed to know everyone – artists, film stars, actors, writers, musicians – all of whom were regular attendees at the many dinners and parties they held when Lyndall moved in with him. My whole circle of friends really started off with Michael, and I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that thanks to Michael, and my job, I had my eyes opened to the beauty of the world and some of the incredibly talented people in it.

Francesco shares this appreciation and we're always keen to find new experiences and to see new things. We've travelled together – really travelled, not lie-by-the-pool-and-read-a-book-travelled – ever since we met and, though we didn't vocalise it at the time, in a way the nursery became an opportunity to share our excitement over some of our discoveries.

We'd not even been open a month when Mary Keen, the garden columnist for the *Daily Telegraph* phoned and said she'd like to come and visit. We don't know how she heard about us, but we weren't entirely surprised – our friends were incredibly supportive and within the first few weeks, all the cognoscenti of London seemed to have turned up, which of course delighted us. A date was set for Mary's visit but, as we are somewhat off the beaten track, hidden down a tiny lane not listed in the A-Z, she couldn't find us. Mary, then in her sixties, is a formidable woman and not one who likes to waste time. Having called almost every member of our staff for directions, she was not in the best frame of mind when she eventually arrived. Luckily, she and Francesco hit it off immediately – she seemed to like his old hippie stories – and her lovely article about the transformation of 'a Cinderella of a nursery, tucked away in a forgotten spot down a narrow lane under Richmond Hill' set the tone for much of the coverage that followed.





Rather than having a fixed plan, we let the nursery evolve, feeling our way as to how best to balance the plants with the beautiful pieces we wanted to sell. I remember one of the first things we bought was the tree-trunk table, which still takes centre stage between the shop and the restaurant, almost appearing to grow out of the earth. It is very hard to find trunks that can be used in this way and, with its organic base and hammered-lead top, it has had pride of place ever since and remains one of my favourite pieces. Around it, we arranged plants not just for sale, but to dress the space: magenta bougainvillea, headily scented jasmine, that Victorian favourite the scented-leaf pelargonium, and tree ferns with their delicate tracery of fronds to remind me of home. The day we opened we made a very simple table arrangement of daffodils growing through moss, and it still stands out in my memory as one of the most beautiful things we've done.

Not long after, we realised that almost every garden centre in the country has a teahouse and I felt a light switch on in my mind. Where could be more magical to eat than here? I could see it all, tables set amongst the plants and dressed with garden-picked flowers; plates of dainty cucumber sandwiches, and plump, fluffy homemade scones with organic jam and cream. Of course, we knew as little about running a teahouse as we did about running a nursery, but we were lucky enough to meet Australian chef Skye Gyngell at a mutual friend's wedding and, knowing she had a good reputation among her private clients, we floated the idea.

She came to look around and her response was immediate – but she didn't just want to do a teahouse, she asked if we would trust her to develop a restaurant. Skye's approach to food was exactly the same as ours – all about good-quality, seasonal, chemical-free produce – and she shared our passion for the setting, so, despite my not being sure we could cope, we decided to give it a try. Somehow, we managed to set up a makeshift kitchen in what was little more than a shed. Skye brought her pots and pans from home and we started with just three dishes and twenty-five seats around a beautiful, long marble table. Just under a year later – after Francesco's vintage Ferrari had been evicted from the garage so we could make that into a professional kitchen – we were offering twenty-five dishes and doing sixty covers a day with a waiting list. And to his credit, Francesco couldn't have cared less about his car.

Lucy Boyd, cook, gardener and daughter of the much-missed Rose Gray of the River Café in Hammersmith, approached us in the autumn of 2004. Back then, she'd had enough of being in kitchens and wanted to spend more time outside, in a kitchen garden, which she helped us to lay out in a part of the garden adjoining the nursery. Having lived in Italy for many years, she had a passion for the country and set about sowing chicory, treviso, cavolo nero, borlotti beans, dandelion leaves, edible flowers – all the things we loved to eat and Skye liked to cook and which were difficult to source elsewhere.

It was only natural that we then propagated the varieties that flourished to sell in the nursery – along with beautiful, large-flowered hydrangeas, sweet peas, and hand-cut bunches of annuals displayed on our zinc-topped tables. As we soon realised, those tables and the galvanised buckets holding the cut flowers were of as much interest to our visitors as the plants in the greenhouses and the food in the restaurant. Slowly, we started expanding our buying trips to France, Italy, England, Scandinavia and Bali – helped by the wonderful Ronny De Koning, who joined in 2005 and is now our artistic director and general arbiter of taste, and Giselle McCarthy (whom Ronny hired three years later) – always only buying things we love. From the beginning, whatever we sold, we wanted it to be beautiful, different from the norm, handmade or at least thoughtfully produced and sustainable, with as little waste as possible.







#### TAKING ROOT

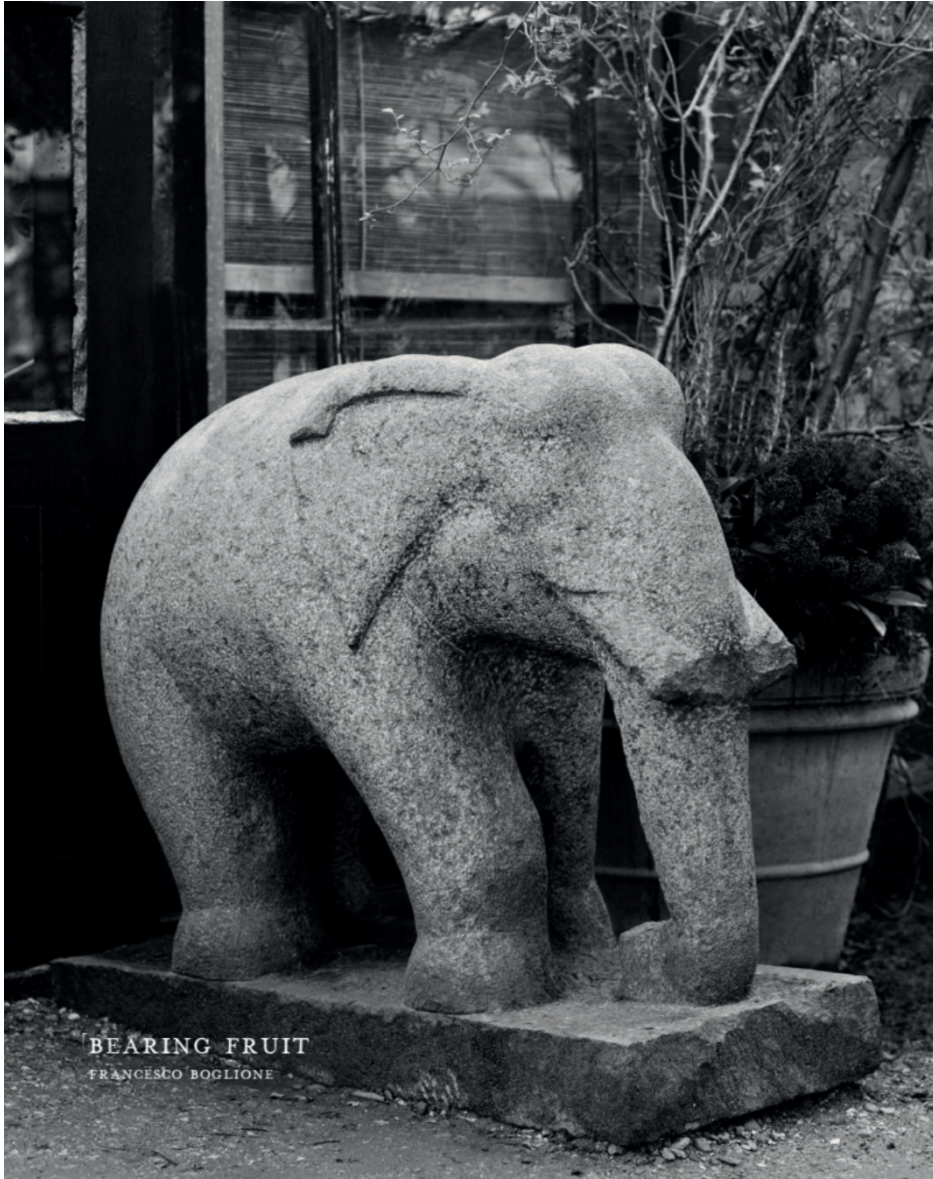
As I've mentioned, we didn't have a plan as such and so could base our decisions only on what we knew, which is how we like to live at home. Even though we lavished so much time and attention on the house, we were never precious about it; Ruby and Anna used to roller-skate around the ballroom and it has always been a place for family, and as many friends as want to come. The girls counted recently that we've had thirty-two people live with us for longer than six months over the last fifteen years – I'd had no idea it had been so many. Friends of ours going through a rough patch, friends of the children who were having problems with their parents – even at one point Bobby Melton, now our operations manager, who joined us in 2010 to run the teahouse and who lived with us for about a year when his partner, Marco, was cooking in the house for us and working on the kitchen garden. We open our doors to anyone who needs a place to stay or a bit of TLC and, at the back of our minds, I think Francesco and I both wanted the nursery to have that same feeling – an extension of our home where everyone is welcome, where there's no need for airs and graces; a place where people can simply be themselves.

News soon spread and within months we'd been featured in the *Evening Standard*, the *Guardian*, *Gardens Illustrated*, *ELLE Decoration* and the French publication *Maisons Côté Ouest*. By 2006, we were in *The World of Interiors*, the *Financial Times*, the *Tatler Restaurant Guide*, *Hello* and both *British and Australian Vogue*, to name but a few. I say this not to boast, but to illustrate how quickly word spread about the nurseries, something we had never imagined in our wildest dreams.

Something else we'd never imagined is that we would play host to Prince Charles so soon after opening, but that's exactly what happened. A very dear friend of ours, Candida Lycett Green, sadly no longer with us, called and said her friend, Prince Charles, had heard of the nursery and the work we'd done on the house and wanted to visit, if it wasn't too much of an imposition. He was due to play a charity match at the Ham Polo Club in the afternoon and she wondered if he could come to the house and change. We thought, yes, he could!

We expected at most a few moments of small talk, but he stayed for over two hours and wanted to know every detail about the restoration: the materials we'd used, the methods, how we'd approached problems. Strangely enough, it was our floorboards we bonded over. We'd had every single board lifted, taken out to the garden, scrubbed – not too hard – with a mixture of ammonia and water, and then waxed. When he heard how, when we'd needed to replace any boards, we'd hunted down antique flooring at reclamation yards, and then had it cut with a handsaw rather than a titanium blade to recreate as closely as possible the original effect, there was no doubt of our common interests. Not even twenty-four hours later, we received a six-page, handwritten letter, thanking us for our hospitality and saying how he'd enjoyed discussing details with us because, to him, 'details are the heart of civilisation'.





On the one hand, to have so much press and attention was wonderful. Having semi-retired from the City, I realised that despite having done quite well and despite coming from a family of entrepreneurs, I'd never really run a business. I'd never written or particularly understood a balance sheet, or had to analyse a company's financial performance, other than knowing my bonus was connected to it. There was an element of wanting to prove to myself that I could run something commercial and successful (not that I would have admitted this to anyone else at the time) and to have such a high profile in the press so soon was encouraging.

On the other hand, however, this profile brought its own problems. The amount of interest we were attracting meant the lane to the nursery was clogged; parking was problematic and tempers frequently frayed. Worst of all, the traffic backing up on Petersham Road could be seen from the top of Richmond Hill – as luck would have it, the only view in England to be protected by an Act of Parliament. It is indeed one of the finest vistas in the country: a sweeping stretch of parkland, water meadows and woodland lining a curve in the river Thames. Understandably, the residents were up in arms screaming blue murder that 'These Italians are destroying our view!' and when they complained to the council, I was surprised and saddened to learn that the fact we were creating jobs seemed to count for nothing. We immediately took steps to reduce the amount of cars travelling to the nurseries, through negotiating extra weekend car parking with local schools, appointing parking attendants, installing cycle racks and encouraging people to visit us by foot, ferry or bicycle (something we still do today) and the council eventually found in our favour.

There was trouble in the kitchen, too. It quickly became clear that our kitchen garden alone could never cater for our growing demands, but we didn't have the contacts to source the suppliers we wanted. Those who did agree to deliver to us couldn't find the nurseries and often gave up. While Skye understood how to cook to bring out the best in ingredients, none of us had any experience in planning menus to minimise financial waste, or so that they worked efficiently with our very limited kitchen facilities. We had to tackle issues with heating, or the lack of it, and, as the restaurant grew, with hiring and managing staff. We lost money in the first couple of years, but thanks to the great kindnesses of Rose Gray, Rowley Leigh (then running Kensington Place), the chef and food writer Simon Hopkinson and others who shared their wisdom and contacts with us, by 2006 we were breaking even and on a much better footing.

Despite our problems, the nurseries continued to find favour in the press. In the *Time Out Eating & Drinking Awards* 2005, we won 'Best Alfresco Dining' even though we were only open for lunch, and then only four days a week. The magical setting and Skye's apparently simple (though carefully considered) approach saw us listed in the *Daily Telegraph's* 'Top 50 Summer Restaurants' in 2008, while in 2009, a bumper year in which we averaged over one article a week (as far afield as Japan, Korea and Sweden), restaurant critic Charles Campion included us in his annual *London Restaurant Guide*. The following year, *The Sunday Times* ranked us amongst Britain's Top 100 Restaurants and then, in 2011, the café was awarded a Michelin star, and the spotlight was upon us as never before.

By this time, the restaurant had expanded to seat around 120 people, and we'd started the teahouse, offering light lunches, teas and cakes, but now restaurant reservations were needed months in advance. People used to dining in Michelin-starred establishments with their starched tablecloths, silver service and hushed ambience were sometimes surprised when they came to us and found dirt floors, mismatched chairs and flower arrangements in jam jars on the bare tables. I remember someone phoning to ask about the dress code and Skye saying, 'Wear shorts if you like, and bring your dog,' both of which we still encourage.

That year was also the first that the nurseries as a whole went into profit, and they have remained so ever since, with the shop now as important a part of the business as the restaurant. Much of this is down to Gael who, as well as still being the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, has the most incredible innate sense of elegance. She doesn't need to go to Prada to buy expensive things, she can throw a scarf full of holes around her neck and still look a million dollars, and somehow, she ensures that this is reflected in the nursery. She'll say I'm the drama expert, but she knows how to create a sense of drama, too – something she and Thomas Broom-Hughes, our longest-standing head of horticulture, would talk about a lot, giggling over plans about whether releasing thousands of butterflies into the greenhouses might be 'too much'. Like me, she has an eye for detail and, although we have many discussions – some of them quite heated – she knows how to work with my outlandish ideas and how to improve on them.

To feel I have proved to myself that I can run a respectable business is a source of satisfaction, of course. But a greater source of happiness for me is the pleasure I get from employing so many people (currently more than 100 at Petersham, including part-time staff), helping them pay their mortgages, making a positive contribution to a community, and creating something real and sustainable, with visible, tangible benefits. I come from a part of Italy which is almost Calvinist; we take our duties seriously and feel guilty if we have too much. I'm grateful for what we have – of course! – and my way of giving back is to create enterprise. So many of today's business models seem to be about replacing people, cutting costs and reducing everything to its bare minimum, whereas I want to build something that adds value rather than diminishes it, and I feel we have done that. We have proved that it is entirely possible to have a profitable, ethical, sustainable business. Gael and I can't claim all the credit, of course. The wonderful team here has played a huge part, and each of our children has contributed, often in quite inspired ways. But the person who really saw Petersham's potential and made sure it was realised is Lara.

From the beginning, Lara had taken an interest in the business, but she's a passionate, idealistic person and something of an activist, and there were other things she wanted to do, too. After she finished her trip in India she came home for a month or two, then went straight back, travelling for eight months on a motorbike. Her time there coincided with the tidal wave of controversy over the effects of GM crops on Indian farmers, which stirred her interest in organic production and led to her taking a degree in social anthropology at SOAS University of London. She wrote her thesis on seeds and sustainability and then worked in film for a while, making a documentary in Havana, Cuba, about the *organopónicos* (urban organic farms) there. Her real involvement in the nurseries began in around 2009 when she went back out to India, to Chennai, to set up an import business to supply us with pieces for the shop, which she did very successfully, also travelling to Indonesia and sourcing things there. Slowly, she became more and more involved, and it soon became obvious how her highly organised mind could benefit us. Gael's always said that Lara is a leader and, true to form, when we embarked on building a home in Australia that meant we were away for extended periods, she stepped in.



*Pictures from the Boglione family travels*

Lara not only kept the business going, she improved it. We'd grown so quickly, that inevitably we often found ourselves running to keep up, with the business developing in a more freeform fashion than perhaps we would have liked. Certain organisational structures were – how shall I say? – somewhat lacking. When we took over the nursery, the most advanced piece of equipment here was a fax machine. We weren't using our stock system properly, which meant that though we had a good idea of overall figures, we were hazy on the details of how they were made up. No one had job titles back then and people had grown with their roles, meaning that responsibilities weren't always clearly defined – something that could and did lead to conflict. We were always conscious of trying to minimise wastage, but didn't have a clear picture of what we were achieving or what we could improve upon. With Lara in charge, that all changed. She evolved our systems and strategies, looking at margins, restructuring in a way that worked for us and recognising people for their contributions and talents, all of which put the business on a more commercial footing. Most importantly, she managed to do all this without losing the special atmosphere of the place, a place where creativity and ideas – even mine, on occasion – are celebrated, not stifled.

I don't want to exaggerate because she's still very young and I believe that if she's successful – if anyone's successful – it's down to support and teamwork, but Lara, very quietly and very calmly, pushed the nursery forward. Lara has always been ambitious and her enquiring mind has sought out opportunities to take the business in new directions – from working closely with our suppliers, such as Cire Trudon candles and Canton Tea, on Petersham-branded products; to persuading everyone that it would be a good idea to decamp en masse to a field in the middle of the countryside for the Wilderness Festival, where our second daughter, Anna, was staging performances; or to up sticks and recreate the restaurant in Regent's Park, as we do for the Frieze art fair. Most notably perhaps, she saw the opportunity to use the nurseries as a platform to share our family's ideas about farming and food.

Working with our then general manager, the ever-unflappable Charlotte Senn, she cleaned out a disused greenhouse (which until then had only ever been used for storage), set up a much-needed dedicated propagation area and created a space to hold events and talks. In 2013, Lara launched the Petersham Platform with a talk by Patrick Holden of the Sustainable Food Trust, formerly director of the Soil Association. Other big names followed: environmentalist-capitalist organic farmer Joel Salatin; Helena Norberg-Hodge, founder and director of Local Futures, previously the International Society for Ecology and Culture; Satish Kumar, environmental activist and editor of *Resurgence* magazine; Carlo Petrini, the founder of the Slow Food Movement... it's an impressive list.

Lara's relationship with Giovanni Mazzei, now her husband and my son-in-law, has been immensely fruitful for the nurseries too, and Petersham Cellar, the company they launched together in 2013 to showcase Italian wines, has brought another dimension to the experience we can offer our customers.

I have proved to myself that I can run a business but, as with my life in the City, I know that I'm better placed to be scoring the goals rather than running the football club. I might play in the Premier League, but I'd be lucky to manage a Championship team – and Lara, supported by my other children, fills that gap.

I'm proud that we've remained true to our roots. The nursery is still the heart of the business and without it, we're just a shop in a field. Everything we do is dictated by the seasons: the cutting garden, the kitchen garden, the long borders in our garden, additional vegetable beds in our orchard garden – every one of them provides material for the rest of the business, either in the form of salads, flowers or fruit for the restaurant, as decoration, or as floristry materials for the weddings we hold. It's true we have less space to grow plants than we once did, but over time our fantastic team have vastly improved our suppliers, seeking out local British farmers who grow organically and responsibly.



Henry Bourne | Vogue © The Condé Nast Publications Ltd.

The Boglione family at home, Vogue 2002



Skye Gyngell, then head chef at Petersham Nurseries, Vogue, 2006

Hugh Stewart | Vogue © The Condé Nast Publications Ltd.

## BEARING FRUIT

I'm proud of how the shop has developed; of how Ronny shares our outlook on buying only things we love. We all have a respect for materials, and for a craftsman's skill. Fashion or trends don't concern us – we want to cherish and look after what we buy, and pass it on to the next generation, and we hope our clients will, too.

I'm proud that, in whatever small way we can, we try to make a difference. We still order our terracotta pots from the same people Gomathy introduced us to back in 2002. Lara – who has been out to see them many more times than I – has watched their children grow up to the point where they now speak better English than their parents and translate for her. As a business we support charities we care about, from local organisations such as Paddock School in Wandsworth and the Vineyard Community Centre in Richmond, which helps vulnerable individuals overcome personal crises, to more global concerns including Friends of the Earth, The Resurgence Trust and 1000 Bamboo Villages, an Indonesian organisation helping rural communities to restore degraded land while building a sustainable livelihood.

I'm proud, too, of the fact that our staff turnover is so low. Mark Tupper, one of our Green Team, is our longest-serving employee and has been with us since the very beginning, having worked for the previous owners, while Paula Foulser, our indispensable general manager, started here as a waitress in 2014, soon moving into a marketing role and beyond. We're incredibly lucky that so many of our staff treat the business as if it were their own and it's this that lends the place its unique atmosphere, I think. We're a comprehensive school, not a grammar and, if we see people have a good heart, we'll try to work with them in whatever way we can, building their confidence so they can do their best. Yes, I'm quite hard sometimes – if you do something stupid, you'll pay for it, because I'm going to tease you to death – but we all understand each other. As Bobby always says, Petersham is very family-orientated. We mean this both literally – we currently employ two sets of sisters, a mother and daughter and a mother and son – but also figuratively. People never really leave, they often pop in or come back to help with events or a wedding – or to have their own here. They're always part of the place.

And that, for me, has been the unexpected bonus of the nurseries. Not only has it given me a large, extended family, it has brought me even closer to my own. For any parent, the greatest joy you can have is to do something exciting and successful with your children and, to different extents, the nursery has helped each of ours. Lara is now our managing director, and I only intervene in places where I think I could give a hand or offer my pearls of wisdom. Fathers and daughters working together must be one of the most irritating relationships, but we get on very well.

Ruby is very involved in menu development for the restaurants and private events and her passion for nature and the environment is the driving force behind Petersham Platform, which she now oversees. My son Harry, inspired in part by his time spent with Dave Hastings down the road, has his own farm, and could sell his produce anywhere but – even though it takes four hours to drive here – he's happy to sell to us as he believes, as we do, in the importance of provenance, of traceability and of the plot-to-plate ethos. The whole thing makes sense from every angle you look at it. I like to think the nursery, in a roundabout way, has been a help to Anna, our second daughter, in her career, too. When she and her friend Louis Waymouth started their first company, Petersham Playhouse, they supported themselves by working in the teahouse in the day and used the house as a backdrop for their extraordinary productions.

Who knows, but perhaps some of the parties we've thrown inspired Anna in her career in experiential events as well. Though Gael is a much more private person than I, we're both very sociable and, even though we say it ourselves, we've hosted some truly memorable occasions here. The house is made for entertaining, of course, and the nursery is the most fabulous venue, and we've taken full advantage, throwing at least two large parties a year. One of the earliest was a fundraiser we held in 2006 for our dear friend, the late Mark Shand and his charity Elephant Family, whose mission it is to protect Asian elephants and their habitats. Mark came to me and said: 'I need to raise awareness of my charity and I've got one shot at it. My sister [Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall] has one date in the next twelve months when she and Charles could come to a party, could we possibly hold it at your house?' We'd travelled a lot with Mark and would do anything for him, so we were delighted to be able to offer up the house, garden and nursery at Petersham.

It was absolutely extraordinary. Mark had spent many years in India and knew all the maharajahs who, because they knew Prince Charles and Camilla would be there, came in all their regalia and diamonds. We had a tented walkway the length of the double border, Indian musicians, floral arrangements of limes and roses – including a wheelbarrow of real elephant dung beautifully dressed with calendula – and Shirley Bassey, one of the guests, even sang an impromptu rendition of *Happy Birthday* when she found out it was Mark's birthday. But the *pièce de résistance* was the three life-sized grass elephant sculptures we had built on the lawn. Made from chicken wire, they were clad from the inside in turf, held in place by hundreds of balloons. A drip irrigation system kept the turf watered so that the grass actually grew, turning them from elephants at the party to mammoths a couple of weeks later. It was huge fun, and I'm still enormously proud that the nascent nursery had the muscle to cover all the costs – with the result that the party was the charity's first fundraiser of this type to raise half a million pounds in a single evening.

Ruby's circus-themed 18th birthday a few years later was even more spectacular as we transformed the garden into 'The Greatest Show on Earth' with a Spiegel tent, incredible acrobatic acts, hula hoopers and trapeze artists over the swimming pool. And then in 2016, we had Lara and Giovanni's wedding in the church next door to the house. The ceremony was in May and Ronny did the most beautiful job of transforming the chancel – and the marquee where we had a meal for five hundred afterwards – into a recreation of a country garden in May with undulating waves of foxgloves, trailing passion flowers and delphiniums; it was exquisite. Petersham Road, Anna's event production company had been going for a few years by then and she sourced beautiful wicker furniture and trunks for the marquee, but it was after dinner when she really brought all her event production experience into play. She's incredibly artistic and manages to add a bit of glamour to a place just by being there, but that day, she outdid herself. We had a spectacular light show illuminating the garden, the lawns blazing with hundreds of flares and gold-painted fire breathers dancing to the beat of Dohl drums and coloured smoke bombs filling the air. The marquee morphed from elegant conservatory to an Indian extravaganza with enormous elephant puppets, jungle planting and a dance floor based on the colours and rather psychedelic feeling of the cult fantasy film *The Holy Mountain*, a favourite of both hers and Lara's. It was huge, huge fun and the dancing went on all night, with many of the dancers the very same people who had been at Gael's and my wedding thirty-two years before.

This unexpected chapter of our lives has been nothing short of a miracle, and I know that we're incredibly lucky to have been able to make a profession out of what we love doing most, which is to welcome people to our home and, by extension, the nursery. It's wonderful to be working with the children and our fantastic team, wonderful to have a restaurant at the bottom of the garden and wonderful to be surrounded by so much beauty, and I hope we are sharing a little of that with you here.







## HARRY BOGLIONE

I've been interested in animals and farming for as long as I can remember. I guess I love really being connected to life. So much of modern life is disconnected – nobody knows where their food comes from; most people don't really understand the environment they live in or how it sustains them, it's just a given that they will be sustained.

I enjoy producing my own food and I like being out in nature. But it's more than that. I don't just farm because I like farming; I think if we can get farming right, we can work out how to correct a lot of other important environmental issues. After all, just under 40 per cent of land on Earth is farmland. If we can manage the agricultural land properly, we can fix a lot of biodiversity – and potentially even climate change – problems, too.

I'm lucky that I've found somebody who shares my passions. Emily is from Bath and we met when we were both living and working in Australia, soon discovering a joint interest in organics and animal welfare. In our little suburban garden in Sydney, we grew our own veg, and started keeping chickens, first for eggs and then for meat, while I helped out on a friend's farm. We always knew we wanted to do something sustainable and watched countless documentaries on the subject but then our son Raffaello – Raffi – came along and we had to take things more seriously.

We bought Haye Farm, on the Devon/Dorset border, in 2014. It was an old mixed farm whose orchards were bulldozed in the 1970s to make larger fields and it needed – and still needs – a lot of work to get it to the state we want it. We've erected and repaired fences, dug lakes and swales to encourage biodiversity and retain the water on our land and, crucially, we've planted thousands of trees, which play such a vital role in the ecosystem, increasing habitats for wildlife, attracting pollinators, cycling carbon and other nutrients, and feeding the soil when they shed their leaves each autumn. Seven years on, we're making good progress. We're now certified organic and have a little bit of everything. We finish around 150 Oxford Sandy and Black/Duroc cross pigs a year as well as having a small herd of native-breed beef cattle and 220 ewes, free-range chickens, vegetables, fruit and pasture from which we make hay. We've also recently rented an additional 400 acres – mainly as wildflower meadows and wood pasture (fields containing trees rather than a monoculture of grass), but on which we're also growing barley for brewing, wheat for milling and a variety of grains to make feed for our livestock.

Our aim is to eventually have a farm that is fully integrated, with each element sustaining another and I believe that the best way to do this is to try to mimic natural ecosystemic functions as closely as possible. Ultimately for me, that means doing everything we can to improve soil health and to make our system carbon positive, rather than carbon negative. Carbon is the building-block of life and so the more carbon the soil can absorb, the richer and more diverse it will be. Locked-in carbon helps reduce greenhouse gasses, as well as improving soil structure, which reduces the impact of drought and flooding alike. I want my soil to become more – not less – alive, and, happily, the consequence of that is higher productivity.





For example, by regularly rotating tight groups of cattle through small fields (the same result that their predators would have effected in the past) the cows are kept well fed on fresh pasture, and the grass is allowed to replenish naturally – along with the carbon in the soil and all the microorganisms it supports – with no need for chemical fertilisers. Similarly, rather than thinking solely about the maximum amount of pork we can produce (which for some might mean pigs packed into sheds and kept in crates) we allow our pigs to live outside for most of the year in small, hedge- or woodland-bound fields, eating their natural diet of forage – grass, leaves, roots, windfall fruit and whatever weeds and plants grow on the unsprayed pasture. The pigs' waste naturally fertilises the land and their rooting breaks up the soil and attracts a huge array of insects that might not otherwise be there – from red ants, which build their mounds on clods of earth that the pigs have dug up, to burrowing bees and dung beetles. As you might expect, the pigs are healthier and happier, too. (Did you know that in the UK, approximately 25 per cent of all antibiotics produced are routinely given to industrially farmed pigs, just to keep them alive? We have perhaps only two pigs a year that develop any condition requiring a course of antibiotics.) Allowing the pigs to forage also means that, although grain feeds are still required, the quantity is much reduced and we're thrilled that this year, we've produced enough organic grain to feed our herd, right here on the farm, with no need for any additional transport.

In all of this, the key thing for me is to understand the wider perspective – the total ecosystem and our place within it. It is understanding that if you plough a hill and plant maize on it, whether it is organic or conventional maize, it is still the worst thing you can do in terms of soil structure and stability. The maize is harvested in late autumn when wind and rain will mean you lose topsoil, depleting your land, silting up rivers and potentially causing flooding downstream. Organic certification, though an important step, is no guarantee of good land management.

There's another important factor, too, which is how and what we eat. As agreed by organisations including the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Wildlife Fund, it's not sustainable for us to go on eating meat at the rate we do now, largely because of the amount of land and water that is used to grow grain to feed the animals for that meat. Thirty-three per cent of the planet's croplands are used for livestock feed production. Shouldn't we be asking ourselves why we are using all this land to produce grain to feed to ruminants not designed to eat it just so we can have cheap beef and lamb? Maybe we should be reallocating this land to vegetables and grains for human consumption, with an amount used as wood pasture for livestock, which not only encourages diverse ecosystems and can provide fruit and nut crops, but also allows nutrients to be cycled back into the soil through the animals' manure.

I've always been convinced that eating ethically and sustainably is the right way to live, probably because Mamma was so vocal about the importance of organic and chemical-free food when we were young – dehydrated fruit slices were about the most exciting treats we were ever allowed. She and my sisters are largely vegetarian, and while I was vegetarian for many years, I produce such lovely meat now, it'd be silly not to eat a little, especially as animals play such an important part in our ecosystem.

When you keep animals you get to know their personalities and characters – the grumpy sows, the chirpy, optimistic or lazy ones; the moody, stubborn or friendly cows. You value them and their lives and the work, effort and time that goes into producing a cut of meat and it's not something I want to guzzle down every day. Vegetables are replenishable: you plant them, they grow and within weeks you can eat them and start again. That's not the case with meat. Emily and I eat it sparingly and when we do, we appreciate it.

I guess we've come a long way on the farm since we've started, but there's always more we want to do. We've built a butchery facility and a brewery (the spent grain from which we use to feed our animals whose manure in turn then fertilises the land) and I'm involved in a number of profit shares for our

fruit and veg, beer and livestock ventures. I provide the land, the seeds or the animals, and the machinery; my partners provide the labour and the management skills; and we split the profits fifty-fifty. It's a business model that makes sense to me – it's beneficial for everyone involved and enables us all to have a much higher output than we could ever achieve individually. Emily and I are very interested in renewable energy too. We have already installed solar panels and a biomass system and, looking forward, are keen to explore the potential and possibility of mini hydro-electrics, wind turbines for harnessing electricity from the wind, and micro-anaerobic digestion to produce biogas and slurry which we could use to run machinery here and heat the greenhouses.

These are the big ideas, but we have many smaller plans on the go as well – I don't think I'm ever not thinking about the farm. This year, we've grown ten varieties of squash, so, in conjunction with the restaurants we supply – including our near-neighbour River Cottage, Brassica in Beaminster, The Pig at Combe, and, of course, Petersham Nurseries – we're selecting the better varieties. Turk's turban looks great but, to my mind, it's not the most flavoursome, whereas zucca violina – a violin-shaped pumpkin – is one of the best I've ever tasted. Diners seem to agree; the chefs tell me that pumpkin soup made with the violinas sells out in a flash. We'll be trying to grow more agretti (a mildly salty, needle-shaped leaf also known as monk's beard) as it's so tricky to germinate, and starting off the chard in polytunnels to give it a head start. I'm always learning. In our first year we planted hundreds of courgettes, now I plant them by the thousand, and we harvest the flowers as well as the fruits.

People often say we're crazy for taking on so much and, with two young children (our daughter Allegra was born in 2016), sometimes I feel that myself, but I'm very happy with everything we're doing. Emily and I work closely together and Raffi and Allegra both muck in and help out. They have an innate understanding of the importance of biodiversity and get ridiculously excited whenever they spot a grass snake or a slow-worm. Ever since we started there's been an element of chaos, and there still is, but now we've got the building blocks

in place we're refining and implementing better systems, and that feels good.

We've been helped through the tough times by both our families. It's probably quite an Italian thing but I was taught from a young age that family is important – you stick together and help each other out, and we've been very lucky in that respect. Both our mothers and sisters come down regularly and help out, which is fantastic. My father, too, is incredibly supportive – once he's sure that whatever I'm doing is a good idea. He asks some hard questions but I've learnt that if I don't like the answers, I'm probably not doing something 100 per cent right. And it's better to identify the problem than to ignore it.

The hours are long in farming and it's certainly not a 'get rich quick scheme' but seeing the plants and the animals grow is deeply rewarding. I'm well aware that, unfortunately, if everything else continues in the way it is now, even my farming on 5,000 acres wouldn't really make a jot of a difference, but I believe the tide is changing. There's much more of a dialogue now between organic and conventional farmers and I feel that by working together and developing new ideas such as agroecology (sustainable farming that works with nature) and by learning how to farm in a more sympathetic way, farmers inevitably gravitate towards organic systems, simply because it makes more sense.

The journey doesn't stop with farming either. The farm is giving me an understanding of natural functions and ecosystems and I hope that one day I can use this to go on to work on larger-scale restoration projects. I'm interested in looking for sustainable alternatives to hardwood timber and construction materials, too – all of these things that are derived from the land. Conventional farming might account for a lot of the problems we have, but it's not the only land-based practice that has negative outcomes. If we really want to make a difference and bring about benefits for society as a whole, we need to be looking at the bigger picture.





## RUBY BOGLIONE

The nursery seems always to have been part of my life. We moved here when I was five and the nursery opened when I was about 11, and I remember the change when my parents bought it. Before, I'd played in the garden centre but hadn't really known anyone there. Then, all of a sudden, everybody seemed to know me and there were always people dropping in and out of the house; sometimes even living here for a while. If ever I couldn't find my parents it would be because they were in the nursery, even at weekends (which is still the case today), and every evening there'd be discussions about it around the dinner table, about the food or the flowers or the latest development or project.

Growing up here was fun – especially having a restaurant on the doorstep. As we got older, friends who needed a bit of extra money would work here, often in the teahouse or in the garden, and we'd all hang out after closing. The whole place has always had a very strong feeling of family, especially as some of the team who knew me when I was a child are still here now.

Even though all of us children have now moved out, it still feels much as it did when we were growing up. Lara and I are more homely and often end up back at the house a few nights a week. Harry comes down regularly to do his deliveries and I see Anna all the time, especially now she's using one of our greenhouses as an office. The whole family is really close – probably too close! We're all good friends, but we joke that we might be a bit too codependent on one another.

After school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, and in many ways, I'm still finding my feet. I moved to central London and worked in interior design and for a property company for a while, but the environment made me feel quite low. I realised that I missed the beauty and the flowers of the nursery, being able to take the dogs down to the river or to go for a walk in Richmond Park. I quickly learnt that I need that release even if I'm living in the city – it's good for my soul.

I started working here as a cook in the teahouse and then, after travelling for a while, I came back and began helping Lara and Charlotte Senn, our then general manager, with whatever needed doing. I've spent some time with the buying teams and in the shop, but what really interests me is our food offering, and Petersham Platform. Holding events and talks about the issues we care about gives us the chance to show that this isn't just a place to come to consume – whether that's a delicious lunch or buying something in the shop – it's a chance to connect with something deeper.

I've always been passionate about the environment. My mother is a very nurturing person who taught us to respect the Earth and the people and animals around us. I remember doing a school project on genetically modified organisms and Lara, who's eight years older than I and who was at university at the time, telling me about GMO seeds in India. She told me what she had learned about Indian cotton farmers who faced huge debt after their crops had failed and their ensuing desperation, since the saving of GMO seed is prohibited. That's what first sparked my understanding that the world wasn't so sweet, and I started doing more research into environmental issues.





Although I'm very dyslexic and find it hard to focus on many things, for some reason the environment and nature holds my attention and I can research for hours, and the more I looked into these issues, the more upset I became – it was like opening a can of worms. I've always loved the ocean and think it's scandalous that we're running out of fish due to overfishing, and that the fish we eat might not be as healthy as was once thought because of all the effluent we dump in the sea. And then there's the problem of plastics and waste, which is huge. On holidays in the Mediterranean I've found myself swimming amongst drifts of plastic when the tide has turned, and I remember seeing plastic washed up on beaches in India – quite different from my father's experience in the 70s. It's a problem everywhere and frightening to think how quickly it has grown. The first plastics weren't designed to be disposable – I remember Mamma telling me about Tupperware parties – but as soon as they were, we seem to have lost our senses entirely, to the point that it's now estimated that by 2050, there'll be more plastic than fish in the sea.

As a result, I try to make a difference in the nursery where I can. I've worked to ensure that our cotton Petersham Nurseries bags are organic, and therefore GM-free. I'm keen to avoid conventional plastics entirely and have been looking into plant-based alternatives which is very interesting. My dream is to have a dedicated Platform area – a comfortable screening room with a stage where we can show films and hold talks and debates – but as we're restricted by space and our licence, which limits what we can do in the evenings, I'm focusing on a more holistic approach. After all, if we're to change our habits, in any aspect of our lives, we need to be aware of our behaviours and the effects they have.

As part of this approach, I've organised yoga and mindfulness workshops in the gardens here for the team, and I initiated our relationship with Hub Dot, the women's networking events. I love their format of speakers talking for just one minute and then encouraging people to mingle – signalling their interests with the help of coloured dots. I'm often nervous meeting new people and this really encourages people to chat to one another in a meaningful way, removing any feelings of shyness or insecurity.

As well as being involved with the food offering at the nurseries, I cook for friends and family all the time. We have eighteen around the table every week or so, and I love the energy and fun that creates. As I've grown older, I've realised that entertaining on this scale can sometimes be stressful, too, so my latest project, Petersham at Home, aims to recreate the atmosphere and beauty of our dinners in a way that makes it easy for people. We provide a chef and wine pairings, along with the cutlery, tableware and flowers, if required, to create something really special. In some ways, it's an extension of what we started with Wilderness and Frieze, a way of trying new things and taking Petersham beyond the confines of our site.

Going forward, I'm cautiously optimistic that the world will change for the better, but we have a lot to do. I sense that younger people are beginning to look around and realise that there's something wrong with the status quo. They're starting to worry about their food because a lot of people are getting sick from it, and they're starting to realise that the world's resources are limited and that we have to care more about the environment. I'm not sure what form this change is going to take, but feel it will be the next big revolution.

On a personal level, I'm still figuring out my own future. My path may take me away from the nursery – but only physically. I know that wherever I go, I'll be carrying a lot of the nursery with me, in terms of its beauty, its family feel and the ethos I've been brought up with, which is that business isn't just about making money, it's about the way you treat people and the way we respect the Earth and nurture beauty.



## ANNA BOCLIONE

As a rebellious teen I spent a lot of my time travelling, exploring and meeting wonderful characters. At the age of 18 I followed a good friend and brilliant artist to New York, in the hope of staging an exhibition of his work, only to find on the day of my arrival that he'd been evicted from his studio and all his artworks had been destroyed, apart from a single light-up angel, shining in the middle of the room.

I lost myself in Bali for months on end, eventually overstaying my visa and having to negotiate my way out of the country. Then it was on to Istanbul to meet up with a boyfriend who was living under the medieval Galata Tower where we spent our time painting, clubbing and exploring the back streets of the Beyoğlu district.

Christmas came around and thwarted my plans for a life on the Asian-European border. My father ordered me to Torino, where, to my dismay, I was made to stay. Filippo, my cousin, was undergoing a similar type of *castigo* – we were both put to work for my uncle at Lo Spaccio (the outlet shop of his clothing company), in the hope that we would work our way up the ranks. For me, folding clothes and putting security tags on socks was not my creative path, but my time in the city did have some advantages. It allowed me to spend cherished moments with my namesake, my grandmother. She was the most elegant, determined woman, who lived by her own rules and never felt it to be a 'man's world'. An independent woman before her time, she was an interior designer with a remarkable shop called La Goccia. Her determination and strength as a woman influenced my character and shaped who I am today.

To my delight and disbelief, she entrusted this wayward creature with a Vespa, which I almost immediately drove off the side of the road – a road that has cost almost everyone in my Italian family a breakage, starting with my grandmother who cracked her head open speeding down the hill on her bicycle during the war. I merely broke my arm, an initiation into a strange family tradition and a disqualification from my duties at Lo Spaccio, which gave me the opportunity to plan my return to New York City.

Theatre – exploring the self through other people's worlds – had always been a passion of mine. Once in New York I became immersed in 'The Method' at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute and, surrounded by actors and artists, the idea of a theatre production company started to form in my mind.

After years away roaming, exploring and learning, I found myself back in the hustle and bustle of London. At King's Cross station I bumped into my old friend, the actor and writer Louis Wymouth. I mentioned the embryonic idea of what was to become Petersham Playhouse and, in time, Petersham Road. A few days later we got together for a chat and set about bringing the vision to life. To support our thespian ways we both took jobs in the teahouse at the nurseries, moving up the ranks. It was quite a hilarious time, clearing plates, serving food and all the while planning an opera.

*Dr Quimpugh's Compendium of Peculiar Afflictions* was the first full-scale production we mounted with Petersham Playhouse. Louis and I worked with librettist Phil Porter, who has written for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and composer Martin Ward, who has worked for the Royal Opera House, to produce a comical chamber opera about a psychologist questioning his life's work. Dr Quimpugh recalls the bizarre cases he's had to diagnose – from a woman who can't control her own hand to another who feels compelled to eat inanimate objects. For its first run we took over the ballroom within Petersham House, later taking it to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe at the Summerhall arts complex. We received many fantastic four- and five-star reviews and were nominated for a Herald Angel Award.







Despite the critics' appreciation, getting the public to buy into an opera with such an extravagant name was another matter and so, back at Petersham House, we moved onto adapting classic texts such as Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. At this time my parents were in Australia a lot and, without them and the numerous people who had lived with us over the years, the house felt empty. Moving our productions out of the ballroom and into the entire house seemed to be the logical way to go; a good opportunity to breathe a bit of life back into the place, especially as it makes for an incredible backdrop.

We stripped out all the furniture and created a route around the house. Starting in the garden, it led the audience on a journey through the lavish sets we built in various rooms, encountering puppets and performers along the way. We worked with the wonderful designer Sam Wyer to create puppets of the Ghosts of Christmas Future, Present and Past, the latter a creation so large its head scraped the ballroom ceiling. The conservatory was filled with artificial snow, we transformed the basement into Scrooge's rooms and we borrowed a coffin from the local undertakers, who loved the show. We were thrilled when the Charles Dickens Museum, in Holborn, asked us to stage the production there.

That really marked the beginning of the site-specific, immersive events for which the company went on to be known. We held several more in the house, including *Le Petit Mort*, a Halloween-themed show, and *A Christmas Cracker*, for which we re-imagined the basement as a Victorian kitchen. Pheasants and onions hung from the ceiling while the singers became increasingly drunk as they made figgy pudding and belted out opera at people. For each production, we'd turn the house upside down, sending my mother close to a nervous breakdown. As the chaos settled into something quite magical, the anxiety and stress would be forgotten and, almost immediately, she'd encourage us to do another.

In 2012, we staged *Myrkwood – A Journey with the Brothers Grimm* at the Wilderness Festival: a trail through the forest along which the audience discovered their favourite fairy tales. The following year we put on *Jabberwocky*, a more ambitious, longer-running show, which meant we basically lived in the woods there for over a month. The same year, working alongside Secret Productions and Village Underground we staged *The Imaginarium* at the latter's iconic East London venue. Here we conjured 'a music hall of the mind' featuring Toulouse Lautrec, Emile Zola, *butoh* dancers, a butcher's shop and a desert in the tube trains on the venue's roof, as well as offering live music and banqueting for up to five hundred people a night.

In 2014, we suggested creating a Louisiana barrelhouse of rhythm and blues to the organisers of Wilderness Festival. They loved the idea and so we created the Juke Joint, a music stage and bar with actors and performers recreating the drinking dens of the Deep South. To our delight, it was packed out every night, and ran for three years, before we decided to try another concept based around Japanese love hotels and supporting the UK's best emerging artists in 2017.

Time flew by as we focused increasingly on immersive events, but I eventually reached the point at which I wanted to move away from hedonism and towards something more grounded and holistic. I'd suffered for years with digestion issues that had affected my weight, my brain and later my spine. Having not received the help I'd hoped for from conventional doctors, I turned to herbal medicine and began researching the links between well-being and food.

I discovered that our genes, once thought to hold the secrets of human health, make up only a small fraction of our bodies' genome. Much of the rest is made up of the genes of our microbes – bacteria, fungi, viruses – many of which are concentrated in our gut and which have a whole array of roles from regulating our immune and digestive systems to protecting against disease and even influencing our personality. I realised that we are part of nature – the very word 'human' derives from the Latin *humus* which means soil – and that nature holds many answers. Just as depleted soil will produce less nutritious plants, a depleted microbiome is bound to have an effect on our health.

This journey has led me to launch The Gut, a platform to start conversations and ignite curiosity about how we can synchronise with nature to improve our health and to change our mood, our cognitive function and our overall happiness. During my ten years at Petersham Road, I focused on 'the journey' of each individual audience member and it is this attention to detail and full sensory experience that defines guests' time at The Gut. By carefully curating our events and drawing upon a diverse network of practitioners, healers, acclaimed chefs and great minds, we instigate healing beyond the clinical setting.

The environments in which we work are as important as the science-rooted practices such as nutrition, meditation and structural body work which we offer. Taking people out of their day-to-day routines and into places of breathtaking natural beauty, they are better able to disconnect from their fast-paced, technology-driven lives and to reconnect with their core, 'wild' selves.

Throughout my career, my family's support has been invaluable. In the first few years of Petersham Playhouse, Harry regularly came with me to the local scrap metal yard, where we made good friends with the 'tippers' – the old boys at the tip – who found all sorts of stuff for me: old signs, amazingly tacky lights, a whole piano, a thousand records – even once some flowery silk pyjamas which made for a sensational festival get-up. Ruby was also a huge help, often coming to my aid when I most needed a helping hand. She's a great cook and spent many years being our in-house festival chef, putting up with very strange food-related requests. My father has a very artistic eye and a flair for business, and my mother has a wonderful imagination – she's a dreamer. All of us children have been brought up to place as much value on imagination as work ethic. As kids we were very much given a voice; no idea was shoved under the table. I don't know if that's made things easier – you soon realise it's difficult to follow your dreams; however, it has taught us that we need to work hard and push ourselves to create our futures.

There's no doubt the nurseries themselves have played a part, too – the simple garden centre converted, customised and reshaped into a 'secret garden', a world far removed from the hustle and bustle of London, cannot but have moulded my imagination and my psyche. Over the years, my office has moved all over London, but I've found that, in order to thrive, I need to be in a creative environment anchored to nature, and I'm now very happy working in the greenhouse tucked away in the kitchen garden at Petersham. We're made up of our egos and our selves, and I think that we should look after our selves more than our egos. I hope that The Gut provides a way of doing that, of helping us to care for and nourish our minds, bodies and souls.







## LARA BOGLIONE

I often ask myself where I'd be now if we didn't have this business at the end of the garden, but I can't imagine anything that would suit me better. What I love about it most is the sensory stimulation – the beauty of the flowers, their fragrance, the birdsong, the fluctuating temperatures of the greenhouses through the seasons. You feel the closeness of nature and the elements. It's a very vibrant place, full of energy – a quality I learned to treasure while travelling in India.

There, I found the sensory overload almost addictive. In the space of a few moments you can go from the scent of incense at a temple to the smell of an open sewer, swiftly followed by a waft of jasmine in a girl's hair as she walks past. There'll be kids playing and laughing in streets crammed with motorbikes, cars, carts – and an elephant. Monkeys stealing fruit and causing chaos in the markets. Everywhere you look, life confronts you.

I first went there aged 16. My father, keen for me to experience what had been such an important part of his life, took me for two weeks. It was just the two of us, driving around Rajasthan in an old Hindustan Ambassador car, and I fell in love with it all – the colours, the architecture, the people, the heat, the religion. Papa and I are at loggerheads quite often but fundamentally we're very similar, and on that trip we just had so much fun. We laughed, creasing up at some of the things the guides were telling us and getting the giggles in inappropriate situations. We stayed in some incredible places, too: palaces where we were welcomed by rolling drums and pathways of rose petals; I felt what it must be like to be a maharajah. It was a full immersion into a beautiful, romantic side of India and I was completely hooked.

I went back with my best friend Lucy Loveday as soon as I finished school and we spent six months on an entirely different sort of trip, spending as little as possible each day, staying in tiny guesthouses and getting around on local trains and buses, often with a lady falling asleep on our shoulder, a baby in our arms and chickens at our feet, all in the boiling 50°C heat. That's when I really lived India. We visited the Salvation Army girls' orphanage in Calcutta and, realising the children had no pens or paints, went out and bought armfuls of them and returned a few times to draw pictures with them, to sing and to teach them the hokey cokey. I think India gave me an appreciation of the fullness of life, in all its many, messy guises.

Now I'm married, and a mother, but Petersham is still a place where I can, to some extent, recapture that sense of wonderment and possibility. I've been involved with the business for most of my adult life, though in the beginning it was at arm's length; sourcing furniture, decorative boxes, jewellery and statuary in India and Indonesia. The nursery was my parents' project and I'd always loved its creativity and diversity but, as I got older, I began to get an idea of the many ways in which it could develop.

The turning point was perhaps as unlikely as a trip to India sparking the genesis of the nurseries: a trip to the Venetian island of Murano. I always love travelling with my father, and we went there together in 2010, again with my friend Lucy, on the trail of some fantastic glass my father had discovered. As anyone who's been to Murano will know, as soon as you get off the boat, touts approach, brandishing glass animals, many of which are made in China, and offering tours of their famous glass-blowing factories. It's a well-known tourist trap now but the island has produced some breathtakingly beautiful glass, particularly in the 1950s and 60s when artists and designers including Fulvio Bianconi, Gio Ponti and Tapio Wirkkala collaborated with the glassworks there. Papà always says he's a truffle-sniffing hound and he'd felt sure there must be more to discover. Eventually, after talking to dozens of people, he'd found someone who'd taken him to a warehouse off the main tourist trail, and it was this he wanted to show us.

I remember I was in something of a daze at the time. We'd met my friend Giovanni (now my husband) the night before and had spent the evening drinking Prosecco and wandering the streets of Venice and, in truth, an early start to catch a boat to Murano was the last thing we wanted. But when Lucy and I walked into that warehouse, neither of us could believe our eyes. Boxes and boxes of frosted scavo vases, glasses, paperweights and the most elegant ashtrays you've ever seen in a rainbow of colours: opalescent blues, spearmint greens, all shades of pink and the softest dove greys. Some were pieces by the masters, but the majority were from the 70s and 80s; just as beautiful but not yet widely appreciated and, like Papà, we became completely obsessed by them. We also found hoards of *goti* – multi-coloured, often wildly patterned drinking glasses made from leftover blobs of glass. Papà bought some and commissioned a new collection there and then, mainly because we just loved them but also because, like so many crafts today, glassblowing is a dying art and in need of support.

When the glass arrived in London, Lucy and I helped my father catalogue them and put on an exhibition at the nurseries. Then, Dickon Bowden, of inspirational upmarket fashion retailer Dover Street Market, asked us to curate an installation in their London store. It was a total surprise and a wonderful opportunity. We arranged different pieces in the window and throughout the store, some filled with flowers – single Icelandic poppies, branches of flowering shrubs or sprays of cow parsley – and others displayed on their own to counterpoint the shop's eclectic fittings.

I've always been quite ambitious, and, with the Dover Street Market project, it slowly started to dawn on me that the nursery might have possibilities beyond the garden walls. I realised that, as well as creating a beautiful nursery, my parents had created a brand with true and solid roots and real potential for development, and that was what excited me. When Mamma and Papà had to go to Australia in 2011 I could see that there was a need for someone from the family to be there nine-to-five on a daily basis, and asked to go on the payroll – much to my father's relief, as it turned out.

I knew that staying at the bottom of the garden wasn't an option for me – I wouldn't have felt satisfied. I wanted to bring Petersham to the attention of a wider audience; sharing our passion for learning, for living well and eating well, and proving to other companies that you can succeed in a natural and environmentally correct way. There was a lot of groundwork to be done behind the scenes first. I worked closely with Charlotte, our then general manager, focusing on the back end of business. From other businesses I'd observed, I realised the importance of staff training and of daily briefings on the products and how to present them to the customer, and I was determined to embed that approach here. There were other more visible tweaks I wanted to make, too. Although the nurseries were visually and creatively inspiring, I felt strongly we should be inspiring people mentally as well, providing an educational, academic element through which we could initiate conversation and debate, which is what led to the founding of the Petersham Platform.

We started with a programme of talks based around food and agriculture, my passion stemming from my studies, and a natural complement to and extension of the philosophy of our kitchen and garden. I wanted to discuss the issues I felt were important, from whether biodynamic farming or permaculture can feed the world, to GM crops and the harm they can cause. Food and farming are still our key areas of interest but we have also expanded to work with a variety of interesting individuals and organisations in other fields, from renowned Indian Yogi and mystic Sadhguru, to – with Ruby's help – Hub Dot, as well as creating a sensory garden at a school for children with special needs and inviting local schools here to teach students how to grow and cook their own food.

In the spring following the Dover Street Market project we were invited to host a pop-up shop at Selfridges department store. The setting – a basement with no natural light – was not ideal, but it was one of the first opportunities for us to move further afield and into the centre of London – so we grabbed it. We learned that while it was relatively successful in its own right, more significantly, it acted as a window onto the nurseries, and brought more people here. It also led us to discover Thomas Broom-Hughes, a qualified florist, whom we took on to run the project. He did a brilliant job and stayed with us for many years, developing into an extraordinarily important member of the team. As well as creating many of the floral arrangements for which Petersham is renowned, he oversaw the opening of our garden shop in 2012 and the ever-expanding School of Garden Inspiration in 2014. (Even though I've basically lived in a greenhouse for the past ten years, I'm not at all green-fingered and it's a New Year's resolution every year to go to more of our workshops.)

2014 was also the year that my sister Anna launched the first of her Juke Joints stages at the Wilderness Festival in Oxfordshire. Harry and Ruby had helped her build the sets, recreating the down-at-heel, Cajun vibe she'd envisaged, and of course, we'd all gone along to support her. I loved the English countryside setting and relaxed, family-friendly feel, which seemed perfectly in tune with Petersham while attracting a completely different crowd of people, and thought how fabulous it would be to have a restaurant there. To my delight, we won the pitch and, although it was a huge undertaking and a steep learning curve for all of us, the team pulled it off magnificently.

It was exciting to know that we could operate on this scale off-site and when, not long after Wilderness, I walked into the marquee at Frieze in London's Regent's Park, I knew I wanted to get us there, too – something that came to fruition the following year. My parents are keen art collectors so we've visited the fair almost every year since it opened and I knew that, if we could rise to such a high-profile challenge, it would introduce us to a completely different clientele again. We have a wonderful client base at Petersham and when people visit, they're looking for a nice day out; an unhurried lunch or afternoon cake, a chance to catch up with friends or buy something beautiful. At Frieze, it could not be more different. The visitors are first and foremost art collectors. They have an agenda and are there to do business, and want their lunch served in under an hour, if not half an hour. Again, the Petersham team did an exceptional job, thanks in large part to our operations manager Bobby Melton who went above and beyond to have everything running like clockwork. It was a real bonding experience for us all, and a fantastic way of reaching a younger, hipper customer than we might otherwise have done.

All these events help spread the word about Petersham, but they also energise the team and the nurseries themselves. When our florists are working on one of their phenomenal displays – a 4ft urn filled with flowers, a 15ft autumnal garland, an enormous table laden with spring posies or a huge panel of dried flowers – for an event like Frieze or a wedding, they always draw a crowd. It gets people talking and wondering, and underlines the creativity that underpins everything here.

That's what makes Petersham so special. From the chefs to the shop assistants and our gardeners, the team have ideas and want to make things happen, whether that be trialling new seeds, working with new craftsmen or displaying things in innovative, unexpected ways. As managing director, my vision has been to take the business to the next level and Petersham Nurseries Covent Garden, our newest venture in the heart of London, has given us that opportunity, and the next chapter in our history.









EPILOQUE  
GAEL AND FRANCESCO BOCLIONE

When we bought the nursery all those years ago, we had no idea where it would lead us. We plunged in at the deep end and taught ourselves to swim as we went along. Now, after all this time, we count ourselves immensely lucky that we've not only reached the other side of the pool but, with Lara taking the business forward in Covent Garden, and Harry supplying so much of our produce, we can pause for a moment and allow ourselves to take a breath and see how far we've come.

It's a joyous view. The nurseries have allowed all of us – each of our children as well as us – to grow separately and independently of one another, while giving us a common interest, with all the laughs, drama and frayed tempers that that entails. If anything, the business has brought us more closely together, and if we ever worried about seeing less of the children as they grew up, nothing could be further from the truth. Anna's enchanting shows at Wilderness provided some fantastic moments for us all to party together and our dinners and Sunday lunches are just as jolly as they used to be, if not more so. Harry and Emily and their adorable children Raffi and Allegra come up regularly. Ruby and Anna are always popping in and usually stay one or two nights a week, and Lara, as MD, is here most of all, sometimes with her husband Giovanni, and always with their sons Achille and Lionardo.

Being able to spend so much time with our grandchildren and seeing them get to know the place is an unexpected blessing, too. The four of them are so comfortable here. They hang out with the chefs – Achille's first word was focaccia – chase the cats, help feed the chickens, know how to charm the staff in the restaurant into giving them coins to throw into the fountain, and occasionally run into meetings to give one or other of us a hug.

If Petersham has been successful thus far it is because it reflects us as a family so well. From the food we cook to the flowers we sell and the events we as a business choose to go to, we only do things that we as individuals are interested in or passionate about. With Lara at the helm and Anna, Harry and Ruby each contributing in their own unique ways, we watch with interest and excitement to see where the next part of the story will lead and what adventures it will bring.

THANK YOU  
GAEL BOGLIONE AND FAMILY

I don't really know where to start!

This book has been a huge passion and labour of love over the years, involving so many wonderful people.

On behalf of the Boglione family, I have to begin by thanking our photographer, Andrew Montgomery. I first saw his work years ago and was so captivated by the way his pictures invoke a sense of calm, and capture the beauty of each of his subjects, that I determined that if ever we did a book, it would have to be with him. Andrew has had so much faith in this project; he has persevered through our ups and downs and has always encouraged us to pick up the pieces and keep going. We are all indebted to him, as perhaps this book would not have materialised without him. Thank you, Andrew.

The story of Petersham makes up the rest of the book. Our heartfelt thanks go to:

The wonderful Natasha Goodfellow, who painstakingly took our words and magically transported them onto the page, creating our story. Thank you, Natasha, you have been amazing.

Paula Foulser, our general manager at Petersham. She and Andrew were unwavering in pushing for this book and would not rest until the end product was in our hands. Thank you, Paula, for your dedication to this fabulous project.

Ronny De Koning, our artistic director. With his precise and calculated eye and his love and understanding of the sublime, Ronny has been a huge part of this vision. Thank you, Ronny.

Skye Gyngell, who is very special to Petersham and who helped create what we have today. Thank you, Skye, for being part of our journey.

Lucy Boyd, who started our vegetable garden and had a passion for Petersham that carried us along for so many years. Thank you, Lucy.

We would also like to thank our wonderful team at Petersham. I love each and every one of them and without their loyalty, Petersham would not be the place it is today. I don't know what I would do without my morning coffee catching up on life in the nurseries with Milli Amissh and Bobby Melton, who are such a support to us all, facilitating and creating and, always, taking the unexpected in their stride. Thanks, too, to our financial controller, John Neill, for keeping

us on the straight and narrow and occasionally letting us stray – a bit! Everyone is special to me and sadly I cannot name each of you but, to the team, a huge thank you.

I would also like to thank my extraordinary family. My eccentric, fabulous husband who had the vision to buy the nurseries, this little gem nestled between the house and the cow field, which allows us to experience the thrill of each season. How brilliant you have been.

And to our four children who are my pulse, my light, my everything. They are all extremely individual in their own ways. I am proud of them for what they stand for: their passion for the environment, their love of nature, their desire to make the world a better place. Their contribution to Petersham Nurseries has been invaluable. Thank you Lara, Anna, Harry and Ruby for being part of this book and this family.

The fabulous new additions to our family deserve a mention, too. How lucky we are to have Emily Perry, Harry's partner in crime. Thank you for all the support you give to Haye Farm, which contributes to Petersham Nurseries in such a positive way, supplying pure, organic food to our doorstep. Our thanks, too, go to our son-in-law, Giovanni Mazzei, who has supported Lara and, with her, created Petersham Cellar, which adds another dimension to the nurseries and allows us to serve the most delicious wines from hand-picked Italian vineyards. Along with these two, I also have to mention our little pumpkins, who have added life, spirit and sheer, utter happiness. Raffi, Allegra, Achille, Lionardo and soon another one to follow (and I hope many more), what joy and delight you have brought us.

Lastly, but importantly, our thanks go to all our customers, diners and visitors for your continued support. We could have done none of this without you.



