

FAMILY TREES

Andrew Beale is following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps as he develops the Beale Arboretum at West Lodge Park Hotel near Enfield, expanding its already impressive collection of trees

PHOTOGRAPHS ANNA OMIOTEK-TOTT

Liquidambar around one of the arboretum's ponds develop their impressive orange and crimson shades as autumn progresses.

WORDS CLARE FOLEY

If you're in the market for a new tree, and you'd like your new purchase to contribute to your garden's autumn display, little will help narrow down the plethora of choice quite like a visit to an arboretum. Time it right, and you'll see all of autumn's most glorious tree species at their colourful peak.

It's a time of year Andrew Beale always looks forward to, when the Beale Arboretum at West Lodge Park Hotel, Enfield, is ablaze with colour, thanks to its vast collection of trees, begun by his grandfather, Edward Beale, in the 1960s. "My grandfather was the sixth generation to go into the family business and I'm the eighth," he says. "He bought West Lodge in 1945 and by doing so, inherited 35 acres of grounds. A previous owner of the house had planted some very fine trees in the late Victorian period – he was American and homesick, so he planted taxodiums and sequoiadendrons – so my grandfather already had a nucleus of fine specimen trees around the house. His vision was to extend that into the two parcels of land beyond the house, and that was what he did."

Austerity after the war meant that it was around 1963 that Andrew's grandfather really got going with his ambitious plans for an extensive arboretum. He was helped in his mission by then director of RHS Wisley, Frank Knight, and Greater London Council's trees consultant Derek Honour. Together, the three men came up with a plan, mapping out the grounds into zones for different tree species.

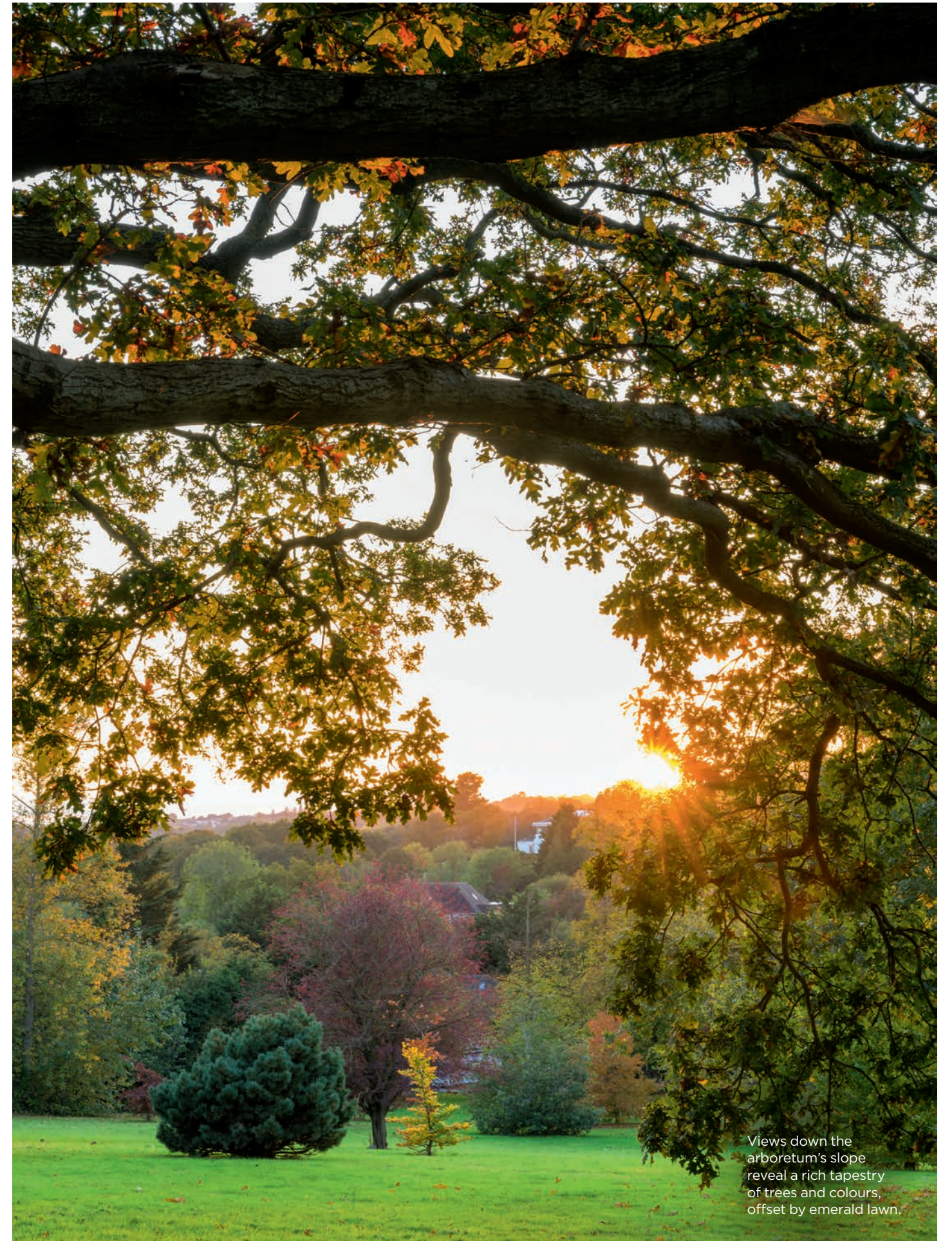
"That's how it started, and it's carried on since then! Now we're home to some 800 species, 15 Champion Trees – some of them international champions – and three national collections with a fourth on the way," says Andrew, who oversees the planting of at least 50 new trees each year to ensure the arboretum continues to develop.

Happily, both Andrew and his father before him, inherited Edward Beale's passion for trees. Equally happily, they also inherited Edward's talent for hospitality, each running West Lodge Hotel in turn. Happiness of the guests is paramount, of course, but Andrew's just as keen to make sure the trees in the arboretum have a happy stay. He and West Lodge's gardeners, Paul Baynes and Mark Field,

Below left The leaves of *Cercis canadensis* slowly become suffused with red in autumn.

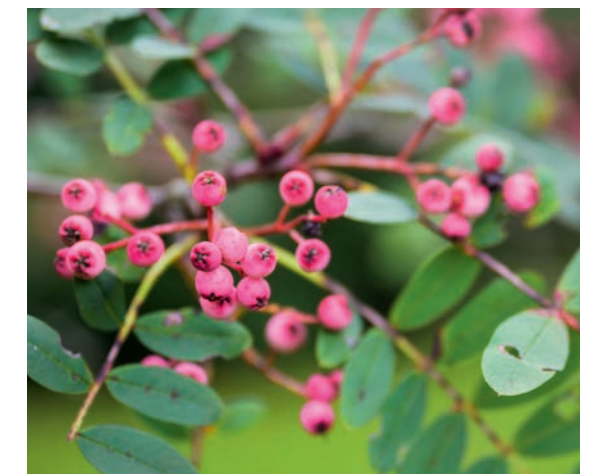
Below right Purple, saffron and gold foliage on liquidambar; in the foreground a young variegated sweet chestnut, rare *Castanea sativa* 'Albomarginata'.

Bottom left Two-tone foliage of *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* 'Matthaei Broom'.



Views down the arboretum's slope reveal a rich tapestry of trees and colours, offset by emerald lawn.

Conifers and deciduous trees combine to fill the Beale Arboretum with colourful foliage.



meet regularly and are usually joined by Andrew's friend and advisor Mark Lane, best known for being head gardener at Buckingham Palace for over 30 years. Together, they keep the arboretum on track, prioritising the jobs that need doing, planning new planting and identifying gaps in the collections, as well as maintaining a lengthy eight-page wish list of trees they'd like to add – the true sign of people who are quite far gone in their love for plants!

The best thing about West Lodge – besides it being the most extensive tree collection within the M25 after Kew – is that because its 4,500 trees are arranged by species, they can be easily compared, particularly if you're interested in any of the trees that make up the three National Collections: hornbeams (*Carpinus*), swamp cypress (*Taxodium*) and the Indian bean tree (*Catalpa*). A sequoiadendron collection is a work in progress, with about 150 of these magnificent trees so far.

Of the existing collections, it's the swamp cypress that capture attention in autumn when their deciduous leaves turn shades of gold and russet before falling. *Taxodium distichum* 'Little Twister'

Above left The moisture-loving swamp cypress, *Taxodium distichum*, is renowned for its rich, russet autumn colour.

Top right Buttery-yellow autumn leaves of *Ginkgo biloba*; Andrew advises choosing a male tree to avoid the smelly fruit female trees produce.

Above right Pink berries of *Sorbus hupehensis*, an ideal small garden tree.

is a favourite of Andrew's "for its slightly twisted branches and glorious autumnal colour from all those leaflets". Autumn is also when the various catalpas are bedecked with 'beans' – the long slender seedpods they develop after flowering. "Some have the most elongated beans you've ever seen. The beans on *Catalpa fargesii* f. *duclouxii* are more than half a metre in length, I kid you not," says Andrew.

Other seasonal highlights of Andrew's include *Acer rubrum* 'Scanlon'. "It's one of our Champion Trees and the reason I like it so much is that all the autumnal colours are on every single leaf, from green through to yellow, orange, gold and red, you'll see all of them on one leaf – it's quite extraordinary." He's also always been partial to ginkgos, recommending 'Blagon' for its "particularly lovely habit and shape", and bright yellow autumn colour. And elms hold a place in his heart, too. West Lodge boasts several that are resistant to Dutch elm disease. "Our *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Dampieri Aurea' is the most beautiful tree in autumn when the green foliage of summer has turned golden. I'm waxing lyrical but it's absolutely beautiful. And with the



naturally resistant elms we've been busy planting, it's really very exciting to come out of those grim years."

For smaller gardens, Andrew recommends *Cornus kousa*. "You get so much bang for your buck! We've got one that's about 45 years old and it's still only about 12 feet tall. It's stunning in spring when it's covered in a blizzard of white bracts, and then the teardrop-shaped leaves turn dark red in autumn so you've got two lovely seasons, plus they're very compact, graceful little trees." The maple *Acer shirosawanum* 'Aureum' is a firm favourite. "It's so compact at no more than four or five feet, but it has the brightest yellow leaves. It's small but it punches well above its weight," he says.

There are around 45 different crab apples in the arboretum, too. "I always think crab apples are one of the very best garden trees, because they have such a lovely flower in spring and this year, they are laden with fruit. *Malus* 'Evereste' has lovely mini apples like a Cox, with golds, reds, oranges, greens." Also bearing bountiful fruit are the arboretum's sorbus. "They have lovely autumnal berries, yellow 'Joseph Rock', pink *S. hupehensis*, white *S. cashmiriana*,

Top left The finely divided and colourful foliage of *Quercus texana* 'New Madrid'.

Above right Laden with crab apples, *Malus* 'Evereste' is a super choice for small spaces.

Above left *Acer japonicum* 'Vitifolium', with all the varied colours of autumn exhibited in each leaf.

Sorbus aria which tends to be more yellow, and *S. torminalis* which is more reddish. We find the birds don't like them very much."

This year's weather may have caused a bumper crop of fruit, but Andrew suspects it will also bring forward the onset of his trees' autumn colour. "I'm half nervous about our autumn National Garden Scheme day on 26 October," he says. "I think the acers might drop their leaves, but we leave them on the ground for a tapestry of glorious colours, and I think the taxodiums will be just right then."

As well as dates for the NGS, Andrew frequently leads tours of the arboretum, and guests at the hotel, whether they're staying overnight or stopping by for afternoon tea, are welcome to explore – "as long as they spend lavishly!" Andrew jokes. "You can do it briskly in 25 minutes or you could spend half a day looking round," he says. It's time that definitely won't be wasted. ■

.....
 The Beale Arboretum at West Lodge Park Hotel,
 Cockfosters Road, Hadley Wood, Enfield EN4 0PY.
 Tel: 020 8216 3900; belearboretum.com