

[I COULDN'T SEE IT MYSELF]

WHEN JULIAN VOGEL'S WIFE BOUGHT A LIGHTHOUSE IN AN APRIL FOOL'S SALE, HE COULDN'T SEE THE POTENTIAL – OR THE GARDEN

WORDS | KATE JACOBS PHOTOGRAPHS | NEIL MARRIOTT

APPROPRIATELY FOR A MAN who spends his weekends in a lighthouse, Julian Vogel is drawn home every Friday evening by his tower next to the sea. Except he arrives not by boat but by car, having crossed the flatlands of Norfolk under dark and vast skies. By the time he gets the family's bags in from the boot, it's usually pitch black but Vogel begins each stay with a little ritual: 'I like to grab a torch and go round the garden, taking in all the changes, absorbing that sense of abundance.'

Life in Norfolk is the antithesis of his London life, where Vogel runs leading fashion and lifestyle PR house, Modus Publicity, while his wife Sally Mackereth is a top-of-her-game architect with her own practice, Studio Mackereth. 'It's a very full-on lifestyle packed with meetings, events and a lot of keeping people happy. In London, I'm dealing with constant visual input, but here I'm able to relax and process things. Even when I'm not here, I can hold this place in my mind and it relaxes me.'

This magnificent lighthouse was brought back to life by Mackereth. She had been on the lookout for an unusual property in neighbouring Suffolk when she spotted this place in a newspaper article on 'April Fool's' homes – the kind of projects you would be mad to take on. But Mackereth sped up to Winterton-on-Sea on the east Norfolk coast and promptly fell in love with it.

The lighthouse is set well back from the sea, with a generous buffer of dunes between the two. Built in the 17th century, its beacon kept ships away from the shifting sands on this most treacherous stretch of sea between the Tyne and the Thames, earning the lighthouse

a mention in *Robinson Crusoe*. Such was the danger that the then fishing village had a profitable sideline in the wrecking business. When the couple bought it, the structure had long since been decapitated and its lantern shipped off to a new life in the Bahamas. And while the lighthouse had already been converted into a home, it was dated, with a faded 1970s, *Terry-and-June-at-the-seaside* feel. 'I couldn't see it myself,' Vogel laughs. 'But Sally said it had good bones, and I've learned to trust her eye.'

So Mackereth created a new, dramatic glazed lantern room, the perfect spot from which to enjoy the incredible views. On the floors below sit the library and bedrooms, all simple and understated with the emphasis placed instead on the curvaceous elegance of the building itself. Then, at the foot of the lighthouse, a timber-clad box extension has given them a generous kitchen, dining and living space that opens out onto the garden.

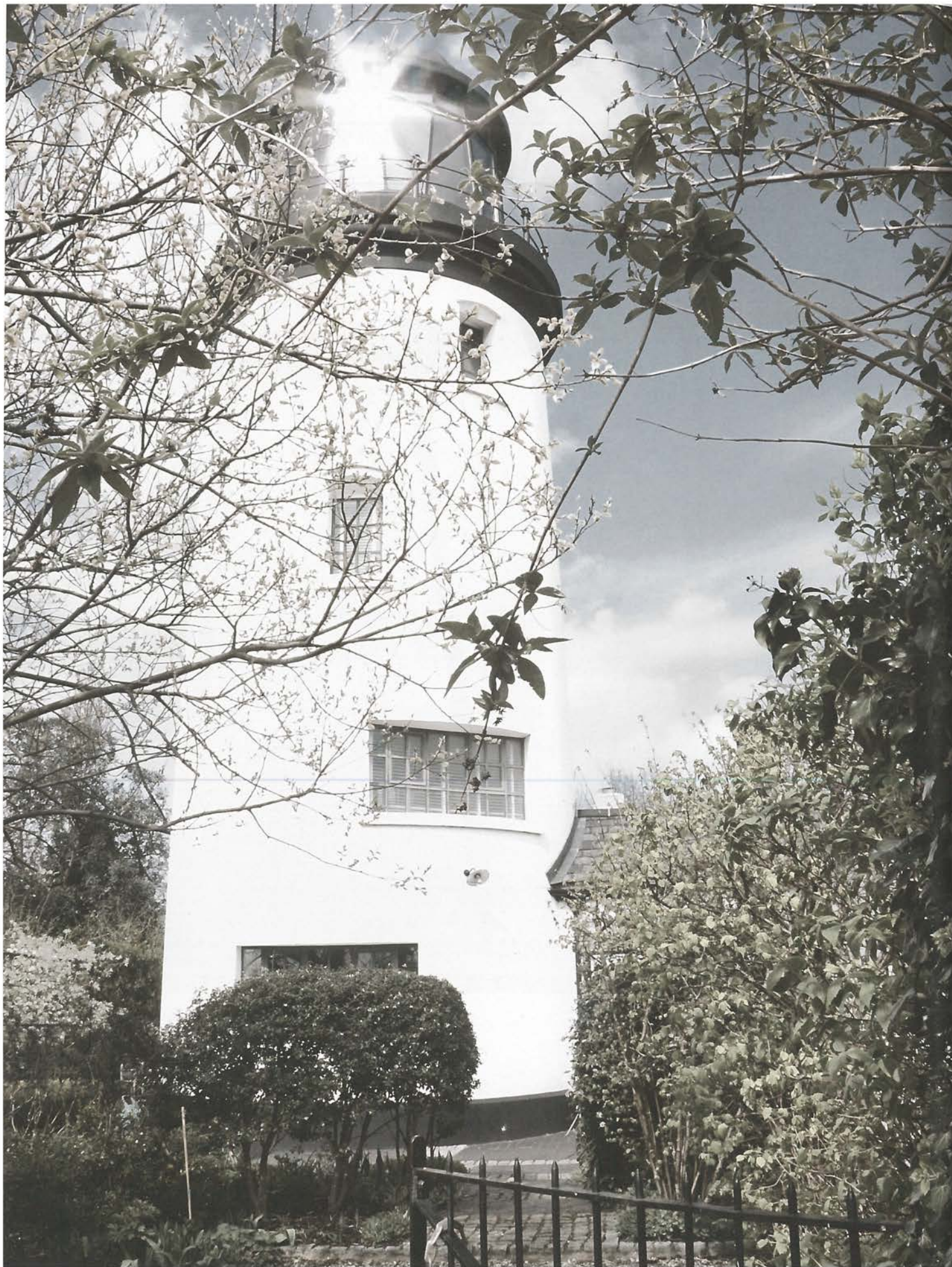
When they inherited the property, the garden was a mess: an awkward expanse of grass, dotted with trees, overgrown and overlooked from many angles, not least by the adjacent lighthouse keeper's cottages. The couple immediately brought in garden designer Chris Moss, with whom Mackereth had collaborated many times. As Vogel explains, 'Chris has the ability to translate Sally's architect vision into landscaping and planting.'

The first step was to carve out some privacy without compromising their neighbours' light, so carefully placed espaliered pear trees and blocks of hazel and box hedging have created a new sense of enclosure. This provides a refreshing contrast with the vast, lonely



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seascapes visible from the tower itself and achieves the garden of rooms that was part of the couple’s brief, as Vogel says ‘to give the space some complexity, so that it can’t be experienced all at once’.

They also wanted to mix the formal and informal, so the hard landscaping combines granite cobble setts with crisp-edged black engineered bricks (that echo the black band that loops around the base of the lighthouse), while the box hedging is clipped into both rectilinear blocks and soft, cloud-like forms. These features have been carefully conceived to look interesting not only from ground level but also when viewed from the giddy heights of the lighthouse tower itself.

As with all good gardens, the planting has evolved over the decade they’ve lived here, with Vogel taking an increasingly keen interest. ‘I’m an aesthetic person, but this was my first proper garden. It has been a learning curve, seeing which plants thrive and which don’t. Thankfully, I have a couple of serious gardener friends who live locally so their gardens have been like a test bed for me,’ he says.

Today the garden is deliberately lush and verdant. Vogel has chosen many of the plants for their interesting foliage and outsize leaves, like *Tetrapanax papyrifer*, as well more structural forms like the slender white trunks of silver birches. ‘I’m drawn to the unexpected, to things that look a little out of place,’ he says. Onto this he has layered softer areas of herbaceous planting in a rich

palette of purples and blues, with hardy geraniums, *Clinopodium nepeta* and salvias adding a dreamy, English-garden element to the space. Many of the plants have personal associations for Vogel, like the rose, ‘Alexander’s Issie’, dedicated by the late fashion designer Alexander McQueen to his muse Isabella Blow after her death – both were good friends of Vogel’s.

This seaside retreat has played an important role in the family’s lives. For the children, Lola and Oscar, it has brought a level of freedom that is impossible back in London – firstly to roam the surrounding countryside and now, as teenagers, to head off to the beach with their friends. The whole family love to lounge on the weathered timber deck, with its sharp edges appearing to float above the lawn. Because they only get here at weekends, the garden was designed to be relatively low maintenance. ‘We didn’t want to be confronted by an untameable jungle on each visit,’ Vogel says. But he finds himself happily pottering and planting, while Mackereth has taken on the therapeutic task of sculpting the box hedging.

The pleasures of gardening have come as a welcome surprise to them both. ‘I’m used to working with clients on designs, and creating a garden is a natural progression of that, thinking about scale, materials and colour. A lot of what I do in my working life is very instant and immediate but gardens teach patience,’ says Vogel. ‘You start by creating structure but in time you have to relinquish some of the control to nature, and that’s the fascinating part.’ ■