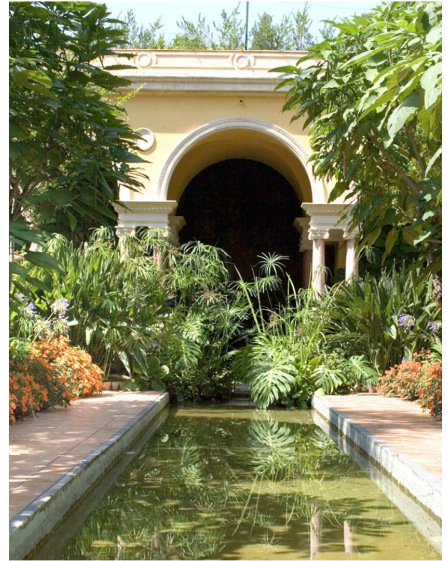
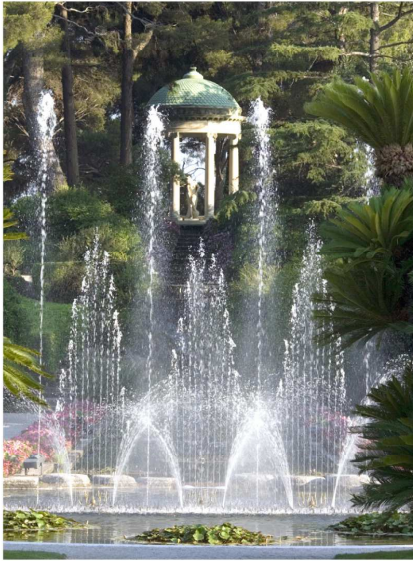


# Sarah's garden tour

This month she visits Villa Ephrussi  
de Rothschild on the French Riviera

Bright bedding displays of red  
*semperflorens begonia* and white  
*senecio cineraria* line the side of the cascade as  
it flows towards the beautiful villa



LEFT The magnificent fountains burst into life CENTRE Hundreds of pink roses fill the air with their scent RIGHT The Spanish Garden



**Each month lecturer and garden holiday guide Sarah Hopps travels the UK and Europe to uncover the best gardens for you to visit**

Whether you arrive on the French Riviera by land, sea or air, your first sight of the landscape is breathtaking. Villages perch on enormous cliffs that rise straight from the sea, olive and citrus groves occupy narrow terraces and sloping pine forests are studded with beautiful villas. This is the backdrop for the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild.

When French financier Baron Alphonse de Rothschild died in 1905, his daughter Beatrice decided to spend her inheritance on building a new winter residence and gardens. She chose a prime site between Nice and Monaco, on the narrowest part of the Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat peninsula. I'd been impressed by photographs of her pink Venetian-style villa, but was especially keen to see the garden which Beatrice had insisted should resemble the famous 'Île de France' steamship. It took seven years to construct because of the difficult rocky terrain.

Between Beaulieu and the old port of Villefranche, I took the road out onto the peninsula. After a sharp left turn, it climbs high above sea level, with amazing views in both directions along the coast. Arriving at the villa, I passed a mass planting of neatly arranged pink and white begonias, providing a perfect display for the entrance. Walking into the cool, shady Spanish Garden with its

elegant archways and yellow ochre walls, I found a formal pool reflecting the flowers of angel's trumpet (brugmansia), arum lilies and papyrus fronds.

Beatrice created several different gardens as a reminder of her travels and she adorned her new property with a large number of statues, urns, columns and gargoyles she'd collected. Stepping up into the Stone Garden, I was encircled by some of these treasures and could admire their antiquity alongside a collection of brightly coloured azaleas. There were tantalising glimpses of the sea through the trees, so I made a detour to the lower, 'outside deck' for open views across Villefranche Bay. A stone balustrade

### 'I was bowled over by hundreds of pink roses in full bloom'

was at the perfect height to lean on. The sun was shining on countless bright white yachts in an azure sea and the whole scene was cleverly framed into several 'pictures' by a series of columns. The experience was sublime!

Continuing through the beautiful and atmospheric Japanese Garden, I came out into an area bursting with magnificent cacti and succulents. The network of winding paths was lined with agaves, opuntias and the pincushion-like echinocactus, all looking extremely happy on their well-drained, sunny slopes.

I had almost reached the far end of the 'ship' when I became aware of a strong perfume. Sure enough, beyond the next

archway, I was bowled over by the sight and scent of hundreds of pink roses in full bloom, displayed beautifully on several terraces and overlooked by a tasteful hexagonal temple. From there, I ventured to the east-facing side and enjoyed the semi-wild Provençal Garden where windswept pine and olive trees provide shelter for an abundance of cistus, echium, lavender and agapanthus.

Climbing up to the highest point rewarded me with a superb picture-postcard vista of the formal French Garden and the villa beyond. Waterfalls tumbled gently down towards a long, narrow pool, surrounded by several smaller pools, immaculate lawns and bright bedding displays. It was from this lookout point that Beatrice acted as captain of her 'ship', giving orders to 30 gardeners, dressed as sailors wearing berets with red pom-poms! My experience of being on board this 'floating' paradise was complete when all the fountains unexpectedly burst into life to the music of Mozart – a beautiful finale to a truly memorable visit.

### Factfile

- **Location** Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, 06230 Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, France
- **Opening times** Open every day. 15 Feb-1 Nov. 10am-6pm (until 7pm July and August) 2 Nov-16 Feb. Weekdays 2pm-6pm, weekends and holidays 10am-6pm
- **Contact** Tel. 0033 4 93 01 33 09 or [www.villa-ephrussi.com](http://www.villa-ephrussi.com)

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