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TIME AND SPACE

MONTY DON

The TV gardener on dogs under the desk, wheelbarrows in the hall and never wanting to move



Don listens to Bach, as well as Dylan, the Beatles and Tom Waits

What does home mean to you?
Home is the centre of my world – I merely visit everywhere else. I have no desire to move, upgrade, downsize, or live anywhere other than where I do. I often do not leave the house and garden for a week or more at a time, other than to walk the dogs across the fields. Just about everything I want or need from life is here.

When did you move in?

We [Monty and his wife, Sarah] bought our house in Herefordshire in October 1991 and moved in on December 8, 1992. We chose it because, after looking at more than 60 houses, it was the best thing we could afford at the time – which was very little. It was a derelict, uninhabitable ruin surrounded by wasteland, but we wanted it within 30 seconds.

Where did you grow up?

In a small village in Hampshire called Weston Patrick. The population was tiny and I was related to half of them. In many ways, it was idyllic. But that part of Hampshire has become gentrified and heavily populated – it feels claustrophobic compared with Herefordshire.

Do you require order at home?

Of a kind. I like to know where things are and to do things a certain way – I like routine and structure. But I am not particularly neat or tidy, and am happy to have wheelbarrows in the hall, swallows flying in and out of the front door, and a gap in the wall where the water pours through in heavy rain.

Are there any house rules?

Yes. Don't talk about work in the kitchen.



His dogs, Nigel and Nell, lie at his feet as he works



FRANCESCO GUIDICINI: BBC/BLINK FILMS



“I always feel intensely homesick the day I am due to set off anywhere. I think that is the result of going to boarding school

Do you get homesick?

Not really. I am usually so busy that there isn't time. However, I always feel intensely homesick the day I am due to set off anywhere. I think it is the result of going to boarding school from the age of seven, when leaving home was always a bad thing and going home meant holidays.

Do you dream about gardens?

Not that I am aware of, but I seldom remember my dreams.

Are you a good party host, or do you prefer solitude and privacy?

The question is academic, as we seldom throw parties – perhaps once every five years. But I don't like going to parties. I would rather be a host than a guest.

How has your garden been influenced by others you have seen?

In every conceivable way, but not often overtly. It is much more a question of proportions, shapes, balances and the relationships between plants, rather than any obvious layout or plant selection. As a result of seeing so many paradise gardens [while filming] last year, I am tempted to introduce a formal water feature – perhaps a rill.

What piece of music do you like to play at full volume?

Could be Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, could be the Beatles, could be Dylan, could be Tom Waits. It won't be jazz or show tunes.

Do you bring back lots from your travels?

No, very little – although I get ideas and inspiration from everywhere I go, and I do try to bring back small objects such as a seed case, shell or stone. I was once in the beautiful garden of Juan Grimm, on the coast of Chile, and spotted a small white stone on the rocks. I picked it up and was about to pocket it when Juan said, "That is a beautiful little stone." I agreed, and he continued, "It took me ages to find just the right spot for it." So, greatly embarrassed, I replaced it exactly where I had found it.

Describe the room where you write

It is a converted hop kiln, so the ceiling rises to a funnel with a roof light 30ft above me – like a dunce's cap. It is lined with more than 3,000 books and the large desk is untidy, with piles of papers and files and all the computer paraphernalia that modern life imposes. There are dog beds at my feet.

What is your oldest or most treasured possession?

I like my things and choose them carefully, but I don't really have a most treasured possession – and certainly none with any financial value. It is the combination of a host of loved objects that is part of the magic of home, be it a favourite mug, guitar, pair of shoes or edition of a much-loved book. I would be saddest to lose some pictures of Sarah and the children when they were little.

Where do you feel happiest alone?

At home, working in the garden. So, by and large, I am a very happy man.

Interview by Caroline Donald

The second part of Monty Don's *Paradise Gardens* is on BBC2 on Friday at 9pm; watch the first episode on iPlayer. An accompanying book, with photos by Derry Moore, will be published in March (Hodder £35)



Monty Don, pictured above in London and left at the Samode Palace, in Jaipur, Rajasthan, which features in his BBC series *Paradise Gardens*

INDIAN STUNNER