



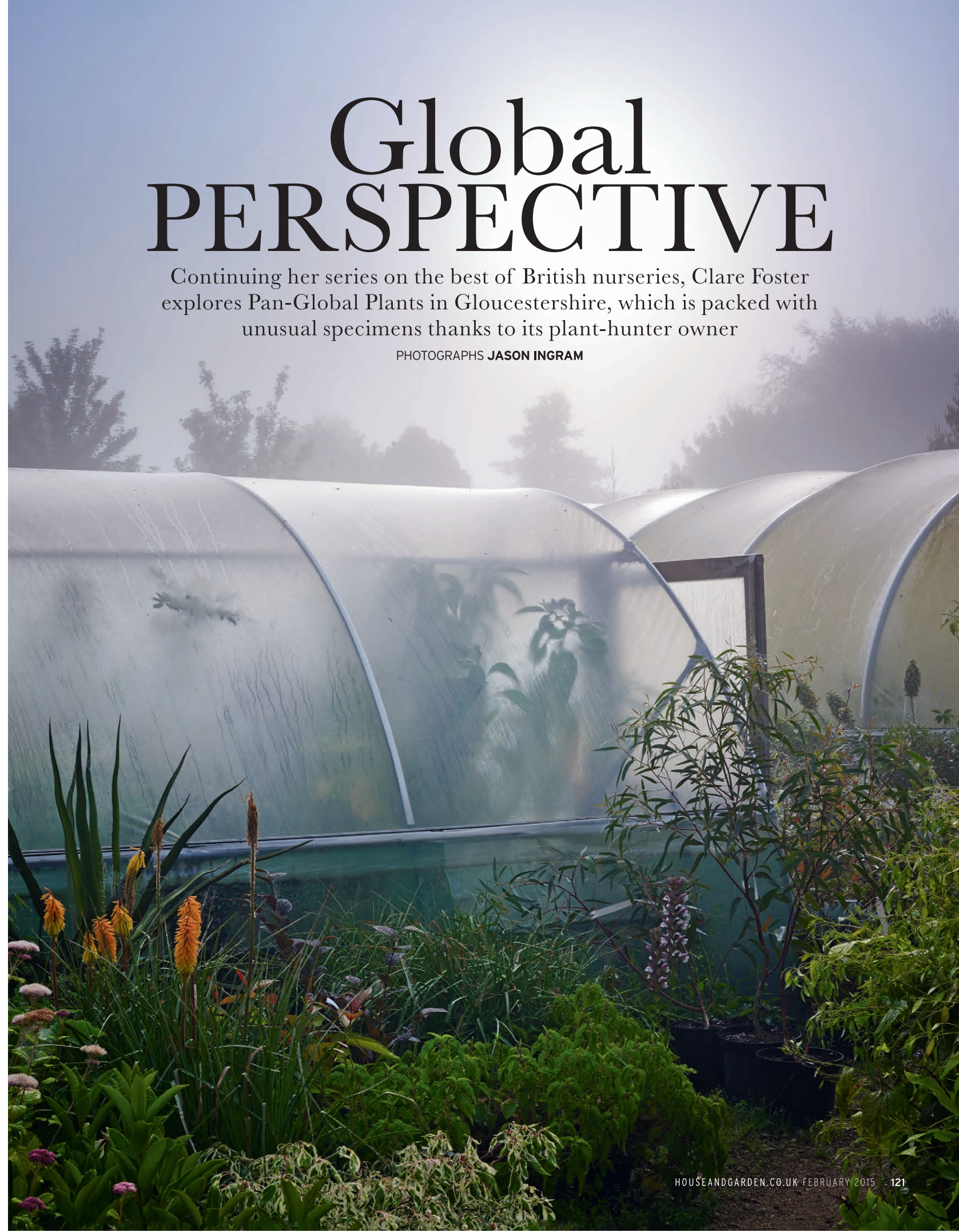
FOCUS ON
NURSERIES:
Part Two

THIS PAGE Nick Macer surrounded by a host of exotic and unusual plants at his nursery in Frampton-on-Severn. OPPOSITE Non-native species, including kniphofias and schlefferas, grow outside the polytunnels

Global PERSPECTIVE

Continuing her series on the best of British nurseries, Clare Foster explores Pan-Global Plants in Gloucestershire, which is packed with unusual specimens thanks to its plant-hunter owner

PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM





A visit to Pan-Global Plants in Gloucestershire makes even the most know-it-all gardener feel inadequate. There are unrecognisable plants everywhere: intriguing, exotic-looking shrubs, perennials, climbers, bulbs and succulents that you will be hard pushed to find in any other British nursery. It is director Nick Macer's thirst for travel that has resulted in this fascinating collection.

One of Britain's modern-day plant hunters, Nick devotes several weeks a year to travel, visiting countries as diverse as Mexico, China, Azerbaijan and Vietnam, bringing back seed and plant material to grow and trial, before offering up plants for sale in the nursery. Originally trained at Merrist Wood College, Nick went on to work at the Hillier Gardens and Westonbirt Arboretum, which fired an obsession with trees and shrubs, before he set up his own nursery at Painswick Rococo Gardens, near Stroud. After six years, he uprooted and moved the nursery to a large walled garden tucked away behind Frampton Court in Frampton-on-Severn, where he has expanded the business over the past 11 years as well as developing an area of garden where he displays some of the rarities that he finds on his travels.

A tour round the nursery with Nick is an intense experience, as he reels off extraordinary botanical names and describes far-off Himalayan mountain ranges at the same time as watering the shade tunnel and giving detailed horticultural advice over the telephone to his customers. 'I travel once or twice in a year and have been all over the world,' he says. 'It's what I live for really – the high point of my year. I've collected all manner of amazing things. That schefflera over there I found on Tay Con Linh mountain in Vietnam. We managed to get right to the top, and this plant was only growing in the last few hundred metres. It's amazing how you get these distinctive layers of plant life up a mountain.' Schefflera is a genus of evergreen shrubs and trees only recently thought of as hardy enough for cultivation outdoors in the UK, with some species being hardier than others. But the fact that this particular form was growing at the top of the mountain was significant, showing that it preferred the cooler microclimate at the summit. 'It's so new that we're not quite sure how hardy the plant will be, but growing in the wild at that latitude and altitude, you know that the plant will survive at least a few degrees of frost,' he explains. 'So it will be a safe bet at least in sheltered, mild places like London and Cornwall.'

Scheffleras have become something of a passion for Nick, along with hydrangeas, of which he has a collection of more than 60. I think I'm in safe water, here, with a group of plants I know well, but Nick shows me specimen after specimen that is unfamiliar: *Hydrangea longipes* var. *longipes*, grown from seed he collected himself in China; *H. heteromalla* 'Nepalese Beauty', which has red petioles and leaf edges, and *H. aspera* 'Bellevue', a new French form that Nick describes simply as 'awesome'. To complement the more unusual varieties, he also offers

'Annabelle' and 'Limelight' to please the crowds. 'I do sell more normal things as well, you know,' he jokes. 'I have to feed my family.'

I point out a plant that I think I recognise. 'Yes, you're right, that's a phlomis,' says Nick, 'but it's not one of the common ones you normally see in gardens.' He smiles, knowing he still has one up on me. This is an unusual shrubby species from south-west Turkey called *Phlomis bourgaei*, which has large, felty, golden leaves and whorls of yellow flowers. 'I have a few specimens of this species around the nursery, and they're all slightly different. That's what you get from wild-sourced seed – this fabulous genetic diversity, which you don't get from cultivated plants.'

To illustrate his point, he whisks me round the corner to show me a collection of colourful *Dahlia coccinea* collected in Mexico. 'In the wild, it's hugely variable, with flowers in every shade of bright yellow, red and orange, and a whole mix of colours in between,' he says. Now with

dahlias in the forefront of his mind, Nick dashes off to the garden behind the sales area to show me a new dahlia species he discovered in north-east Mexico in 2005. So new to cultivation it hasn't yet been named, it is a large, exotic-looking plant with beautiful, glossy foliage and pale lilac flowers.

He is apologetic about the state of the garden, which he thinks is spiralling out of control due to lack of time, but in the same breath says he finds the neglect creates a spontaneity that he couldn't have contrived himself. 'It's inspiring, watching how things self seed so magnificently,' he says, and I agree. I enjoy the exciting, wild look of the garden, part jungle, part prairie, and the way that he has combined grasses, perennials and exotics in a glorious muddle of colour and texture, with bees and butterflies everywhere. At the garden's high point in summer, with everything growing up tall, the eye is drawn to the strong accents of scheffleras, tetrapanax and red-hot pokers, to the oversize crimson flower spikes of *Lobelia tupa* or the architectural foliage of *Euphorbia x pasteurii*. Interesting combinations stop you in your tracks: spiky *Yucca linearifolia* set against the softly flowing *Salix exigua*, or the jungly *Arundo donax*



OPPOSITE 1 *Albizia julibrissin* 'Rouge Selection'. 2 *Tilia nobilis*. 3 *Aloe polyphylla*. 4 *Schefflera* sp. nova, a new species discovered by Nick in Vietnam. 5 *Yucca linearifolia* with *Salix exigua*. 6 *Watsonia* 'Brick Red Hybrid'. 7 Kniphofias and grasses in the garden area. 8 Hydrangeas and other shrubs in the shade tunnel. ABOVE The sales hut backs on to the garden, with plants such as acanthus, echinops and *Arundo donax*

with the spheres of echinops and spikes of acanthus. Nick uses the garden as a trial ground for new specimens to test their hardiness, and as the walled garden lies in a frost pocket, it provides a suitably exacting test. 'Yes, I've lost plenty of things here,' he says, matter of factly. 'I had a 1.8-metre agave in there until we had those cold winters a few years ago. Things took a real hammering.' But his prize specimen of *Tetrapanax* 'Rex' has survived, which is good news for Nick and good news for customers looking for an extraordinary, tropical-looking plant that will survive temperatures lower than -10°C. Playing Russian roulette with new, untried plants is all part of the excitement here □

Pan-Global Plants, Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire: 01452-741641; www.panglobalplants.com