

N°8 | MAR/ APR 2020

*the magazine*

# MY FRENCH COUNTRY HOME

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THE CHÂTEAUX LIFE



# The *Peony* Project

Photography by David C Phillips and Georgianna Lane

Bénédicte de Foucaud  
turned her delightful hobby,  
into a passion to be shared  
with flower lovers from all  
over the world.



The *Conservatoire de la Pivoine* (Peony Conservatory) is the only place in the world where a single floral family, the Paeoniaceae, cohabits; shrubs, herbaceous plants, intersecting hybrids and botanical species all thrive harmoniously.

The idea sprouted in 2003, an idea between Bénédicte and three girlfriends on a trip to Amsterdam. It was her job as an antiques dealer, always on the hunt for rare and historical pieces, that inspired her to conserve her favorite flower. Saddened to see precious varieties neglected and even lost, she vowed to protect as many as possible.



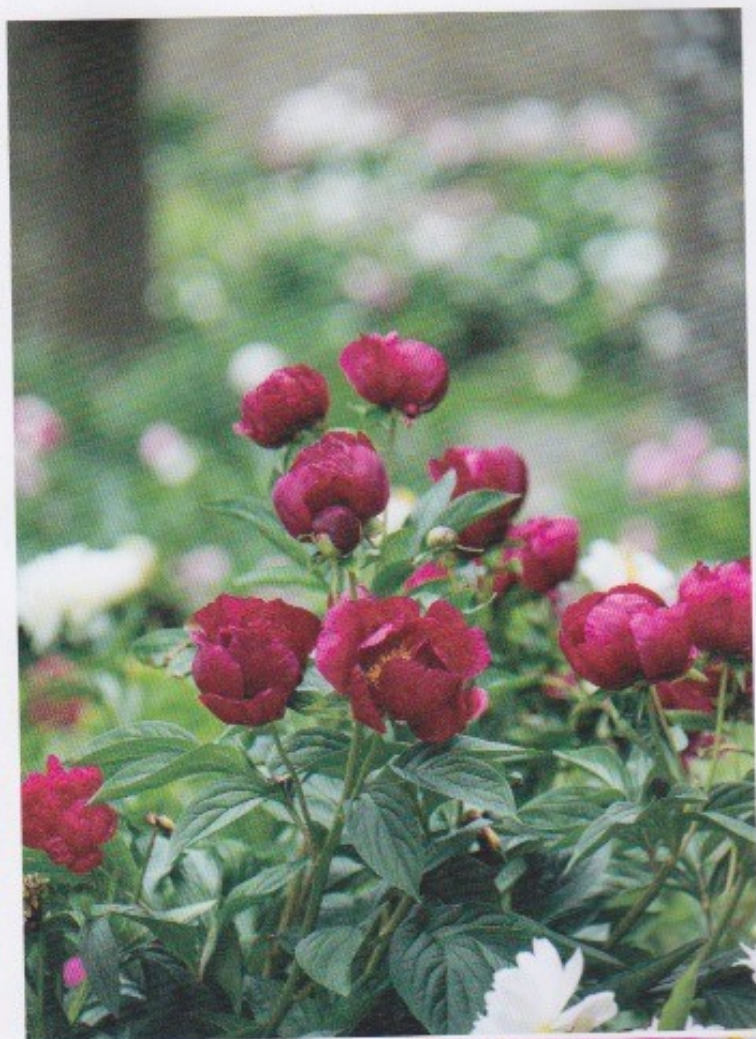
**ABOVE**  
A view on Château de Sourches just before sunrise; inside the moat that the Peony Conservatory has called home since 2009.

**RIGHT**  
Detail of some Globe of Light peonies in bloom.

**OPPOSITE**  
A view of inside the moat, from above. Tables and chairs are dotted throughout the Conservatoire, where guests are welcome to rest and enjoy the beautiful flowers.







ABOVE  
A group of fuchsia-red  
"Anemoniflora Rubra" peonies.

RIGHT  
A bouquet of several peonies  
from the Souches collection.

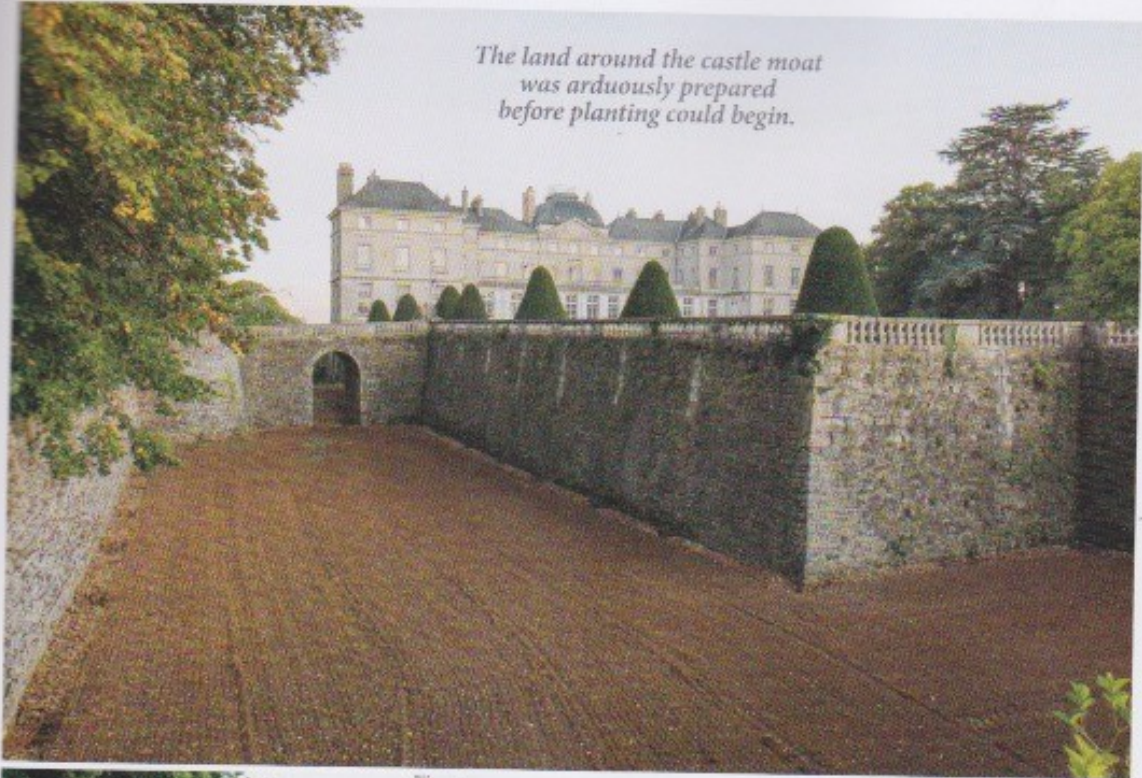


Her home at the grandiose Château de Souches offered a fine backdrop for her peony garden. Located 25 km west of Le Mans, this neo-classical masterpiece holds an important place in French history. Designed in 1756 by Gabriel de Lestrade for the Marquis of Souches, Grand Provost of France (Head of the King's Armies), it is one of the country's few larger castles preserved in its original state.

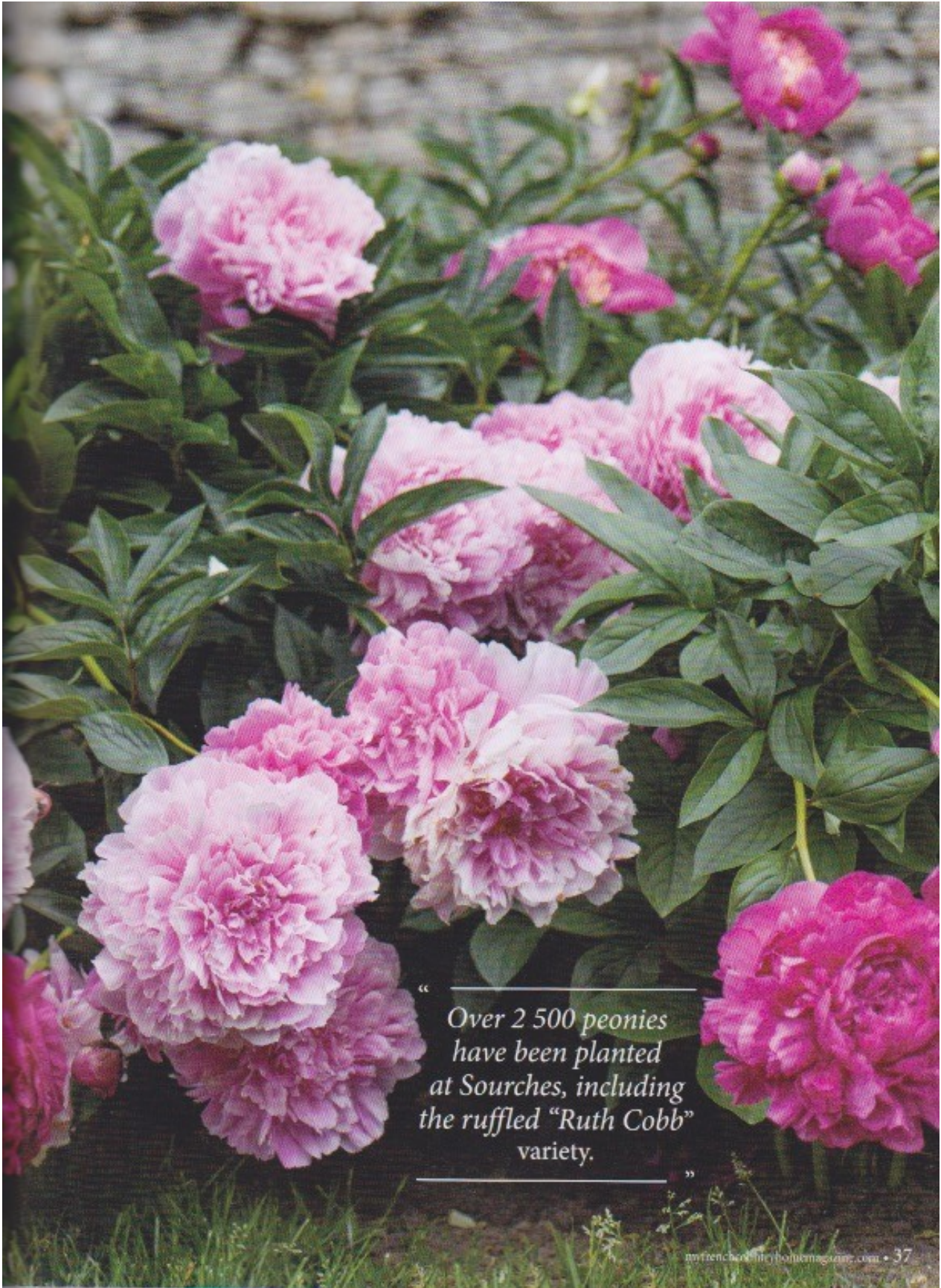
The Conservatory began with "Madame de Verneville", a white and pinky-cream layered peony, and with the help of traders across the world - Canada, America, Russia, Estonia, Japan, New Zealand and England (to name a few) - her collection blossomed.

The peonies were originally planted around the park, but after losing many flowers to the park's wild boar and deer, in 2009 it was moved to the deep and sizeable castle moat to protect them from destruction.

*The land around the castle moat  
was arduously prepared  
before planting could begin.*







“ Over 2 500 peonies  
have been planted  
at Souches, including  
the ruffled “Ruth Cobb”  
variety. ”



*Bénédicte commissions  
artists to paint her flowers.  
Each limited-edition print  
is available for sale.  
"Prince Troubetzkoi"  
by F. Vadon.*



*Paeonia "Prince Troubetzkoi"*

*F. Vadon 2018*

*-Château de Souches-*



In 2012, after one of her friends quipped that she was greedy in keeping all this beauty to herself, Bénédicte decided to open her collection to the public. "We opened officially in 2015. My friend was right, not about me, but about seeing how much people appreciate the combination of the colors, flowers and the place itself. They feel like they're somewhere unique, and I'm glad to share it!" Bénédicte says.

Accompanying her efforts in the garden, Bénédicte has written a series of books to further her conservation efforts and knowledge of the flower. Her third volume will be published in 2020, focusing on French peony breeders. In addition, she commissions artists to immortalize her Souches peonies in a series of limited-edition watercolors, available to purchase online and at the Château.

Today, over 2 532 peonies have been planted at Souches, from rare and old to new breeds. Bénédicte continues to collect them, thanks to the huge space available to her. Around the moat, on the terrace, in the potager...

For Bénédicte, "the most important thing is the future." Her passion and determination to conserve the peony is beautiful in its intention and execution. An undeniable floral wonderland. ♡

*Château de Souches,  
72240 Saint-Symphorien  
[www.chateaudesouches.com](http://www.chateaudesouches.com)*

*Gardens open from May 8,  
from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m.*

*Bénédicte's first book  
'How to Discover the Peonies  
of Souches' is available to buy  
in English, French and German.*



**TOP**  
Bénédicte at work, tending to her peony garden; a small bouquet of "Mr. G.F. Hemerik" peonies, inside the chateau.

**LEFT**  
Designed in 1756 for the Marquis of Souches, this neo-classical chateau is beautifully preserved in its original condition.





