

Prepare to be a-maze-d

Named for the old English meaning delirium or delusion, mazes were conceived to boggle the mind.

Deborah Nicholls-Lee meets the man behind *Saltburn*'s chilling climax

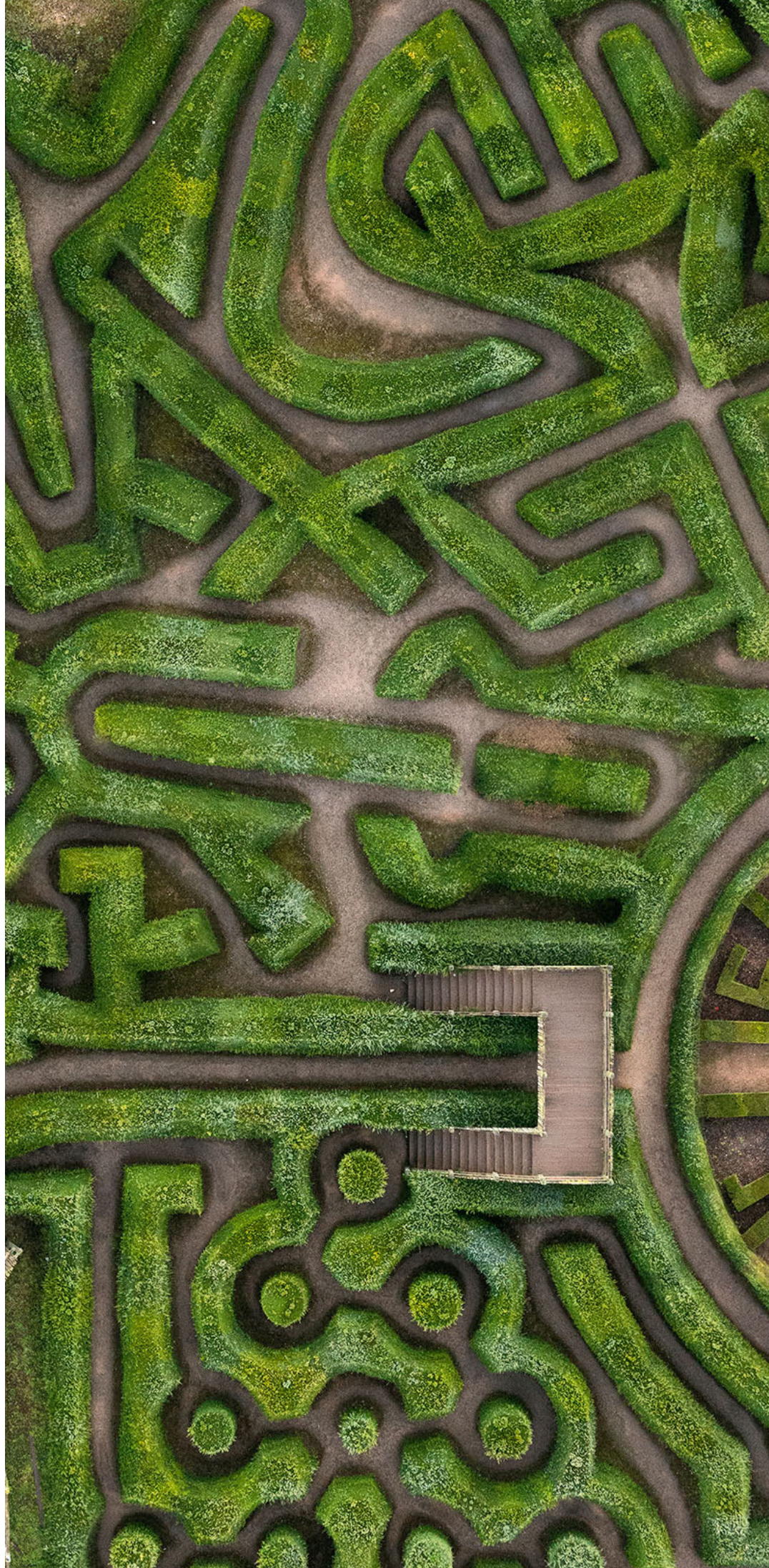
IT'S the film everyone's talking about—a sinister story that both disturbs and delights. *Saltburn*, filmed at Drayton House in Northamptonshire, features a climactic scene in an elaborate garden maze. As Drayton has no maze, director and co-producer Emerald Fennell enlisted the help of Adrian Fisher, the world's leading maze architect, to design one for the film.

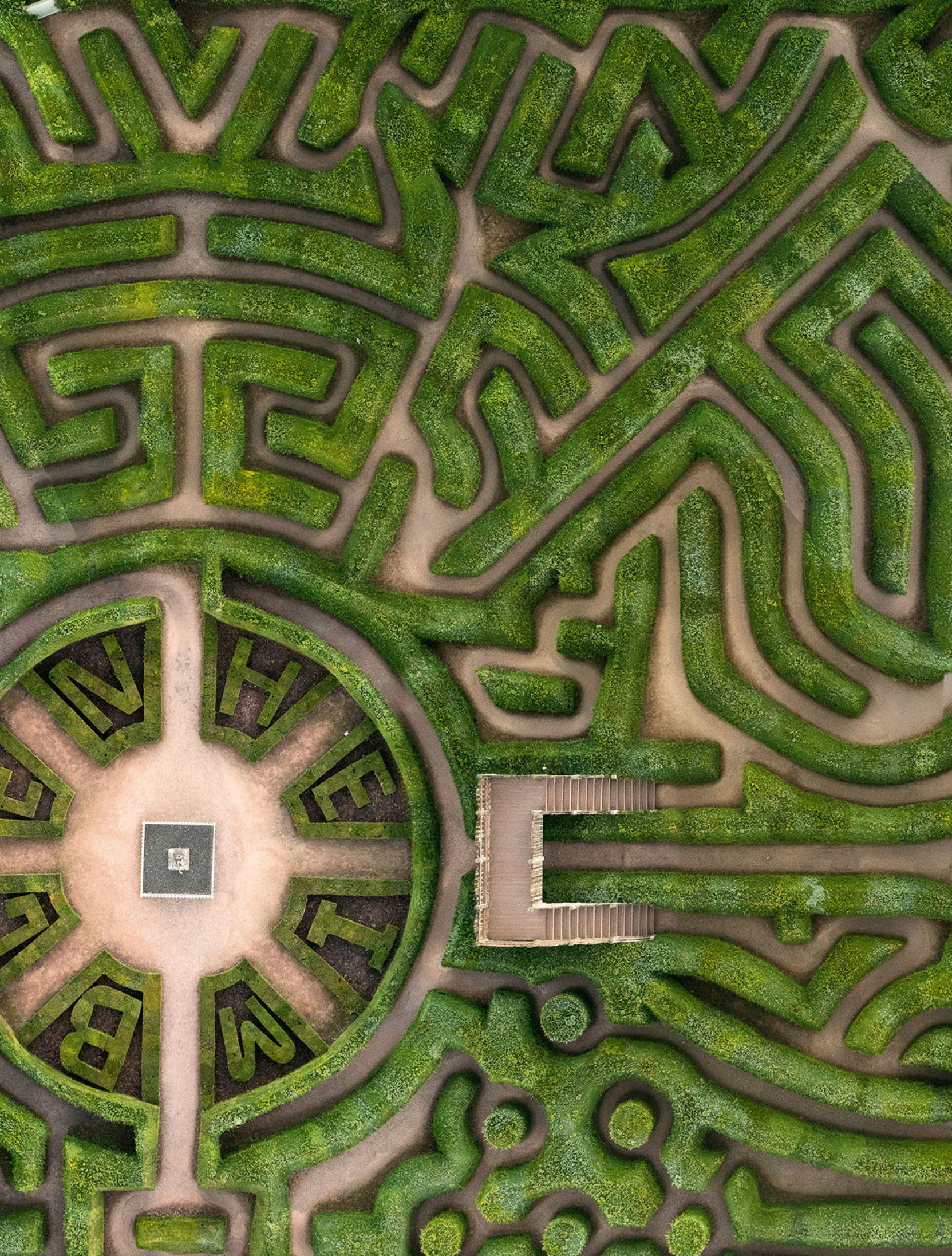
Masterminding more than 700 hedge, water, mirror and mosaic mazes around the world, as well as the first 'maize maze', chopped into a Pennsylvania cornfield, requires a busy

‘Adrian Fisher’s fast-moving mind is as twisting and turning as his creations’

brain. The day before our planned interview, Mr Fisher telephones me to share the concept he has for COUNTRY LIFE's own maze, the ideas spilling over, unable to wait. His fast-moving mind is as twisting and turning as his creations. Without warning, the conversation takes another path, switching to the awe-inspiring aerial photographs he takes with his drone ('I can deploy it in 90 seconds—and then *whoosh*'). Then, we're onto follies. 'I'm nuts about towers,' he says, describing them as 'the aerial camera points of the past'. →

Adrian Fisher's Blenheim Palace maze that enjoyed a starring role in *Inspector Morse*







There's no doubt that Mr Fisher's designs are also meant to be enjoyed from a height, where the hedging reveals hidden graphics. One vivid example is the *Alice in Wonderland* maze created at Dorset's Merritown Farm, which features many familiar characters, including a grinning Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter and Alice herself (see *'How to commission a maze' box*). At its centre is a pocket watch fixed at four o'clock, indicating a perpetual tea time.

The maze in *Saltburn*, which does not exist beyond the concept and scale model, is also striking from the air: a mesmerising rotated star with apses forming a central cross—a symbol of sacrifice. Conceived with various plot devices in mind, the maze has two solutions, one much shorter than

the other, enabling those who know the puzzle well to get ahead of others and make a quick exit. 'There's a very cleverly concealed what looks like a dead end, but isn't and there's a tiny little passageway that allows someone to get to the centre first,' explains the designer. There, visitors encounter a minotaur statue: a reference to Daedalus's sadistic labyrinth from Greek legend, the most famous maze of them all.

A maze is a place for secret conversations, assignments and—in fiction, at least (remember Morse at Blenheim Palace?)—unwitnessed murders. 'It's the ultimate skullduggery. It is the theatre,' enthuses Mr Fisher, who was once introduced to a couple whose baby had been conceived in one of his creations.

As far back as 2000BC, humankind was etching brain-shaped labyrinths into stone and clay—graphic metaphors for the mind, impregnation and the transition through life. By the 13th century, the English had given the concept a name: *maes*, meaning delirium or delusion. It was at this time that labyrinths, with their characteristic unicursal construction, were added to the grounds of churches and cathedrals, providing paths of contemplation and a symbolic journey towards enlightenment. The Renaissance saw the addition of multiple junctions and dead-ends, giving birth to the modern maze. Country estates added them as garden features to entertain their guests and enhance their grounds, 'boasting in a rather joyful way,' as Mr Fisher puts it.



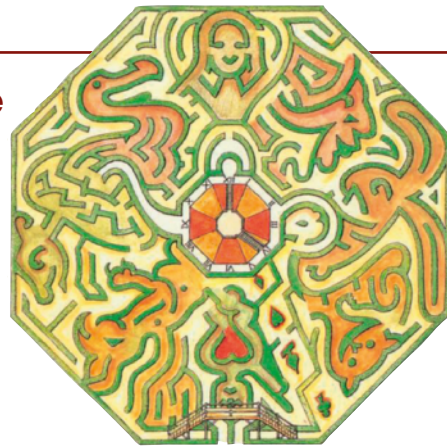
Every which way: Mr Fisher tries to escape from the maze at his former home in Dorset

His first foray into maze-making had a rather prickly start when, aged 20, he fashioned a puzzle out of holly hedges in his father's Dorset garden. Yet the playfulness that mazes bring out probably began far earlier. 'From the time you can hardly toddle, you want to explore what's out of sight,' he reflects. Later, it's the cerebral challenge that appeals most. A completion time of 30–40 minutes is optimal, he adds: 'You want a goal and, when you've solved it, you feel fantastic.'

Describing himself as 'an entertainer', Mr Fisher deems a maze to be the perfect ice-breaker. 'It brings out humour, lightens →

How to commission a maze

- Walk the landscape with your maze designer. Discuss your family history, the themes that connect you and the passions you have today
- Select a well-drained space of at least 100sq ft or so. Flat ground is easiest, perhaps with a slight slope for better water run-off. You may wish to incorporate natural features, such as mounds or streams, into your design
- If hedges will dwarf the property, consider a turf maze (a path cut into the lawn), a boulder maze through woodland or a paved maze in a courtyard. Ask yourself if you'd like the property to look out onto the maze, says Adrian Fisher, or if you'd prefer the maze further afield 'so that it becomes a magnet and draws you through the landscape'
- For planted mazes, factor in the time needed for the shrubs to fill out—typically about three to seven years, although some deciduous species can be ready in a matter of months. Mr Fisher recommends selecting shrubs that grow locally as they are most likely to thrive. 'The yew bush is the queen of all materials, if it will grow,' he says. 'You only clip them once a year, they hold their shape and look fantastic.' Green beech and hornbeam also work well



Mr Fisher's *Alice in Wonderland* design

- Work with what you've got, advises the designer, recounting the Duke of Marlborough's claim that the 1991 Blenheim Palace maze in Oxfordshire was created for only £103, as almost all the materials were foraged from the estate. 'The thrift really appealed to him,' Mr Fisher recalls
- Check whether you need planning permission and factor architectural drawings, materials, soil preparation, labour and maintenance into your budget. For an entry-level outlay, try a temporary maze formed of hay bales or bricks. Add value by introducing moveable walls or hedge gates, allowing mischievous owners to alter the solution on a whim



The maze designed for *Saltburn* has two escape routes—one much shorter than the other

things up and it's something you can do together.' He'd even have them as part of a job interview, insisting there are few better ways 'to get to know what someone is like'.

A maze designer can't resist recommending a few add-ons. 'It's much more fun if you have bridges,' he reveals, as the vantage point provides clues to solving the puzzle and interaction with other people on different paths. Follies are even better and make an extravagant central feature. 'People love getting up high and enjoying views,' Mr Fisher believes. 'Seeing England from the air, seeing our great gardens, it's another dimension again to England's favourite pastime, which is enjoying wonderful gardens in a climate that makes it easy to grow them.'

'There's a wonderful sense of being part of an adventure'

One such garden is at Leeds Castle, Kent, where, in 1988, the maze-maker had the pleasure of introducing Princess Alexandra to its newest attraction, leading the royal party boldly through the 156sq ft maze, only to discover that the head gardener had built it to an earlier design iteration. 'We turned around the corner and the bush I was expecting to have been removed was there,' Mr Fisher recalls. The guests took the designer getting lost in his own creation in good spirit.



The Music Maze at Balsham, Cambridgeshire, features a treble clef planted in golden yew

Other memorable hiccups include the towing of an 18-ton, 51ft yellow submarine across the Mersey, as the centrepiece of The Beatles' Maze (1984) had proved too plump for the tunnel beneath the river; and the disastrous flooding of the late Lord Sandberg's hedge maze (2002) at his Hampshire home, aptly named 'Waterside'.

Constructing a maze is as much of a riddle as solving it and, despite its ups and downs, Mr Fisher revels in the process. 'There's this

wonderful sense of being part of an adventure,' he explains. When the late Sir Alfred and Lady Beit worked with him, in 1989, on a beech maze for Russborough House in Co Wicklow, Ireland, it was clear that the elderly couple were as taken with the project as he was. 'We come out every day in the middle of winter in our Wellington boots,' they gleefully told him. 'This is one of the most exciting and creative things we've ever done.' 🐾

Adrian Fisher's five mazes to visit

1. Leeds Castle, Kent

Few mazes can match Leeds Castle's dramatic exit, which rewards players with a trip through a twisty subterranean grotto, its shell-encrusted walls concealing fearsome sculptures. This yew maze was devised by Mr Fisher, Randoll Coate and Graham Burgess in 1987 and features a disorientating spiral construction in the shape of a crown—a nod to the many queens who have resided at the castle.

2. Beazer Gardens Maze, Somerset

Despite its name, this paving-stone puzzle near Bath's Pulteney Bridge is technically a labyrinth, as it is solved by following a single path. Created by Mr Fisher in 1984, in collaboration with Coate and Mr Burgess, the simple-looking puzzle is deceptively clever.



Classical figures with connections to Bath's heritage feature in an intricate marble mosaic comprising seven 'gaze mazes' to be solved by a keen eye.

3. Scone Palace, Perthshire

Located in the grounds of the crowning place of Macbeth, Robert the Bruce and Charles II, Mr Fisher's most eye-catching Scottish maze is a masterpiece of texture and colour

(above). Alternating hedges of green and copper beech weave together to make a tartan garden in the shape of the heraldic Murray Star.

4. Kentwell Hall, Suffolk

Across a moat, in the central courtyard of a splendid 16th-century property, is Mr Fisher and Coate's award-winning labyrinth in the shape of a Tudor Rose, thought to be the world's

largest brick-pavement maze. The five-thorned rose proffers five different progressions through the puzzle. When you've solved these, brick paths indicating junctions and flyovers permit an additional brain teaser—this time in three dimensions.

5. Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire

An aerial view of the 1.8-acre, two-mile-long Marlborough Maze reveals eight letters spelling out Blenheim and a fanfare of cannons, banners and trumpets inspired by Grinling Gibbons's stone sculptures, commissioned for the palace's roof more than 300 years ago. From one of the bridges, you may also spot the V-sign that Mr Fisher and Coate included to commemorate Sir Winston Churchill, who was born at Blenheim and features on the £5 note beside a holograph of the maze.