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design a yew maze, using the letters 'O' and 'Z', the name of the underground magazine that he co-edited (and which became the focus of a famous obscenity trial in 1971), as his motif. 'I found it amusing to put those two letters together, but I never think about the trial now,' he says.

Over the years more land has been acquired and today the estate covers 6,000 acres. In 1995 Dennis planted up the five-acre Ralph's Wood (named after a local conservationist) with native broad-leaf trees – oak, ash, birch, hazel and willow – little realising where it would lead. Now he employs a head forester and a nursery manager to grow saplings from locally collected seed for his Heart of England Forest charitable project. 'We plant 300 acres every year. What we plant depends on the soil and location, but it is

mostly heavy clay. My forest stretches from the relics of Shakespeare's Forest of Arden in the north down to the Vale of Evesham in the south, and now measures 1,900 acres, roughly five Hyde Parks.' The project was driven by his wish to reinstate a large forest to an area once covered in mighty elms.

His £500 million fortune will fund its upkeep, and eventually the forest will be used for camping, traditional woodland crafts and equestrian events. There are already 11 miles of permissive footpaths. Not surprisingly, Dennis's favourite plant is a tree – the rowan or mountain ash. 'According to myth it's the only tree left that still understands human speech. I speak to my trees, but they don't speak back,' he adds.

'I write poems about them instead.' **VB**
Photographs by Ben Quinton