

Background to South African Flora exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show in London

SA first exhibited at Chelsea in 1976

In 2019 SA won gold again at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in London – the 37th time in 43 years.

After an absence of four years SA flowers is once again set to take pride of place at the Chelsea Flower Show that opens on 21 May 2024 to the public.

South Africa winning gold at the Chelsea Flower Show in London has for very many years been a source of great pride for all South Africans. A former key sponsor, the South African Biodiversity Institute /Kirstenbosch Gardens, indicated in 2021 that it would no longer be involved.

A private sector-led initiative and team that includes Leon Kluge, winner of the last two gold medals, Keith Kirsten, Michael Lutzeyer and Marinda Nel past Chairman of the Botanical Society and project manager. The return of SA has been made possible with the support from private sponsors and donors.

It simultaneously creates the opportunity to highlight plants as “a source of joy and fulfilment, building healthier lives, stronger communities and thriving environments” as eloquently summarised by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). The importance of protecting and conserving our natural environments is also underscored.

Leon is an international floral artist and landscape designer, exhibiting and designing gardens around the world. In SA he hosts a tv show called “die groenste vingers” and “leon kluge plant safari’s”.

South Africa is home to the Cape Floral Kingdom, one of the six identified floristic kingdoms in the world. The Cape Floral Region is also inscribed as a UNESCO heritage site. Its land area represents less than 0,5% of the African continent and contains 20% of the continent’s flora. The density, endemism, and diversity of an estimated 9 000 plant species have made this region one of the world’s 35 biodiversity hotspots.

Under Leon’s direction the exhibit will showcase this diversity from the coastal sands to the rich fynbos found in different biomes of hills and mountains and cut flower hybrids which have originated from this biodiverse landscape.

Michael Lutzeyer. Over the last decade he has successfully merged a passionate enthusiasm for conservation with sound business principals in the development of Grootbos Private Nature Reserve. Grootbos Foundation an NPO and the Grootbos Florilegium followed.

Grootbos has **achieved** Global Ecosphere Retreats (GER)[®] status - excelling in the areas of conservation, community, culture and commerce and is a centre of excellence in sustainable business practices.

The Grootbos Foundation is a non-profit organisation, established in 2003 with the VISION of conserving the Cape Floral Kingdom and uplifting the communities therein by developing sustainable livelihoods through ecotourism, enterprise development, sports development and education.

The sustainable project models created are replicable and scalable in order to assist the communities that surround us, also those in other regions. Many of the projects generate their own income and/or are partially self-sustaining.

The Grootbos Florilegium was launched in November 2022. It is a unique collection of botanical illustrations by a collaboration of local and international artists. The collection depicts the rare, endangered and charismatic plants found on the Grootbos Nature Reserve and surrounding region.

What makes the artworks even more distinctive is the inclusion of insects, pollinators and other creatures associated with the respective plants. The collection pays homage to the environment's greater ecology, as art becomes an expression of the deep commitment to research and conservation that Grootbos has. These artworks are now housed in the Hannarie Wenhold botanical gallery.

Keith Kirsten, renowned horticultural specialist, has been referred to as the guru gardener of South Africa and has for many years organised annual tours to gardens in England, including **Highgrove** the private residence of Their Majesties The **King Charles III** and The Queen Camilla. The itinerary for the 2025 tour will be released at the end of February 2025.

Marinda Nel, former chairman of the Botanical Society and Kirstenbosch Branch, honed her skills in the business world at one of South Africa's leading blue-chip companies. Her expertise spans financial analysis, business development, the principles of good governance, and managing outcomes. However, it is her profound passion for indigenous plants and the preservation of our country's environment that has inspired her involvement in managing the return of our plants to Chelsea.

Cape Flora SA is a non-profit organisation that represents the South African cut-flower growers and exporters who bring the majestic Cape Flora feast into homes and businesses around the world. As an industry organisation, Cape Flora SA ensures that the splendour of these unique flower species add their distinctive beauty to any occasion in an environmentally conscious manner.

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More of the beautiful flora produced in South Africa can be seen on Cape Flora SA's website (www.capeflorasa.co.za).

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