RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2013

Design and plant highlights from the centenary show (sponsored by M&G Investments)

Photography: Neil Hepworth, Tim Sandall and Sarah Cuttle

"The centenary was marked in the Pavilion by several nurseries that exhibited in 1913. I imagine that the spirit of the Pavilion hasn’t changed in the 100 years of the show."

Stephen Bennett, RHS Shows Director

New plants

Streptocarpus ‘Blue Frills’
Blue double flowers of ruffled centre petals offset by cream, blue-veined outer lobes. Said to be easy to grow and flower. Bred by and available at £4 from Dibleys Nurseries, Denbighshire; 01978 790677.

Strawberry ‘Malling Centenary’
A heavy–cropping June bearer with sweet, glossy and uniform fruits. Named to celebrate 100 years of research at East Malling. £14.95 for 12 plugs from D.T.Brown; 0845 3710532.

Clematis Chelsea (Evipo100)
The compact habit of aptly named, soft pink C. Chelsea makes it ideal for small gardens; height and spread 60–90cm (2–3ft); flowers late spring until autumn. Plants cost £11.99 from Raymond Evison Clematis of Guernsey; 01481 245942.

Gaillardia ‘Fanfare Blaze’
Flowering April–September, this new perennial provides colour in beds, borders or containers. Plants are £6.50 from Hardy’s Cottage Garden Plants, Hampshire; 01256 896533.

Dutch nursery Warmenhoven took Gold and the Diamond Jubilee Award with its innovative hanging Hippeastrum.

‘RBC Blue Water Roof Garden’
Designed by Nigel Dunnett and The Landscape Agency, this innovative urban rooftop garden aimed to show the potential that roof gardens hold as places for planting and recreation, and to harvest rainwater. It also included many beneficial habitats for wildlife to foster increased biodiversity (sponsor: Royal Bank of Canada).

‘Trailfinders Australian Garden presented by Fleming’s’
Australian native plants were at the fore in this sustainably-focused urban garden, designed by Phil Johnson. Rainwater was harvested in a billabong, which doubled as a natural swimming pond, surrounded by lush vegetation (sponsors: Trailfinders, Fleming’s Nurseries, Victorian State Government, Philip Johnson Landscapes).
**Show details**

**New perspectives**

- The Homebase Garden
- A family garden by designer Adam Frost with a modular bed system for flowers, herbs and vegetables around apple and pear trees. Fresh green French beans, kale and peas contrasted with purple Iris sibirica and Tagetes (designers: Nicole de Vésian and Ulla Molin, this modern garden inspired by the work of 20th-century gardeners by Ulf Nordfjell included strong structural elements, with striking topiary forms and low travertine walls adding strong structural elements (sponsor: Champagne Laurent-Perrier).

- The Laurent-Perrin Garden
- Inspired by the work of 20th-century gardeners Nicole de Vésian and Ulla Molin, this modern garden included both English and French elements, with striking topiary forms and low travertine walls adding strong structural elements (sponsor: Champagne Laurent-Perrier).

- ‘The 9 Billion Conversation Garden’
  - What will the world be like in 2050 when the global human population is predicted to top 9 billion? This was the question posed by Ruth Willmott and Frederick Whyte. They used elements of this Fresh Garden to symbolise facets of humanity (sponsor: Willmott Whyte in association with Business in the Community).

- ‘The Homebase Garden’
  - “Sowing the Seeds of Change”
  - A family garden by designer Adam Frost with a modular bed system for flowers, herbs and vegetables around apple and pear trees. Fresh green French beans, kale and peas contrasted with purple Iris sibirica and Tagetes (sponsor: Homebase. In association with Alzheimer’s Society).

- ‘Herbert Smith Freehills Garden for WaterAid’
  - Inspired by the work of the charity WaterAid in India, this Artisan Garden evoked a small market garden in the subcontinent. Growing cut flowers, especially Tagetes and roses, to use in garlands, and was edged with bamboo, rubber plants and jasmine (designers: Patricia Theron & Janet Honour; sponsor: Herbert Smith Freehills LLP).

- ‘After the Fire’
  - An evocation of the power of plants to regenerate after a forest fire – a familiar concept to Provence-based designer James Basson, of Scape Design. Fire-adapted Mediterranean plants such as Arbutus surged forth under charred branches. Clumps of thyme nestled between seats formed from fired-clay boulders and surrounded by a charcoal mulch (Forest Research UK).

- Metal and water
  - Laser-cut metal panels were used as attractive bridges over narrow water channels in ‘The Homebase Garden’ (see p76). Nigel Dunnett used metal grating panels as see-through walkways alongside decking in the ‘RBC Blue Water Roof Garden’ (see p76). Yorkshire pride of place was manifested solid in ‘Le Jardin De Yorkshire’ at the front of the garden, the names of towns through which the 2014 Tour de France will pass (see overleaf) were cut out of steel panels submerged in a water trough.

- ‘Digital Capabilities’
  - Designers Pault and Tom Hartleet took an innovative approach to portraying internet activity in their Fresh Garden, using a series of panels that moved in response to ‘tweets’ mentioning the show. They opened to reveal glimpses of lush exotic planting behind (sponsor: University of Lincoln).

- Marc Quinn sculpture
  - This year, the Society worked with leading British artist Marc Quinn – famous for his botanically inspired work alongside more daring pieces – who donated this piece to help raise funds for the RHS Chelsea Centenary Appeal. Marc, who is a regular visitor to Chelsea, unveiled his sculpture The Rush of Nature at 10am on Monday 20 May. The 1.83m (6ft) Phalaenopsis orchid took six months to make, from a clay model to bronze, and finally 18 layers of paint, sanded back to reveal the subtle lines of the flower. It is, he said, ‘an X-ray of the energy of nature flowing through the plant. The Chelsea Centenary Appeal is a year-long initiative to raise £1 million to encourage more young people to get involved in horticulture, including funding for 15 apprenticeships.'

- ‘The 9 Billion Conversation Garden’
  - In association with Alzheimer’s Society.

- ‘The Homebase Garden’
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Bicycle wheels in red, white and blue, suspended in a typical landscape of the Dales, celebrated the fact Yorkshire will host the ‘Grand Départ’ (start) of the Tour de France in 2014. Sweeping beech and yew hedges rose above a meadow dotted with cowslips, cow parsley and a single Cypripedium calceolus (yellow lady’s slipper orchid), ‘grazed’ by wire sheep (design: Alistair W Baldwin Associates; sponsor: Welcome to Yorkshire).

The Arthritis Research UK Garden

This garden had a personal significance for designer Chris Beardshaw, himself an arthritis sufferer. He used shady woodland planting, a formal outdoor seating area and lushly planted borders to represent the various stages sufferers experience with arthritis, from lack of understanding following initial diagnosis through to learning to manage the condition (sponsor: Arthritis Research UK).

The SeeAbility Garden

Colourful planting and bold structures – such as these bright stainless steel spheres suspended to form a screen – highlighted the problems associated with loss of vision in this thought-provoking Show Garden (designer: Darren Hawkes; sponsor: Coutts).

The M&G Centenary Garden – “Windows Through Time”

Traditional and modern features and planting styles combined in this garden to reflect the changing fashions in gardening, using a wealth of shrubs mingling with softer grasses and perennials. A modern sculpture framed the view to Cornus kousa beside an oak summerhouse (design: Roger Platts; sponsor: M&G Investments).

An Alcove (Tokonoma) Garden

Water fell into a series of pools, the largest swirling below an immaculate representation of a traditional Japanese room. Designed by Kazuyuki Ishihara, the build and planting showed his customary incredible attention to detail (sponsors: Sekisui Hime Toka Co, HB-101, Jyutaro, Art grade, Cat’s Co, British Airways).

New plants

Tropaeolum Fruit Salad


Rosa The Lady Gardener (‘Ausbrass’)

Short/medium-sized Shrub rose. Delicate blooms scented of tea with hints of cedar; plants cost £37.99, available at the end of the year from David Austin Roses of Wolverhampton, 01902 376300.

Interesting orchids

Awarded at the show

Cymbidium Tiger Tail was given an RHS Award of Garden Merit when the RHS Orchid Committee met at Chelsea. A well-flowered plant (right) could be viewed on the Orchid Society of Great Britain stand.

Outdoor slippers

Jacques Amand displayed many slipper orchids for the garden, including hybrids, which are easier to grow than species. Cypripedium ‘Pink Blush’ (x sect VIII/C. kentuckiense x C. macranthos) is being sold in garden centres and nurseries.

Cut to shape

Ulf Nordfjell used blocks of yew to give a sense of movement throughout ‘The Laurent-Perrier Garden’ (see p79). Wedges of woven willow sat in a field of barley in ‘Stockton Drilling’s “As Nature Intended Garden” (design: Jamie Dunstan).

Christopher Bradley-Hole used foliage blocks to evoke the patchwork of fields and woods of Britain in ‘The Telegraph Garden’ (see also p78).

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