

# Floral celebration fit for a Queen

Brian Claridge looks back at the highlights of this year's Chelsea Flower Show

**T**HIS YEAR'S Chelsea Flower Show, joined in the celebrations of The Queen's 90th birthday with eye-catching floral arches at two of the entrances to the Showground.

The grand floral arch at the primary entrance was the creation of florist Shane Connolly, who holds a Royal Warrant of Appointment to The Prince of Wales and The Queen. He created a beautiful floral arch using British blooms donated by UK growers and the arch was installed with the help of design students from several UK colleges.

As the Royal florist responsible for directing the horticultural elements at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Shane is no stranger to Royal floral design and welcomed the challenge.

Says Shane: "I was honoured and delighted to be asked to design the main archway to celebrate The Queen's Birthday and wanted it to showcase the beauty and range of British grown plants and flowers and the skills of the British flower and plant growers. Having UK students of floral design to help install it was the icing on the cake."

A photographic exhibition of The Queen, a regular visitor to Chelsea for more than half a century, was held at the show and

## Chelsea Facts

- 165,000 visitors visit the show every year
- There are more than 100 exhibits in the Great Pavilion, predominantly from nurseries and florists, and around 270 trade stands
- It takes 800 people 33 days to build the show from bare grass to the finished article
- The Great Pavilion is more than the size of two football pitches with enough room to park 500 London buses
- At last year's show, visitors consumed 7720 glasses of Pimms, 28,447 cakes, pastries and biscuits, 10,823 glasses of champagne and 64,144 hot drinks.

the celebrations continued in the Great Pavilion, where several exhibitors tailored elements of their floral displays to mark Her Majesty's milestone year.

One of the highlights of this year's show was a display of 5000 handmade crocheted poppies that covered the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea in a blaze of red. Creators of the Poppies Project, Lynn Berry and Margaret Knight, initially set out to crochet 120 poppies to honour their fathers, who both fought in the Second World War, however, their work escalated into well over quarter of a million poppies with help from contributors all over the world. The individually hand-knitted and crocheted poppies inspired designer, Philip Johnson, and the display served as a poignant commemoration of the centenary of the First World War.

There was plenty to see at RHS Chelsea, with 17 show gardens, seven fresh gardens and six artisan gardens, encompassing different cultures and landscapes. With carefully choreographed precision grassy plots were transformed into spectacular gardens in a matter of weeks.



## The show gardens

All the show gardens at Chelsea were crafted with skill and precision by teams of highly experienced landscapers, contractors and nurserymen under the watchful eye of garden designers. Here are just a few of them:

**God's Own County - A Garden for Yorkshire** (above) by designer, Matthew Wilson, showcased the county's wealth of scenery, iconic heritage, deep-rooted industries and skilled tradespeople. Inspired by the medieval Great East Window at York Minster, which is nearing the end of a ten-year restoration, the garden featured a beautiful stained glass panel made using the same methods employed in 1405.

Despite its ancient inspiration, the garden mixed old and new, with state of the art technology in the construction of the garden building alongside 600 years of living history from York glaziers and stonemasons. The planting on the upper level of the garden celebrated the woodland gardens in the county, while the central perennial planting was inspired by, and designed to echo the stained glass at the Minster.

The M&G Garden was designed by eight times RHS Gold medal winner, Cleve West, who was inspired by his memories of ancient oak woodland in Exmoor National Park where he spent his teenage youth. Rather than replicate a particular scene, he chose to pay contemporary homage to the landscape that made such an early impression on him. The garden featured a stone and gravel path through woodland-edge planting with a sunken terrace and pool.

The Harrods British Eccentrics Garden was a beautiful English country garden, with spring-flowering perennials, ferns, roses, evergreen topiary, an octagonal folly and sunken Italianate pond, but designer Diarmuid Gavin had a few surprises in store for visitors. Every 15 minutes, the conical bay trees began to twirl, the roof of the tower popped open, the flower borders spun round the folly, the window boxes rose up and down, and mechanical shears appeared to trim the topiary.

The garden was inspired by cartoonist and illustrator, William Heath Robinson, who was well-known for his cartoons and inventions and Diarmuid's somewhat theatrical garden was certainly a talking point at Chelsea.

## Greening Grey Britain

The RHS Greening Grey Britain campaign was launched last year in response to the worrying trend of paving over front gardens.

The growth of grey space, and decline of green, aggravates a range of environmental challenges, while the domination of grey, hard surfaces has been shown to have a negative impact on our health and wellbeing.

The RHS teamed-up with award-winning designer Ann-Marie Powell to champion the health and well-being benefits of horticulture. Ann-Marie's garden at this year's Chelsea celebrated the wide range of plants that gardeners can use to promote health and happiness. Her garden included cacti, fruit and vegetables, wildflowers, fruit trees, herbs, a bug house, a kitchen garden, a compost bin, hanging baskets, house-plants, seedlings, and many other items.



Brendan Cole and wife Zoe



Alan Titchmarsh and Kelly Hoppen, Esther Rantzen



## Artisan gardens

Set side by side in the Artisan area, this category demonstrated traditional designs, materials and methods. Here are a couple of the gardens at the show:

**Senri-Sentei-Garage Garden** Designed by Kazuyuki Ishihara, this garden was for car enthusiasts, with planting designed to complement the vehicle. Planned as a two-tier structure, the ground floor offers essential off-road space for a car, but also a place for the family to relax. The rooftop tier was planted as a garden, which fuses its form with that of the vehicle, though it can be enjoyed as much by families without a car.

**Papworth Trust - Together We Can** The Papworth Trust disability charity found inspiration for its garden whilst working on the I Can campaign with profoundly deaf solo percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie. A water marimba

generated the garden's acoustic pulse, harnessing natural materials of water, sun, wood, earth, and so the garden, designed by Peter Eustance, becomes a musical instrument.

The garden's backdrop was a natural woodland copse of birch and hazel, strikingly interwoven with features that evoke the equipment of a recording studio, whilst in the foreground, water cascaded from the pool.





## Fresh gardens

The Fresh category contains smaller plots, but no less carefully crafted than the larger Show Gardens. Among the exhibits were:

### Urban Connections

**Gardens** This garden, designed by award-winning duo Lee Bestall and Paul Robinson, addressed the growing problem of loneliness amongst older people and complemented the RHS initiative Greening Grey Britain (see p83). Their innovative garden design highlighted the power of green spaces in urban areas where people can meet and socialise. Following Chelsea, the garden is being relocated to Victoria, subject to planning permission, to create three new small public gardens for residents and visitors to enjoy.

**The Imperial Garden - Revive** explored the complex relationships between Russia, Ukraine and the UK. The garden, designed by Tatyana Goltsova, considers what could happen if politics were removed from the world. Central to the garden is the symbolic theme of lace, which weaves its way through to bring a unifying harmony to the two sides of the garden.



Some of the many sights that visitors could enjoy at this year's show including, below, the Imperial Garden and, below inset, Chelsea Pensioners enjoying Urban Connections



## Great Pavilion

The floral displays in the Great Pavilion were colourful as always and a number of the exhibits were designed to celebrate the Queen's birthday. One of the outstanding displays was a ten-foot floral portrait of the Queen's head by leading designer, Ming Veevers Carter. The exhibit marked the debut of New Covent Garden Flower Market, which has for decades provided plants for Chelsea's designers. The exhibit featured 10,000 flowers, including roses, carnations, chrysanthemums, lilies, hyacinths, freesias, gerberas, gladioli, clematis and sweet peas and it took a team of 35 people six months to create.

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge were at the show to admire the Princess Charlotte chrysanthemum named after their daughter and it was their first visit to Chelsea. The Royal party also included the Duke of Edinburgh, Princess Anne, Prince Harry, Prince Andrew, Princess Beatrice and Princess Eugenie.

Celebrities were out in force on the Press Day, among them Rupert Murdoch and Jerry Hall, Twiggy, Dame Judi Dench, Mary Berry, Alan Titchmarsh, Kelly Hoppen, Rob Brydon, Ben Fogle, Brendan Cole, Sue Holderness and Esther Rantzen.

### Find out more

■ For information about next year's event and other RHS shows, contact the Royal Horticultural Society on 020 3176 5800, website: ([www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)).



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