

RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2007

Friday 25th May

My passion for gardening has developed slowly over several decades and finally led me (along with Alan, my willing partner in passion) to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, the most prestigious, the most innovative, the most expensive ... but it wasn't too bad (£40 admission each) as we found rather a good deal with Plymouth City Coach.

And so it came to pass that we stood poised at the entrance of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, venue of the 84th RHS Chelsea Flower Show (the first one having been held in 1913). We were poised because we had to have our bags checked, but nothing suspect was discovered and suddenly there we were, inside and ready for action, complete with a £5 catalogue.



Poised for the bliss!

One of the first things I noticed was actually a notice reminding people that it was a hot day (yes, a hot day in England in May) and therefore to take care. It was already crowded at 10.30 in the morning, but the excitement was tangible and it was a good job we'd bought the catalogue with its showground guide and map, as otherwise we wouldn't have had a clue where to look first.

The show gardens beckoned us and I found it quite a buzz to see in reality the gardens I'd seen tantalising parts of on television over the last few days. Even the names seemed evocative – *Scent of a Roman*, *The Fortnum and Mason Garden*, *Fleming's* and *Trailfinders Australian Garden*, *The Fetzer Sustainable Winery Garden*, *Through the Moongate*, *The Laurent-Perrier Garden* – to name but a few.



**Laurent-Perrier Garden
Designer Jinny Blom - Gold**



Fetzer Sustainable Winery Garden
Designer Kate Frey – Gold

It soon became apparent, though, that the crowds made it difficult to see the gardens as a whole. There was a lot of opportunistic shuffling of people into every available space and sometimes one just had to be very patient. I began to realise that my old film camera was well out of date, as I saw people all around me holding out their digital cameras to take a photo easily, whereas I had to wait until there was a reasonable space in the crowd. I knew there and then that a digital camera had high priority on my wish list.



Through the Moongate
Designer Lesley Bremness – Bronze



The Bradstone Garden
Designer Sarah Eberl – Gold



Tribute to Linnaeus Garden
Designer Ulf Nordfjell – Gold

It became increasingly hot and crowded as the morning wore on and I did wonder if the fairly frequent sirens I could hear in the background were ambulances rushing to the Chelsea Flower Show (although there was naturally First Aid available). Although we had taken a bottle of

water with us, we decided to sit down at one of the refreshment areas for a drink and something light to eat.

That turned out to be easier said than done - this time there was a lot of opportunistic grabbing of seats the second anyone stood up! Somehow Alan managed to procure two chairs at a shared table for four and we enjoyed a chilled drink and some cool fresh fruit salad. My feet were beginning to be quite sore, as I had foolishly decided to wear some sandals that I thought were a bit more stylish than my trusty Merrell sandals - but how I was longing for my trusty Merrell sandals by the end of the day!



Marshalls' Sustainability Garden
Designer Scenic Blue - Silver



The Outdoor Room - Cancer Research UK Garden
Designer Andy Sturgeon - Gold

Before we'd arrived at the show, I'd been interested to see what people would wear, imagining all sorts of finery and even a smattering of hats complete with their own integral miniature garden, but most people looked completely 'normal' - your average range of the modern person in smart casuals. I expect it's a different story on the special days before the general public are allowed in...



Lloyds TSB Garden
Designer Trevor Tooth - Bronze

I'd also wondered whether there would be any sightings of the 'famous gardeners' wandering

around knowledgeably and expansively, like they seem to do when being filmed for the television show. I was a little disappointed that not one of them seemed to coincide with where we were at any given time.

I always wonder how convenient the conveniences will be at any huge gathering and it was time to find out. I entered with slight trepidation, but there was no time to trepitate, as we were all herded through the system like sheep through a sheep dip! In fact, to be honest, I fancied the herders had an Australian accent! Once relieved, it was along to the communal hand washing area and out into the bright sunshine again, dazed and disoriented, while trying to regain that certain Chelsea Flower Show air of refined gentility.

After consulting the guide once more, we allowed ourselves to be carried along on a tide of humanity into the Great Pavilion. It was indeed great to be a little cooler in there (but just as crowded!) We spent an enjoyable time wandering around, admiring all the exhibits – truly inspiring.



One of the inspiring displays...



...and a very striking one



**Garden of Clouds City Garden
Designer Kazuyuki Ishihara – Gold**

Having cooled down a little, we spent the next hour or two (time became distorted!) viewing the Chic Gardens, the City Gardens, the Courtyard Gardens and the Roof Gardens. The

gardens were wonderful, it was the crowds that became almost unmanageable. At times, trying to walk to the next garden, we were literally at a standstill. As a small person with sore feet, this was particularly trying! To be honest, it spoilt the whole experience for me. To be honest again, I felt very bad when I bumped into a Chelsea Pensioner in full regalia and hope he heard my "Sorry!" as I was carried further along by the crowd.

However, it was a little better walking along the Royal Hospital Way and the Pavilion Way, where there were many exhibitors of all kinds of garden and gardening accoutrements. We even splashed out – we bought some solar garden lights!

A little flushed with this success (and the unremitting sunshine) we headed back to where we had seen the Pimm's for sale. Then it happened – I saw Chris Beardshaw, standing in his show garden, talking very knowledgeably and expansively to some of the public. Somehow, that added something very vital to the day and gladdened my heart, if not my feet.

We finally made it to the Pimm's stand and found it was a little on the pricey side, but it was so utterly welcome! To escape the heat of the day, we went to stand in the entrance of the Great Pavilion again, sipping the fruity nectar – those were a good few moments indeed!

Thus our first Chelsea Flower Show experience ended on a high note, as we left the Chelsea Royal Hospital and went outside to battle with the crowds of coach catchers. We'd done it – we were no longer Chelsea Flower Show virgins! This gardener's rite of passage had been a bit of an eye opener, but I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I am resolved to go again with my digital camera, my RHS membership for privileged entry and reduced rate and my lovely, comfortable, Merrell sandals!



The iconic Chetwoods Garden
Designers Laurie Chetwood & Patrick Collins – Gold



A Garden in Time
Cardiff City Council – Silver Gilt