

A showcase for stone in hard landscaping

The Royal Horticultural Society's flower show at Chelsea has become a showcase for the innovative and exciting use of stone in hard landscaping. *NSS* went along to this year's show.

The world's most famous flower show, at Chelsea in London, has gardens by internationally acclaimed designers whose hard landscaping of choice is natural stone.

The stone appears in various guises – as paving, setts, cobbles, walling, blocks, masonry, sculpture, ornaments, lettered plaques... almost any variation you can think of.

There is almost as much variety in stone and the way it is used at Chelsea these days as there is in the plants. To recognise that, the prize categories at Chelsea this year (24-28 May) included, for the first time, an award for the best garden construction.

It was won by Swatton Landscape for Cleve West's M&G Garden, which is pictured below. Stonemason and dry stone waller Max Knowle, who often works with Sharon and Steven Swatton, played his part in the construction of the hard landscaping, which is substantially Forest of Dean sandstone.

The M&G Garden combined the formal and informal, something that was seen in

many of the show gardens at Chelsea this year, with a naturalism often preferred, sometimes even to the point of being quite barren. The informality of dry stone walling was to be seen in many of the designs. And with Adrian Gray exhibiting his extraordinary skills of stone balancing (pictured at the bottom), we might say that appearing in the show gardens in the future.

Running water also plays a major role in many of the gardens and, of course, water



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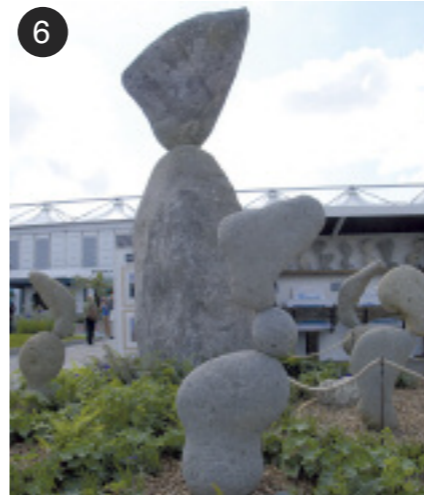
1) Chelsea Barracks garden from neighbours of Chelsea Hospital. 2) In the St John's Hospice garden a fountain in Portland Roach. 3 & 4) Two aspects of the M&G Garden with its Forest of Dean sandstone, which won the newly introduced Best Garden Construction Award for Swatton Landscape. 5) James Parker displayed his garden sculptures created from Welsh slate. 6) Adrian Gray displayed his Cornish granite stone balancing.



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With Antithesis of Sarcophagi are (left to right) Stephen Pike, owner of The Marble & Granite Centre, who supplied the block of granite, Martin Cook and Gary Breeze, who designed the alphabet for the inscription.



The pictures above and right show aspects of Antithesis of Sarcophagi by artist-lettercutters Martin Cook and Gary Breeze. The entry gained a lot of interest and those seen looking at it here are (on the left) TV and radio presenter Jo Wiley, who was recording a piece for television; (in the middle) Anita Rani, a radio and television presenter and journalist, looking through one of the holes at the garden inside the block of granite as Martin Cook explains the concept to her; (and right) Charlie Boorman, a presenter, travel writer and actor known for his enthusiasm for motorbikes, which is why he was in a wheelchair (temporarily) at Chelsea as a result of having fallen off one. Antithesis of Sarcophagi was sponsored by stone wholesaler The Marble & Granite Centre, which also supplied the Lapitec sintered stone for the Modern Slavery garden (on the left) and the Solus Decor Fire & Water stand (below).



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features are often created using stone.

The most novel exhibit was The Anthesis of Sarcophogi, designed by artist-lettercutters Martin Cook and Gary Breeze and sponsored by stone wholesaler the Marble & Granite Centre, which supplied the huge cube of Portuguese granite that hid the plants inside it. The garden won the Best Fresh Garden Award and a Gold Medal.

The granite cube was quarried as a 44tonne solid block. The middle was removed with a wire saw, leaving walls 200mm thick, into which have been drilled holes to peer through in order to be able to see the lush growth inside, contrasting with the barren gravel and burnt oak fence on the outside.

On one wall on the outside is an inscription that nobody will be able to read because it is written in a 24 character



Above. The Meningitis garden included dry stone walling by triple Pinnacle Award winner Andrew Loudon. The two walls represent the disease that sufferers have to find a way through, and recovery from the disease. A carved stone tableau set in the back wall depicts the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius, and his five daughters. The dramatic wooden sculptures are of real people, including Paralympian cyclist Lauren Booth. They represent lives changed, lost and altered.

Left. The Yorkshire garden inspired by the medieval Great East Window at York Minster, which is nearing the end of a 10-year restoration, including repairs to the 300 individual pieces of stone from which it is constructed (see the NSS report on the masons' contribution to the work at bit.ly/York-window). The garden features a 5m x 3m panel of stained glass made using the same methods employed in 1405 at the Minster and, inevitably, Yorkstone (Moselden from Marshalls).

Below. There was Portuguese sandstone paving in The Telegraph garden with boulders from Purbeck. At least 10 different skills and crafts were represented in the garden, including architectural ironwork, sculptors, stonemasons, nurserymen, landscape contractors, concrete artists, ceramicists and metal fabricators.



alphabet created by Gary Breeze.

The Marble & Granite Centre also gained more distinction at Chelsea thanks to the Lapitec sintered stone it distributes exclusively in the UK.

The sintered stone was an integral part of Juliet Sargeant's The Modern Slavery Garden, which won the People's Choice Award for the best Fresh Garden and a Gold Medal. Lapitec also featured on fire pit specialist Solus Décor's trade stand. In both cases, the Lapitec was fabricated by The Marble & Granite Centre customer, London Stone.

Juliet Sargeant selected Lapitec as flooring in her Modern Slavery Garden, which drew attention to the 13,000 victims believed to be in slavery currently in the UK. Juliet used dark grey Lapitec Antracite stone in two different finishes in the heart of her garden – its 'dark centre' – which hints at slavery in a 'normal' UK street happening behind closed doors.

Another novel idea was in the Meningitis



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garden, designed by John Everiss, with wood carvings of actual people, including Paralympian cyclist Lauren Booth. The Cotswold stone dry stone walls were built by Andrew Loudon, who has the distinction of having been awarded three Pinnacle Awards for excellence from the Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA). The DSWA does not present Pinnacle Awards lightly – it has awarded only 12 of them since they were initiated in 1994.

One entry where it would have been strange if stone had not been used was the Yorkshire garden, from a county almost defined by its Yorkstone, which the garden duly had. It was Moselden from Marshalls, matching the stone seen around York Minster. Marshalls also supplied the Aluri limestone on the floor of the building and 150m² of sawn Indian sandstone paving for the 'Fresh' garden area.

There were some unusual additions to some of the gardens – a Mini car in the



1 & 2) Contrasting uses of stone in the L'Occitane garden and the Mindful Living garden.

3) Hospital Bed, with stone paving supplied by Lapidica.

4) The Brewin Dolphin garden included some interesting variations of gabion walling.

5) There are many trade stands at Chelsea Flower Show. This one displays the work of Paul Vanstone. After graduating from the Royal College of Art in 1993 Paul went to work in Italy at traditional marble carving studios in Carrara. He has also spent time working in Berlin, travelling to Rajasthan to learn India's marble carving techniques and was an assistant to British sculptor Anish Kapoor.

Senri-Sentei garage garden, for example, and a hospital bed.

The hospital bed was in a garden called The Garden Bed created in partnership with the Asda grocery chain by Stephen Welch and Alison Doxey. It featured natural stone paving from stone company Lapidica, forming a backdrop for the powerful narrative of

The Garden Bed, which truly reflected the theme of this year's Chelsea Show: Health, Happiness and Horticulture'. The stand had a hospice bed, connecting the patient directly with nature and the emotional benefits of a lushly planted garden sanctuary.

Luxury stone expert Lapidica has worked with Stephen Welch for many years, providing stone surfaces and statuary for his garden designs, and was delighted to be invited to participate in this show garden, supplying limestone laid inside the stand and reclaimed York Stone forming the exterior terrace. ■