

NORTHERN SIGHTS

The very first RHS Chatsworth Flower Show was launched in June in Derbyshire with a remit of creativity and design innovation – but did it succeed?



Photographs: John Campbell

Part of the Freeform installation
'Pic 'N' Mix' by Heywood & Condie

The inaugural RHS Chatsworth Flower Show in early June was based on the theme 'Design Revolutionaries', intending to focus on those who push the boundaries. To reference this, a new garden category was launched – the Freeform category. These unjudged installations were open to any interpretation and could be any size and shape the designer wanted. There were also a series of show gardens, as well as artworks and installations, including the inflatable 'Great Conservatory' and a series of wind sculptures by Andrew Lee in front of Chatsworth House (below), which made the most of the blustery conditions.

The event did not get off to the most auspicious start, with terrible weather calling a halt to Press Day, and difficulties with traffic and parking. "After the extreme weather caused traffic problems on the first day, we put extra measures in place to ensure that traffic moved well for the rest of the show," explains Hannah Dolby of the RHS. "We also put extra resource into managing queues at the gates, which became too long on the second day. We will certainly embrace all feedback on the show in its inaugural year, and will take it into account in our planning for next year. Beyond these issues, feedback on the show has been overwhelmingly positive."

Indeed, despite the problems, visitors who did make it to the event were impressed with displays and the unbeatable setting in the grounds of one of the country's most admired historic estates and houses, on the banks of the river and framed by majestic trees and gently rolling hills.

We asked a variety of industry people what they made of the new great Northern show.



Photo: RHS



Curves & Cube installation

01 CLIVE NICHOLS
Garden photographer



"I LOVE TAKING graphic photos of sculpture, and liked David Harber's striking broken cube, in the Freeform garden 'Curves & Cube', created with Gaze Burvill. Made from oxidized steel and featuring a filigree of organic patterns that mimic foliage, it was very photogenic when viewed from close up and far away. It looked particularly powerful and striking against a backdrop of sky and clouds."

02 ARIT ANDERSON
Pre-Registered SGD Member



"I THINK THAT as an inaugural show, RHS Chatsworth demonstrated design evolution and no doubt as each year goes by we will see more revolution come through. Newer, younger designers will have the opportunity to take the helm. I loved the fluidity of Jo Thompson's garden. The curves and soft, meadow-style planting complemented the movement of the river close by. The clever use of rebar really worked as a 'barely there' boundary, but its industrial finish made the space contemporary."

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Jo Thompson MSGD's Freeform Brewin Dolphin Garden



Corten steel walls in the IQ Quarry Garden

03 JO THOMPSON MSGD
Designer



"I LOVED PAUL Hervey-Brookes' IQ Quarry Garden, especially the amazing rear wall with bold, beautiful panels." The walls

were in fact an artwork called 'Passing Light', commissioned specially for the garden, and designed by Stroud-based artist Ann-Margreth Bohl. Made of Corten steel, it was treated by the artist by hand on site at Chatsworth to create the distressed effect using hydrogen peroxide, salt and acid. The piece is concerned with the movement of light through a solid structure.

04 SARAH JARMAN AND ANNA MURPHY
Pre-Registered SGD Members



"THE 14M-HIGH inflatable Great Conservatory and its dripping moss installation by Cityscapes' Darryl Moore and Adolfo

Harrison MSGD, complete with glitter ball, was a brave and exciting exhibit at the show. Information boards and tropical-planted beds illustrated and educated about the Victorian head gardener of Chatsworth, Joseph Paxton, and his work. The central installation was arresting, a moss-covered frame with misting sprays that dripped water into a pool below. We even saw an older gentleman tapping his foot to the subtle soundscape that played in the background. There was definitely a feeling of awe and wonder in there."



The 'Heart of Glass' installation in the 'bouncy castle'

05 DARRYL MOORE Cityscapes



"I ENJOYED HEYWOOD & Condie's installation 'Pic 'n' Mix'. It was a large work commenting on the relationship between nature and

culture, and in particular critiquing conspicuous consumption. It asked the visitor to put in more effort than they would with a show garden to understand it, but allowed for different levels of reward. Garden designers could learn a lot from it about how space, objects and relationships can be deployed in a design. The most surprising aspect was when, during build up, I looked across the river and saw a dead horse lying on the grass. I did a double take, even though I had seen this life-size synthetic model in a previous installation. It added a determinedly political aspect to the work (something that is generally absent from garden discourse), but was deemed too subversive and had to be removed!"

Photo: Heywood & Condie



Pic 'n' Mix: A Garden Grottesque for 2017



Pre-Registered SGD Member Sam Ovens won Gold for his Wedgwood Garden

06 PAULA MCWATERS Gardening editor, *Country Living*



"THE RHS SHOWS DIRECTOR Nick Mattingley promised that RHS Chatsworth would be 'playful and fun', and I did think that came across, from the silver and gold cow sculptures on Lee Bestall MSGD's Peak District garden to the weird and frankly rather disturbing sculptures in Heywood & Condie's 'Pic 'n' Mix' installations. Some designers responded magnificently to this stunning landscape setting, particularly Jo Thompson with her

sinuous lines of naturalistic riverside planting in the Brewin Dolphin garden. But my favourite was Sam Ovens' Wedgwood Garden – especially the romantic and inviting informal path hidden towards the back."

5 THINGS WE LEARNED AT RHS CHATSWORTH



01 Quarry gardens are in A Gold and Best in Show for the M&G Garden at Chelsea by James Basson MSGD, based on a Maltese quarry, was quickly followed by a Gold and Best in Show for Paul Hervey-Brookes for his IQ Quarry Garden at Chatsworth.

As quarries are now officially a trend, your clients will be requesting you recreate one in their suburban backyards.



Photo: RHS

02 Rain + wind = flower show chaos

There were days of rain during build-up, followed by a Press Day so windy the Great Conservatory and pavilions and then the showground had to be closed for health and safety reasons, so it wasn't a surprise the car parking areas

were quagmires. The RHS couldn't do anything about the weather, but visitors who got stuck in three-hour traffic jams getting in and out of the show, and those who didn't make it at all, were vocal about organisational issues on social media. The ducks were pretty happy though.



03 People like it traditional

Just like at Chelsea, the People's Choice of Show Garden went to a more 'traditional' style of garden, Pre-Registered Member Butter Wakefield's Belmond Enchanted Gardens, which featured a romantic spiral staircase, wildflower planting and extraordinary willow fencing with chunky wreaths made by craftsman Jay Davey, inspired by similar ones at Belmond Le Manoir.



04 Cow tipping is not funny

Spare a thought for Lee Bestall MSGD, who was not a-moo-sed at having to pick up and hose off his wind-fallen cow statues on his Experience Peak District & Derbyshire Garden, which endured the worst ravages of the bad weather. There was huge appreciation across the show at the effort it took to get the gardens finished in such dreadful conditions.



05 It's all a bit of fun

Chatsworth was meant to be more edgy and creative than a typical RHS show, and it certainly succeeded in being more fun, from big hands to dinosaur skulls, floral bridges and disco balls to well-dressing and the 'bouncy castle'. If the show can continue to capture and build on this tongue-in-cheek vibe it will succeed in having its own tangible personality and direction. ○