

LANDSCAPES: Gardens of peace

By YVONNE YOONG

Gather twelve of the world's top landscape designers together in Nagasaki, Japan for two weeks, dispense a common theme for World Peace focused on "Peace and Restoration" for them to build show gardens within a 100 sq m (1,076 sq ft) radius plot each and get them to source for their plants from nurseries within miles of the surrounding vicinity according to their respective interpretations in ten days and what do you get at day's end?

Picturesque postcard-perfect gardens teeming with winning designs and concepts to boot – each unique according to the different designs meted out by some of the world's most accomplished and seasoned landscape designers.

At the flourishing finish of the Gardening World Cup 2012, akin to the Oscars for show gardens, it was evident that all the creations left their indelible imprint for World Peace. Unfazed by the strict limitation of budget, timeline and barriers in communicating in the Japanese language – albeit aided by the help of a translator, the landscape designers bravely rose to the challenge unfolding at Huis Ten Bosch, the unique location of last year's competition.

Considering the World Peace theme, it transported the contestants to a place that bears a striking reproduction of the residence of the Dutch Royal Family's palace with parterres, tunnels and fountains, even windmills and canals fashioned in the style of a 17th century Dutch town dotting the picturesque site.

Competing for World Peace Huis Ten Bosch is historically relevant to the theme for World Peace as during the time of the Shogun rule, the whole of Japan was sealed off to outsiders save for Nagasaki being the only port open to international trade where Dutch traders were seen arriving in the 17th century.

Also woven into its drastic twentieth century story when the city situated on the west coast of Kyushu island was bombed in 1945, this site, steeped in poignant history was aptly chosen to incorporate the theme of World Peace on the good soil of the Gardening World Cup 2012.

The Gardening World Cup, also dubbed the Japanese Chelsea Flower Show has gained itself a live global following in the hearts of gardening enthusiasts and fans the world over for its unique festival focused on "Flowers and World Peace".

The highlight of the event is the spectacular end result, showcasing the best efforts and concepts by a hand-picked selection of arguably some of the best landscape design talents from around the world. Following in the tradition of pitting some of the world's most accomplished international talents against

each other to achieve the best result, previous alumni include gardening giants such as Andy Sturgeon and Sarah Eberle.

Continuing a legacy of excellence

Last year's event marked the third in a consecutive annual series of the ultimate garden design challenge that attracted prominent landscape designers from countries across the world including UK, USA, France, Italy, Spain, New Zealand, South Africa, South Korea, Japan and Malaysia.

"The standard is incredibly high. There are leading designers here, all at the top of their game competing for the awards," acknowledges Malaysia's very own Lim In Chong who is mostly known as Inch. Inch was bestowed with the Best in Show Award at the Gardening World Cup 2012 for his entry entitled "Eye to Eye" (NST RED: 8 February 2013).

Bob Sweet, head of judging for Britain's Royal Horticultural Society which is responsible for organising the Chelsea Flower Show who was convener of the judges in Japan had proclaimed that the gardens would have been in the running for Gold Medals at Chelsea.

At the event, he also acknowledged the huge leap in standards based on when he first helped judge the first Gardening World Cup three years ago.

Golden garden gems

The Gardening World Cup 2012 in Japan yielded its magic this year, garnering some bespoke entries befitting the theme. Given the stringent deadline of ten days to fashion the show gardens from thin air, the end results were spectacular.

Five Gold Medals were awarded at the Gardening World Cup 2012 for the best of the show gardens. Each of the entries were in their own different way, interpreted aptly with the peace theme resonating creativity, originality and intelligence — from a journey of war to peace, the path of a bullet transformed into a picturesque garden creation, to the ruins of Japanese castles of old; they all had something profound to express.

The Gold Medal winners were Malaysia's Lim In Chong for "Eye to Eye", James Basson representing France with his entry "Dulce et Decorum Est", Xanthe White of New Zealand for her show garden entitled "Regenerating through water, a garden for World Peace" as well as Japan's Kazuyuki Ishihara who took the Best in Show for Artisan Gardens at Chelsea this year for "An Alcove Garden" and Hiromu Terashita for his show garden entitled "Forest that Nurtures the Seeding Of Peace".

Gold Medal Winners for Gardening World Cup 2012 in Nagasaki, Japan Best in Show Award (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan Award) & Gold Medal – Lim In Chong (Malaysia) for "Eye to Eye"

Taking one on an aesthetic adventure coupled with some navigation through a barren plot leading to a mini Mediterranean paradise-like garden bursting into view with blooms as ubiquitous as English roses to the most exquisite varieties of flowers on display, Lim In Chong or Inch of Inchscape's entry proudly brought its fair share of attention to Malaysia by his securing the Best in Show Award which is the overall accolade bestowed on the best show garden at the Gardening World Cup 2012 — an accomplishment certainly not to be taken lightly.

Attention and care were obviously lavished on his "Eye to Eye" show garden.

The arid, dry and barren outer area denoting a place at war with itself when people do not see eye to eye with each other was juxtaposed against a gorgeous mini paradise of a garden.

Proving to be the master of strong concepts, Inch had also won the Gold Medal Award, Best Interpretation of Theme and the Mayor's Award for his "Gardens of Peace, Faith and Hope" in 2011.

"I designed 'Eye to Eye' to exemplify getting through the crisis and leaving hardship at one side of the dry garden and arriving at paradise when people see eye to eye," he elaborates on how his decision came about to design two gardens — one barren while the other would exemplify a thriving garden full of water which is a source of life and plants, and juxtapose them against each other.

"I visualised this journey from war to peace to be about how to see things from another person's perspective. If we can see eye to eye, there would be a lot more peace in the world. Interestingly, the word paradise comes from a Persian word that means a wall garden."

"There are three non-movable screens with 'eyes'. When they are not in line, you cannot see the courtyard garden, much less journey to it. On the other hand, when the eyes are in line, you can see right through to paradise by walking right into heaven on earth obtained through the instrument of peace."

His Mediterranean-themed garden with a courtyard and a bubbling starshaped spring that almost seems alive and happy finding itself in wonderful company surrounded by roses, chocolate cosmos and exotic dancing plumes like *Persicaria orientalis* is contrasted against the blue-and-white tiled floor.

Jury's Citation: The garden told the story of a war torn area where there were no plants, only shards of metal from shrapnel.

But standing in this area and looking through 'the eye,' a mirrored panel is pulled back to reveal a beautiful garden planted with roses, herbaceous plants and four enormous *Washingtonia* palms. The garden inside the 'conservatory' is a true garden with immense beauty, including glazed flooring tiles which further emulate the conservatory feel. Large screens on the side allow the visitor to look through and enjoy this garden. The brief has been cleverly interpreted. The choice of materials including the rusty chards, the rocks, the design of the conservatory and the plants clearly made this the unanimous winner.

Peace and Flowers Award and Gold Medal – James Basson (France) for "Dulce et Decorum est"

British designer James Basson who represented France where he resides captivated the crowd with his show garden entry entitled "Dulce et Decorum Est". Literally translated to mean "How sweet and fitting", this poem written by Wilfred Owen in 1917, a famous poet of the World War I, detailed his description of the horrors of war.

Ironically, the title, inspired by the original quote from one of the "Odes" of Horace, the ancient Roman poet with the Latin motto "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" which means "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country" was intended to convey to the ill-informed civilians then who perceived war as noble, as to the actual horrors of battle. British poet Owen, himself thrust into the thick of battle and the reality of war fighting in the trenches of France used it to describe the futility of war, calling it "the old lie".

Receiving a Gold Medal for his entry, Basson was also bestowed the Peace and Flowers Award (Special Nagasaki Governor's Award) for the best interpretation of theme.

His thought-provoking conceptual interpretation of an apartment in Gaza pierced by a bullet is represented by the idea of a gaping hole ripping through three layers of concrete slab walls, leaving in its wake the image of the devastation of war.

The depiction of a bullet ripping through the concrete walls of the show garden inspired by a photo of a missile-torn apartment in Gaza expands on the theme to show “how right and fitting it is that nature reclaims and makes beautiful what man has destroyed” with the semblance of a peaceful garden area created out of a derelict living space.

“We maintained the screens denoting the rooms and the partition of the lounge and dining areas in keeping with the house that was once there. The higher plants are used to create intimate ‘rooms’ within the garden whilst the lower plants are for colour and to coax nature back into the space. One has to step over the water to enter the garden which creates a slight sense of trepidation but once inside, the water adds to the calm surroundings,” states Basson.

The symbolic recreation of three rooms that have been blasted through echoes with the natural beauty evading the “damaged space” expounding fully on the idea can Mother Nature can return and “make something beautiful, beautiful enough for people to come back to”. The passage of the spent bullet bursting its way through solid material, evident in the small hole on the back wall that widens into a jagged wreckage in the front symbolises the terrible effect inflicted by war from even a small cause resulting in devastating consequences.

Jury’s Citation: The garden provided an emblematic representation of a war-torn zone, where property has been destroyed, but where there is hope by landscaping the debris left behind to provide an enjoyable space. The judges felt that the brief had been accurately delivered and the overall effect provided a sustainable example of a garden which could be built in these difficult circumstances. The construction of the damaged walls was very convincing, providing a series of apertures of reducing sizes. The floor was partly flooded but provided sufficient dry areas for utility purposes. The planting reflected a range of plants which had been convincingly used to provide effect without becoming too ornamental or fussy.

Best Design Award and Gold Medal – Xanthe White (New Zealand) for “Regenerating through the water, a garden for world peace”

Being one of the five Gold Medal Award winners for Gardening World Cup 2012 who also clinched the Best Design Award (Special Sasebo Mayor’s Award), Xanthe White’s unmistakably lush and green, New Zealand inspired show garden “expresses the duality between war and peace, life and death and the harmony found in the unification of the two”.

Employing the theme “Regenerating through the water, a garden for world peace”, the end result of the planting effort reminiscent of the natural landscape of New Zealand where ubiquitous small courtyard gardens can be found peppered in homes as a special place for reflect and reflection only serves to reinforce a sense of serenity. In her show garden that feature the words of a New Zealand poet about the country’s antinuclear stance reinforces what she terms as “an important part of New Zealand’s culture that expresses (its) desire for peace before politics”.

The external façade showcased a wall formed from charred timber – symbolic of removing the life from the timber but also protecting it from decay at the same time. The inward wall meanwhile represents regeneration and is linked to water, the source of all life.

Interestingly, the walls are linked by the burnt-wood pergola which employs the use of contrasting timber to contrast “light and dark views” as one enters and exits the garden. Plants near the water spring up lush and rich while orchids and bright yellow daisies formed a cascade down the green walls while naturally formed stone steps form a path through the water feature.

Jury’s Citation: The garden was designed to draw the visitor inside, where they were met with a serene and peaceful ambience.

The garden relied heavily on wall planting, both inside and outside and gave a distinctive feel of the designer's native New Zealand. The seating and water feature in the garden added to its values. The quality of the design, planting and construction were excellent and provided a real atmosphere in line with its brief.

People's Choice Award and Gold Medal – Kazuyuki Ishihara (Japan) for "An Alcove Garden"

Japan's multiple Chelsea Gold Medal winner Kazuyuki Ishihara proved himself to be the master of designing the quintessential Japanese Garden par extraordinaire with his landscape creation paying tribute to "An Alcove Garden".

The alcove "Tokonoma" room he says is the Japanese living space within the home that comes with "tatami" flooring which is further complemented by distinctive Japanese styling. Just slide back the paper screens and voila! The garden is revealed in an instant. In Japan, the garden and the home are one with the alcove room serving the all-important purpose of unifying the home with the garden, resulting in the creation of a unique space for people to enjoy. Ishihara observes that with the declining number of alcove "Tokonoma" rooms throughout Japan, his desire to create and bring about an awareness of the social importance of these spaces in bringing people together resulted in his decision to highlight this particular show garden. And, what an effect he did have with his zen-like Japanese tea house garden with a solitary pine stooping gracefully in an almost sweeping gesture to touch the cascading pool's surface as it were and a maple just turning bronze - enchanting onlookers with the aesthetic composition laid out before their eyes.

Jury's Citation: The Alcove Garden was designed as a Japanese Garden which included many of the features which may be typically found in Japanese tradition. This included a tea house, entrance pergola and stepping stones across the water to access the tea house. Plants included Pine trees pruned in typical Japanese style, Acers, a green roof to the tea house and moss mulching to cover the bare ground of the planted areas. All of the planting and construction was done according to a very high standard resulting in a quality garden. The garden was designed to bring thought and relaxation together, which it achieved admirably.

Best Construction Award and Gold Medal – Hiromu Terashita (Japan) for "Forest that Nurtures the Seeding Of Peace"

Hiromu Terashita was the other entry from Japan that summoned the great task of replicating the castle ruins of the Sengoku Period with its dominant stone walls contrasted with the winding Japanese White Birch and Japanese Maples of the natural forest environment sprinkled with lush flowers to represent new life which is about to sprout.

"Japan has endured seemingly endless fighting over status and power. The reward for which has resulted in a considerable human loss. From what was once a battle ground created by the hands of people, this garden represents the bringing forth of new life, healing and the act of returning to nature.

"My desire in designing this garden was to engage the audience with the concept of rediscovering the richness of nature, the importance of life, however insignificant it may seem and peaceful co-existence between human beings," he reflects, outlining the explanation for his creation entitled "Forest that Nurtures the Seeding of Peace".

Jury's Citation: The theme of the garden made play between the strongholds of the fortifications used to build Japanese castles in former times against the gentle "new generation" which is emerging from the older landscape. Great skill was used to build the bases of the castle walls which with their curved base are typical of those seen in areas of Japan. Around the superb stonework, trees from all areas of Japan were planted to provide a Japanese setting for the fortifications. From the front of the garden, young small plants within a delicate setting demonstrate how the new compares to the old. The quality of the construction and planting is excellent. Pics courtesy of Gardening World Cup 2012.



British designer Basson (top) who represented France got the inspiration for Inch's magnificent garden, "Eye to Eye" won the Best in Show Award. "Dulce et Decorum est" from a bullet piercing through a Gaza apartment.

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