

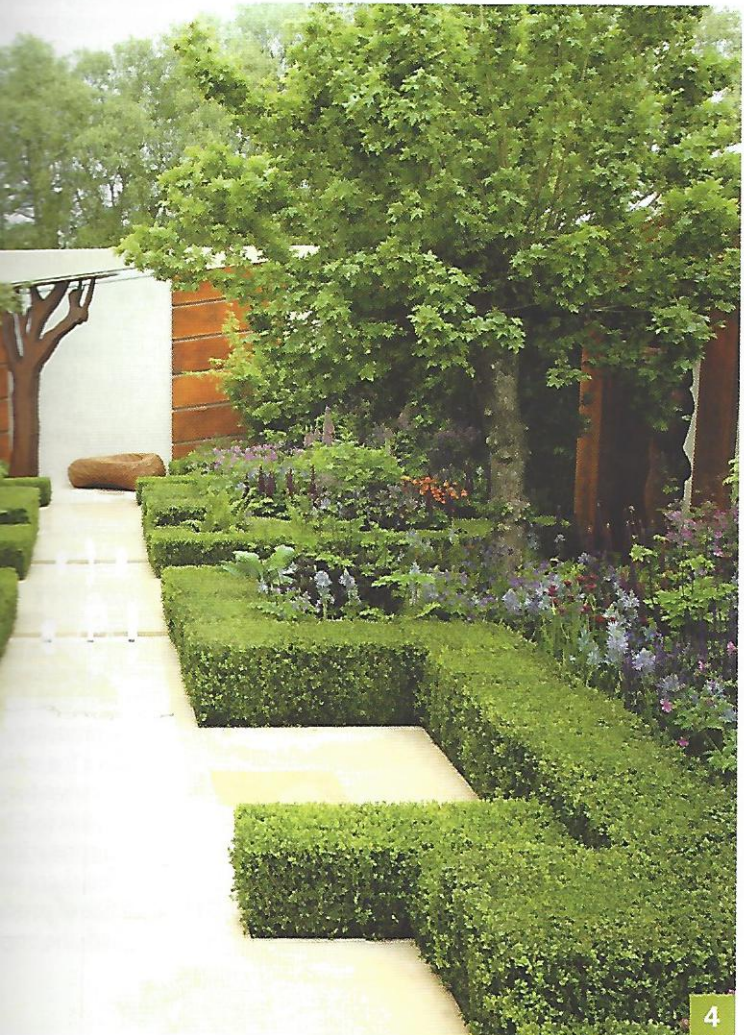
PHOTOS: Richard Hanson

# CHELSEA 2015

Zia Allaway sizes up the gold medal-winning gardens at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show



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**D**elivering an eclectic crop of show gardens, this year's Chelsea saw tropical and Islamic designs vying for attention alongside the crisp modernist and naturalistic gardens we have seen dominate the event in recent years. Attention to detail was the order of the day, with many designers delivering faultless planting, dramatic architectural forms and shimmering water features, but originality was in shorter supply, and left one longing for someone to shake things up a bit. The seven gold medal-winners were, in the main, easy to spot, and few were surprised when Dan Pearson walked away with Best in Show for his reinvention of Chatsworth's Trout Stream and Rockery.

## 01 THE LAURENT-PERRIER/CHATSWORTH GARDEN *Dan Pearson MSGD*

Few people have the skill to blur the lines between natural landscape and designed space as masterfully as Dan Pearson, or to tread so lightly to achieve this delicate balance. In his garden for Laurent-Perrier and Chatsworth, Dan created the illusion of ancient landforms and naturalised wild flowers, taking the visitor on a sylvan journey terminating at a serene moon-gazing pool edged with irises and meadow plants. To evoke this sense of tranquillity on an awkward triangular plot, where visitors could glimpse the showground beyond from every angle, is testament to his skill.

Although at first glance the design presented a slice of native English countryside, a closer look revealed plants

from every corner of the globe. Exotics, including rhododendrons, *Enkianthus*, the dainty *Disporum cantoniense* 'Night Heron' and turk's cap lilies, jostled with natives, such as red campion, wild roses and ferns.

Despite having to redesign a section of the garden when Thames Water stopped play two days into the build, fearing the giant boulders would damage the drains below, Dan reigned supreme, his contemporaries diminished by his encyclopedic plant knowledge and artistic prowess. His warmth and team spirit is also refreshing and undoubtedly helped to build trust and a bond with Crocus, who were masterminding the build and supplying the plants. →



## 05 A PERFUMER'S GARDEN IN GRASSE

BY L'OCCITANE *James Basson MSGD*

This is the garden that had the gardening glitterati all a-twitter, and for many, James Basson's design stole the show, with Monty Don declaring it his favourite for Chelsea's top prize. The judges also placed the garden up there with Dan Pearson's, though "slightly stressed-looking trees" apparently tipped the balance in the end. James's reimagining of the historical garden of a Provençal perfume grower was a masterclass in naturalistic design, his appreciation of that landscape, which he has made his home, authenticating every aspect of the design. It was as though he had picked

up those fields in France and spirited them into the heart of Chelsea, with every tiny feature remaining intact.

The romantic garden included space to relax beneath olive trees. The heat was almost palpable, evoked by rammed earth pathways and scented Mediterranean planting, while the cool shade of a bathhouse offered respite from an imagined midday sun. Telescoping from the broad picture, encapsulating the sights and sounds of Provence, down to minute details, such as succulent seedlings peeping out of cracks in the tufa bath, this outstanding design secured James a well-deserved gold.