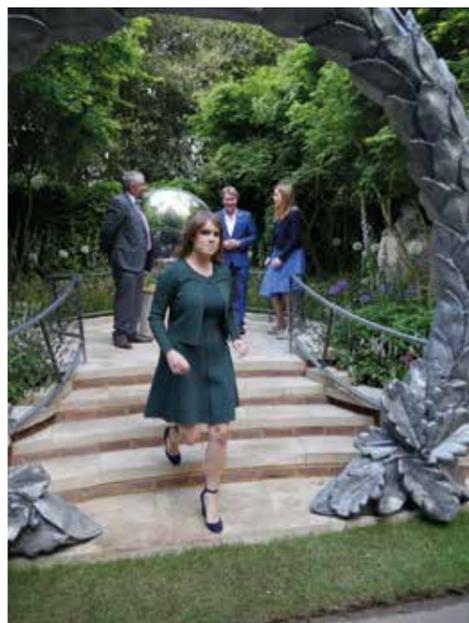


Many of the garden's features are symbolic of the Commission's past, present and future. The garden uses plant species from sites in the CWGC global estate and elements and materials hand-crafted by the CWGC's own artisans.



The beautiful entrance arch was created at the CWGC's workshop in 'leper' (Ypres), Belgium, topped with a silver crown referencing the Commission's historical links with empire. Meanwhile, the delicate steelwork – the railings, steel trees and leaves – was hand-forged by CWGC blacksmiths at the workshop in Beaurains, France.

The Portland stone steps and coping stones are made from reclaimed First World War headstones, the two statues standing guard have been recycled from the CWGC Portsmouth Naval Memorial and the hand-made red bricks are from stock used to repair the iconic CWGC Thiepval Memorial, on the Somme, last year. A central seat is, fittingly, topped with 100-year-old oak and contains the Commission's badge carved in stone. The garden itself uses familiar plant species frequently seen in CWGC cemeteries in northern Europe, with pale flowers, lush foliage, herbaceous and alpine plants and a calming palette of colours. Surrounded by a *Carpinus betulus* (Hornbeam) hedge, multi-stemmed *Acer palmatum* (Maples) create a canopy which provides an area for quiet contemplation. Trees have always been an essential part of any war cemetery, providing shade and intimate enclosure for visitors.

CWGC Director General Victoria Wallace, said: "It is a matter of great pride for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to be represented at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in this our centenary year. "Through our horticultural efforts, we honour the fallen of two world wars across 150 countries, creating beautiful final resting places for servicemen and women from around the world. Our artisan garden celebrates the skills and workmanship of our international teams, and will provide a lasting focus of reflection and commemoration as it tours in our



member states after the show. It is a great privilege to work with this fantastic team of gardeners and craftsmen, and a joy to see David Domoney and David Richardson's collaborative design bring their work to a wider audience."

CWGC Director of Horticulture David Richardson, said: "The garden has a real sense of enclosure and privacy, using a *Carpinus* hedge and *Acer* trees, typical of many CWGC cemeteries.

He added: "In 2017, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is celebrating 100 years of great gardening. With a global gardening workforce of more than 850 men and women and a maintenance commitment of more than 700 hectares, we're proud to be one of the world's largest horticultural organisations. Our horticulture has always been an essential part of our commemoration of the war dead – ensuring the cemeteries and memorials are places of beauty and quiet remembrance for the hundreds of thousands who visit them each year. We're delighted to have the chance to work with David Domoney and showcase our work at Chelsea."

Contained in the CWGC garden are the same plants and flowers that will be adorning Westminster Abbey on Tuesday May 23 for the CWGC's special centenary Service of Thanksgiving.

Silver Gilt Winner - 'Beneath a Mexican Sky'

Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Buckley



In our last issue we featured the proposed RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden design entry of Manoj Malde. This was Manoj's first attempt in the well-known competition, so you can imagine his delight at being awarded a Silver Gilt medal.

We caught up with Manoj to tell us about the whole experience - and of course - would he do it again?

Describe your experience of the build-up and the construction of Beneath a Mexican Sky on personal level. The highs and lows, sleepless nights, relief, anger, elation etc...

"From past experiences of working on Chelsea gardens, I knew that the days were going to be long. Doing a garden at the Chelsea Flower Show takes you on a roller coaster ride of stress, anxiety, tears, joy and elation. The ride is definitely worth it, but it doesn't help when beautiful plants that you have tagged on a trip in Italy arrive damaged. This situation is made worse when these are some of your main plants and the nursery then says they have none left! Anger would be an understatement, but a solution had to be found.

The BBC World Service were following me throughout this journey, making a documentary about myself and Beneath a Mexican Sky and there were many highlights during the build onsite. I was ecstatic when my trees and the *Agave parryi* var *truncata* with the huge flower spike arrived on site. I'd say there was definitely some plant envy. I can only describe it as euphoria when I watched the walls being painted and the trees being planted, suddenly my vision was rising out of the ground. This was the moment the site turned into a garden.

Designer Manoj Malde, is the creative force behind UK based landscape company Couture Gardens. His passion and enthusiasm for colour and style have gained him projects ranging from indoor garden designs for high-end inner London restaurants to commissions for clients living around the Mediterranean. His entry design for the Chelsea Flower Show this year, was inspired by Mexican architect Luis Barragan, entitled 'Beneath a Mexican Sky'. Sponsored by Inland Homes, Manoj gained a Silver Gilt award in the Fresh Gardens Category.




Tears flowed when the cream of the horticultural and garden design worlds were paying me compliments about my garden. The most emotional moment was when my good friend Mary Ellen Taylor said "Simon would be very proud of you if he were here". The late Simon Pyle was vice principal at the English Gardening School, but above all he was both mentor and friend.))

Did everything go to plan Manoj? Were any changes in plants last minute or minor design details?

"The last couple of weeks were frantic. We did have some crop failures so I was running around like a headless chicken trying to find replacement plants. Luckily some of the nurseries that I trade with are experienced in working with designers showcasing at the Chelsea Flower Show. They always grow various varieties of plants for different conditions, but it's about making sure you get to the nurseries on time to get the plants tagged and deliveries booked.))



Left: This stunning horse head sculpture by Rupert Till featured as part as Manoj's design

How has the weather affected the design and its ongoing maintaining through the show?

“At the start of the build the weather was very good, which speeded work up and so we were slightly ahead of schedule. Then the heavens opened. This not only made planting difficult but the biggest worry was whether the team from Topcret could get all the micro-cementing done. As ever, Tecwyn came to the rescue. He put up a large tent for the guys over the areas they were working in so that the conditions would remain dry.

As planting was getting difficult, I told the team to go home early, have a rest and come back at the crack of dawn the next day. There was no point in getting muddy fingers all over the plants as it might damage them and create more work. Unfortunately, it rained for two more days, but once the rain stopped the team worked like troopers.”

When did you hear of your Silver Gilt medal and what were your feelings at the time?

“Early Tuesday morning I was standing at the garden and I saw Nicki Chapman, Tom Harflett and a team of camera men walking towards me. Throughout this process I have never thought about the medal, so it was only at this moment it all became very real. Slowly Tom turned the medal over. It seemed like forever. My first ever garden at Chelsea and I had won a Silver Gilt. I was ecstatic. My sponsors Inland Homes Plc were also delighted.”

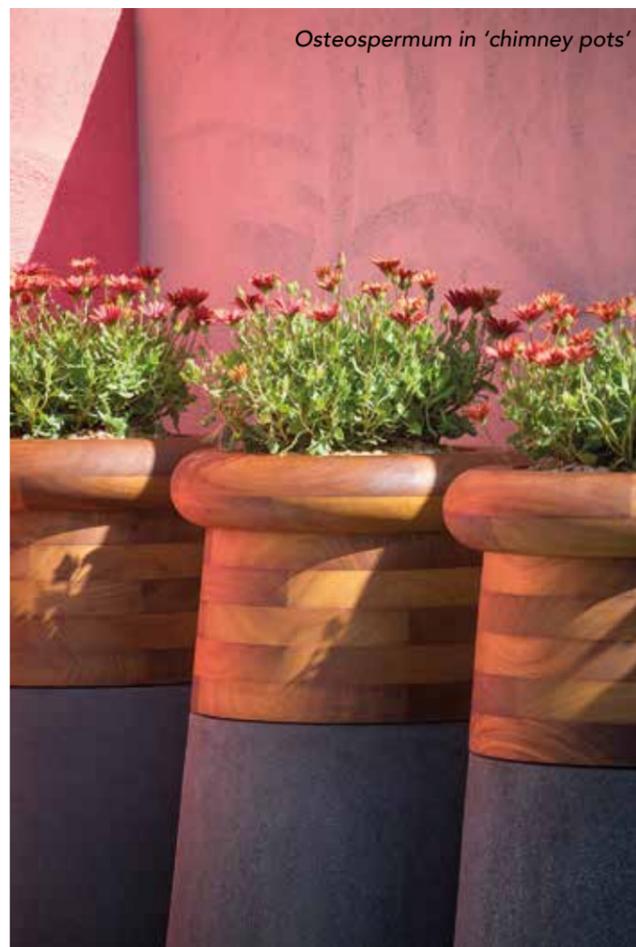
How many people were involved in the construction and design, and any names that you would like to mention who were loyal servants and mentors?

“There were almost 35 people involved in the design, construction and marketing of 'Beneath a Mexican Sky' and that does not include all the hordes of delivery drivers and teams of nursery people in the UK, Spain and Italy. Tecwyn Evans of Living Landscapes and his team have been amazing throughout the build, it has been an absolute joy to work with them. Every member of my planting team was chosen by me for their past experiences of working on show gardens. Alyson Hamilton who lead my planting team was an absolute trooper.



My utmost gratitude goes to Inland Homes Plc for all their help and support throughout this journey, as without their generosity 'Beneath a Mexican Sky' would never have been possible.”

Left: Puya coerulea set against rich orange wall



Osteospermum in 'chimney pots'



Above: The familiar Dracaena draco, Dragon Tree

Out of all the gardens on display if you were a judge who would win your Gold Award, except yourself on this one!?

“'Breast Cancer Now' designed by Ruth Willmott would have won my gold. Ruth's thought process in designing the garden was excellent, her planting scheme was beautiful and the garden looked stunning.”

What happened after Saturday night? Was there a sell off or did somebody wanted the design in their home?

“The plants are being relocated into various gardens. Thank God there was no plant sell off frenzy on the garden. However, there have been some people who have shown interest in me recreating the look for their personal garden - so watch this space. The public's reaction to the garden has been astounding. So many people came up to me to tell me it was their favourite garden throughout the show. That is a very humbling experience.”



For any budding designers out there, what advice would you give if they wanted to display a garden at Chelsea?

“For any budding designer who wants to showcase a garden at Chelsea, my advice would be to start building a strong, reliable and professional team around you. These should be people you trust and you must also be prepared to listen to them. But always remember this is your design, so you must be prepared to do whatever it takes to make your vision come alive. If something goes wrong you cannot point the finger at anyone. In the media and the public eye, the buck stops with the designer.”

What's next Manoj? Tell our readers what happens next week in your life.

“As soon as the show ends we start the de-rig of the garden. Next week I start working on a garden design for the sponsors for a luxury show home at their Chelmsford development; I must finish a planting plan for a client whose garden build has already started; I will be directing some tree planting for a client; oh and I also have a meeting with a new client. What I am also looking forward to is getting started on my training sessions with my trainer.

The business is heading in the right direction so I am about to engage an assistant designer. I would like to grow the team and the business. My ambition is to create some gardens in the Mediterranean for private clients, hotels and spas.”

And finally, will you come back and do it all over again?

“I would love to come back and do another garden. Maybe even main avenue? If there are any companies out there who want to take the opportunity of getting their brand name in front of an international audience of some 200,000 show visitors, not to mention the BBC, international and social media coverage... You know where I am!”

Suppliers: Horse Sculpture – Rupert Till
Furniture – Roberti Rattan
Pots – Indigenous Planters
Terrarium – Urban Botanics
Photographic Cushions – Botanical Cushions

