

Our first meeting of 2017 was both entertaining and informative, as four Southern California landscape professionals shared their impressions of the 2016 Chelsea Flower Show in London. The program was moderated by Marilee Kuhlmann of the Urban Water Group and the G3 Garden Group, who introduced the panel of speakers: Yvonne Savio, retired head of the Los Angeles County Master Gardener Program and blogger on her website GardeningInLA.net; Francesca Corra, owner of Dirt Diva Designs and member of the APLD (Association of Professional Landscape Designers); and Shawn Maestretti, owner of Shawn Maestretti Landscape Design and member of the ASLA (American Society of Landscape Architects). Each panelist shared their personal slides and spoke about favorite designs and what they felt were the biggest “take away” ideas they brought home from the show.

Marilee gave a brief overview of the show, sponsored by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), which takes place annually during the third week of May on 11 acres of the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, London. It takes two weeks to set up the event which lasts for 6 days and features 17-21 gardens (each of which may cost \$500,000 to build and 18-24 months to plan), plus 30 or so small gardens and about 500 exhibitors.



Best in Show 2016, designed by Andy Sturgeon
Photo credit: www.telegraph.co.uk

The first presenter was Yvonne Savio, whose experience at the show was from the perspective of a novice attendee. The event was on her retirement “bucket list” and she confessed to crying from the emotional response she had to the overwhelming scope and scale of the show. Yvonne therefore chose to focus on “My Favorite Take-Home Treasures,” including sculptures, crazy costumes and clothing, and specialty plants, such as a blooming *Meconopsis*. Other displays she enjoyed were the dyer’s

garden, the low allergy garden and the educational displays on the theme of “Greening Grey Britain.” While she found everything to be intriguing, Yvonne was relieved knowing that she was not going to be taking anything home except her memories.

Shawn Maestretti spoke next and felt that his lasting impression was that the show presented “An Emphasis on Garden Culture” which he feels is not as strong in the United States as it is in Europe. He gave a brief history of the show, which began in 1862 as the Royal Horticultural Flower show and was a way for the public to follow the gardening trends of the royals. Its popularity soon caused it to evolve and feature designs of individuals, eventually bringing it to its present renown with the participation of respected international designers. Shawn then shared pictures of some of his inspirations from the 2015 and 2016 shows, which were a combination of practical concepts that could be applied in any garden, as well as others that were more expressive and not as feasible for practical implementation. His favorites ranged from Dan Pearson’s Best in Show naturalistic design from 2015 to the whimsical driftwood garden art sculptures displayed last year, all of which led him to the decision to refer to himself as a “Garden Architect” in an effort to promote a greater awareness of local gardening culture.

Next to speak was Francesca Corra, who concluded that her Chelsea experience tied in with the concept of creating a “Sense of Place” which she described as making one’s physical surroundings worth caring about and setting them apart from other spaces. This in turn led to related themes she pulled from the show, which were wellness and healing, and artistic elements. These concepts were evident in her selection of slides and included sculptural pieces, soothing fountains, well-designed stonework, a garden for meditative “mindful living,” and one of her personal favorites: Chris Beardshaw’s garden featuring a serene sculpture of a sleeping face. Francesca’s take-aways from the show were the many inspirations and fresh ideas she is eager to implement locally in future garden designs.

In summation, Marilee shared images from Chelsea shows she attended dating back to 2010. Some of the designers that were meaningful to her were: Luciano Giubbilei, Joe Swift, Jo Thompson, Paul Martin, James Basson, Cleve West and Andy Sturgeon. In particular, she remarked that Tom Stuart-Smith’s “cloud”

garden was an example of a design that would translate well into a California palette. Marilee also spoke about the scope of the show, with television coverage beginning on the Sunday prior to the show’s Monday opening which is reserved for the press and the queen. RHS members are then admitted Tuesday and Wednesday, with the remainder of the public being allowed in Thursday through Saturday. An estimated 24,000 people attend daily.

The panel then answered audience questions, ranging from judging criteria to financing of individual gardens, to how a design is actually executed once accepted into by the RHS for inclusion in the show. The entire evening was an interesting look at this annual event with facts and features for all horticultural tastes, and a great start to the new year of SCHS programs.

✿ Sabine Steinmetz

FEBRUARY HORT HAPPENINGS

Please contact location(s) to confirm listed events, and for a full schedule.

Events are free with admission unless otherwise indicated.

Locations are listed by Zip Code.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF L.A.
900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles 90007
213.763.3466 nhm.org

Sundays, 2/26, 3/5 & 3/12, 12noon-4:30 pm. Grow Your Own Vegetables: 3-Class Edible Gardening Workshop Series. Learn how to grow edibles; create good soil; what, how & when to plant; composting & watering; managing pests; increasing yield & variety. 3-class series: \$100 members, \$120 non-members. Visit nhm.org/workshops for info. about available discounts and registration.



SOUTH COAST BOTANIC GARDEN
26300 Crenshaw, PV Peninsula 90274
310.544.1948 southcoastbotanicgarden.org

Saturday, 2/18, 2-3:30pm. Beneficial Bugs In The Garden with Lili Singer. This illustrated lecture highlights helpful bugs you are likely to find in home landscapes, with tips on how to attract and conserve them. Lili is the Director of Special Projects and Adult Education at the Theodore Payne Foundation for Native Plants, as well as an award-winning horticulturist, educator and garden writer.

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SHARING SECRETS RESPONSES

Are you capturing or diverting any water from recent rains? In what ways?

Yes. Robert and I have identified and planned four separate areas for gravel reservoirs in crucial areas in our “formal” back and front yard that replace or will replace lawn areas. Three are completed. A fourth, our most ambitious, is in the works for this year. The results have all been positive and

two have fully served the purposes that we intended. However, there have been unintended consequences that we are now having to ameliorate during the summer and autumn: reflective heat, higher temperatures in the yard, loss of the visual cooling a lawn can give, and lower humidity in the yard.

We also recycle 100% of the gray water to our yard from our washing machine by first distributing to a 40 gallon garbage can with a sump pump, to a hose, to a sprinkler. However, in a yard of our size, the approx. 240 gallons every two weeks, is literally a drop in the bucket, and this past summer we simply

did not have enough water to go around and found ourselves in the dire straits of sacrificing heritage plants even though we were no longer watering lawns. I am sure all of you were in the same circumstances.

- Catherine Pannell Waters

Thank you for sharing this with our membership, Catherine! You can read a more detailed description of Catherine and Robert's water-conservation efforts in the "Sharing Secrets" on-line column. - Ed.