

Designing Gardens for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show

by Jim Fogarty

Jim Fogarty



I have been fortunate to design two gardens at the [RHS Chelsea Flower Show](#). The first was in 2004 and it was off the back of winning Gold & Best in Show at the Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show (MIFGS). Along with Martin Semken and Mark Bence from Semken Landscaping & Flemings Nurseries we formed an all-Australian team that travelled to London to create a show garden in 2004. There had been an Australian garden before by an expat Australian based in the UK, but this was the first time an entire team had travelled over from Australia. It was a huge novelty for the RHS, and in many ways helped to open many doors for other Australian designers to exhibit at RHS Chelsea. We didn't have long to prepare, and sourcing plants in time was incredibly difficult; we had to try and pull together whatever options (including non-Australian plants) we could as there weren't many Australian specimens offered in England at the time. That garden was awarded a Silver-Gilt award and as a team we were immensely proud.



One of the strangest moments was meeting Her Majesty the Queen. Everything is planned and prepared and we were advised that we would be receiving Her Majesty. The show grounds for the Royal visit are like a ghost town and only people with the Royal pass are permitted to be on site. The bomb squad do a sweep of the show. We were then visited by someone who advised us as to the correct protocol to receiving Her Majesty. Paul Keating had famously put his arm around Her Majesty, and we surmised they were worried we might make another faux pas! Then, all of a sudden, a shortish elderly lady with a very friendly disposition walked up to us with a small entourage and of course we recognised her straight away. They say there is a high proportion of people who freeze when they meet her. But we were able to engage in a relaxed conversation and show her all the Australian flowering plants we had in the garden which she was genuinely interested in and fascinated that we had travelled so far to build a garden at RHS Chelsea. We met many celebrities including Ringo Starr – a completely surreal experience for us Australian gardeners.



In 2011 I designed a show garden on the Main Avenue at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show for Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne (now RBG Vic). The Director of RBG at the time was Dr Philip Moors who led the project team along with some respected Australian business leaders who support RBG Vic. This garden was a pure Australian garden with the aim to promote the new Australian Garden at Cranbourne (The Australian Garden at Cranbourne was designed by Taylor Cullity Lethlean with Paul Thompson). Working with the RBG team was an incredible experience for me. Not only from a camaraderie point of view but there was a level of professionalism that inspired me. This time we had about two years to prepare for the show, which gave us the opportunity to source lots of Australian plants in Europe and to also raise some plants from seed which we had shipped from Australia. Roger & Gwen Elliot were part of the RBG planting team and having that encyclopedia knowledge on site was an incredible experience. I learnt so much about Australian plants doing this garden that I still utilise with projects today.

Main Avenue gardens are the big prestigious displays at RHS Chelsea and the build period is over 21 days which is a bit of a marathon for everyone on site. We had an amazing contractor led Mark Gregory in the UK, and with nearly two years of meticulous planning we finished in time for judging and won a Gold Medal which was a tremendous result for everyone involved. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth visited our garden, and I was able to take her around the space to show her some of the rare and threatened plants

that had been grown from seed. Again, Her Majesty was genuinely interested in the diversity of Australian plants and flowers. We also met many other Royals including Princes Edward and Andrew. Princess Beatrice was with Prince Andrew and while Dr Philip Moors was talking with Prince Andrew, I asked Princess Beatrice if she would like to come inside the garden and have a look. Princess Beatrice was relaxed, friendly and full of personality and I had great admiration for her character.





Someone had described to me before that the [Chelsea Flower Show](#) is a bit like the Wizard of Oz. Coming from Australia there is so much fantasy and history tied in with the show. Being part of the show and meeting Royals and celebrities is a little like drawing the curtain back slightly, but RHS Chelsea will always hold a special place in my heart. It is not so much about winning medals; for me it is the people and friendships that come with projects like this.



[Meet Jim Fogarty Here](#)

- [View Tours Jim is currently leading](#)

Article images

2011 Chelsea Garden Designed By Jim Fogarty Photo Credit Allan Pollok-Morris

2011 Chelsea Gold Medal Sign

2011 Jim Fogarty Queen Elizabeth Chelsea With Dr Philip Moors

2011 View of the Waterhole pic by Jay Watson

