

Fellow of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (FRIH)

Alan George Trott



Alan Trott (RHS) being presented his 2017 FRIH award certificate by RNZIH President Dr Keith Hammett (LHS). Photo: Murray Dawson.

Alan Trott richly deserves the award of Fellow of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. He is truly a Renaissance man. In 1978 he started a four-hectare garden in Ashburton from scratch. Over the years he has developed this into a garden that is today recognised as a Garden of International Significance.

To achieve this he has demonstrated the skills of a plantsman and garden designer. His two books telling the story of the garden show that he is also a consummate photographic artist and communicator.

Trott's garden may be considered as fine art and the manifestation of one man's vision. As with all art it has been influenced by work that preceded it. Alan and his wife Catherine are familiar with great gardens overseas and here in New Zealand.

In both his books Alan includes quotes by Vita Sackville-West who developed the legendary garden at Sissinghurst in England. To me there is a parallel here. Both gardens have been developed hands-on by trial and error; learning from practical experience. They use plants that have proven their worth in the local area. Neither garden is filled with the latest introductions, recently imported from overseas and touted by the trade untested.

We may think of great gardens as living sculptures in time and space. The ephemeral nature of this art form is expressed by Sir Peter Smithers, another great plantsman, photographer and author who, in his book *Adventures of a Gardener* published in 1995 (pp. 75–76), wrote:

“The art of gardening is a complex and difficult one in many dimensions. It cannot be collected or sold at Sotheby's, but it is art none the less. For a garden is a personal thing, a part of its creator. Like any true work of art it is his own expression of the meaning of existence, but unlike the plastic arts it is ephemeral: with him it will die”.



The Woodland Garden. Photo courtesy Trotts Garden.

Alan's garden was originally named Brantwood, but fittingly, through popular usage has become known as Trotts Garden. Although, as can be seen from aerial photographs in his books, the garden is a harmonious whole, it is made up of quite disparate elements, each segueing seamlessly into the next.

The formal herbaceous border framed by clipped hedges rivals any in the world. While its ambience is comparable to similar traditional herbaceous borders overseas, the choice and placement of the plants is unique.

Similarly few knot gardens in the world compare to that which Alan has created. This is a very demanding discipline that few master. The knot garden is outstanding in all seasons, but is particularly striking in winter when its outlines are highlighted by a coating of snow. At such times its excellence can be fully appreciated.



Knot Gardens. Photo courtesy Trotts Garden.

To me the greatest achievement of the garden, and where Alan's plantsmanship can most clearly be seen, is that the plants and their relationship to each other form the structure of the garden, yet each is allowed to speak for itself. They are not simply blobs of colour akin to decoration on an iced cake.

Yes, there are hard elements and a few discrete pieces of sculpture, but these have not been allowed to dominate. It is a garden, not a sculpture park.

In moving a chapel, happily named the Brantwood Chapel, thus retaining a clue to former owners of local land and links back to the UK, Alan has shown great vision. The chapel has been lovingly restored and introduces an element of human activity and spirituality beyond appreciation of the garden and its plants.



Brantwood Chapel. Photo courtesy Trotts Garden.

Alan and his wife have produced an asset of great value to New Zealand. It is therefore fitting, that in addition to this Fellowship, Alan has in 2017 been awarded the Queen's Service Medal for his services to horticulture.

References

- Smithers, P. (1995). *Adventures of a Gardener*. The Harvill Press with The Royal Horticultural Society.
- Trott, A. (2012). *From Pasture to Paradise: the Story of Trotts Garden*. Trott's Garden Publishing.
- Trott, A. (2016). *Paradise through the Seasons: a Year in the Life of Trotts Garden*. Trott's Garden Publishing.

Citation prepared by
Dr Keith Hammett