

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

Penelope ('Penny') Jane Zino



Penny Zino FRIH.

Penny is the creator and garden artist behind the celebrated and world-class Flaxmere Garden in Hawarden, North Canterbury.

The RNZIH New Zealand Gardens Trust (NZGT) assessed Flaxmere in 2005 as a 'Garden of National Significance' (now classed as a six-star garden, using their current scheme). In the book *Flaxmere Garden, 50 years of extremes* (Grant Mangin, 2017), Kerei Thompson (NZGT past president) pays tribute to Penny's talent, vision and patience in creating the garden in such a challenging climate while still clearly demonstrating 'the art of gardening'.

Penny describes the development of the garden as a result of forces greater than herself; the challenges of

record-breaking droughts, ferocious winds, searing summer temperatures and freezing winters all playing their part in the decisions made over 50 years of garden-making. Alongside these climate-related challenges, the book also describes family health issues and changes over the years.

From 1966, when Penny and her husband John moved into their new home and farm on the banks of the Waitohi River, they cleared overgrown trees, levelled and commenced planting, more planting and replanting – later establishing the former Zino Nurseries, an art exhibition, and a wedding venue business.

Juliet Nicholas, the photographer who illustrates the book, attributes Penny with a unique ability with vistas, spatial relationships, plant associations, colour and playfulness, and with new ideas to enrich the garden compositions. Some go so far as to call Penny 'the queen of vistas'.

In 2004, Penny and Ali Meyer founded an annual exhibition of New Zealand artists in North Canterbury. The first event was spread across three gardens, but subsequently it focussed solely at Flaxmere Garden, with sculpture displayed in the garden and other art forms exhibited in the restored 1890s barn. The 'Art in a Garden' exhibition became very popular, with 2000–2500 visitors over the three-day opening. Music, children's activities, food offerings and support of charities were added over the years. Along the way, Penny also purchased sculpture

which particularly suited her garden. In 2015 Penny and Ali sold the event which continued to run for four more years.

Overseas travel has provided opportunities for Penny to experience the work of other plantspeople, such as Noel Kingsbury and Piet Oudolf, whose masterclasses she attended with Robyn Kilty in 2012, which inspired a new interest in naturalistic perennial plantings for areas at Flaxmere.

Penny has been an active member of the NZGT since 2005 when she was persuaded to apply to have her garden assessed by the Trust. Penny has been a Trustee of the NZGT for about five years and writes for and has edited their newsletter for many years, superbly documenting the annual conferences and garden visits with a keen design and plantswoman's eye for detail. She has also contributed to NZGT exhibits at the Eilerslie Flower Show when it was held in Christchurch.

An RNZIH fellowship is awarded to "Members who have made a significant contribution to horticulture by their activities or interest in or service to horticulture".

In awarding an FRIH to Penny, the RNZIH pays tribute to her as a talented plantswoman, designer and leader in the garden and arts community of North Canterbury and New Zealand.

**Citation prepared by
Penny Cliffin**



Flaxmere Garden in Hawarden, North Canterbury.

