

Winning gold at Chelsea

Trish Waugh¹



"100% Pure New Zealand Ora – Garden of Well Being" at Chelsea Flower Show. Image courtesy Andrew Maloy.

The creation of the "100% Pure New Zealand Ora – Garden of Well Being" at Chelsea Flower Show was a very special experience for me and I would like to share the highlights with you.

My husband Doug and I, together with Kim Jarrett, a landscape designer and art director in the film industry, were first invited to design and build a garden for Chelsea Flower Show in 2002 by Ellerslie Flower Show, who were initially considering carrying out the project. We had just completed a very successful Gondwanaland exhibit in the ASB Discovery marquee at Ellerslie Flower Show earlier that year.

Kim and I prepared a design with Māori sculptor Lyonel Grant and presented this to Ellerslie Flower Show. At this point Tourism New Zealand had been brought on board as principal sponsor and all systems would have been go for taking our garden to Chelsea in 2003 if it hadn't been for the World Trade Centre bombing in September 2002. To cut a long

story short we redesigned the garden for a much smaller area and were eventually accepted by the RHS for the 2004 Chelsea Flower Show.

Design team

Our team comprised the following: Kim Jarrett, lead designer and special effects designer; myself as plant designer; Lyonel Grant, sculptor, paving designer and weaver of our story; Tina Hart, visual artist who prepared our submission illustrations, painted a scenic backdrop for the garden and applied colour effects in the garden; Doug Waugh who organised the materials for the garden and coordinated construction on site; and lastly but by no means least Brian Massey, who had just finished as head greensman on the set of *Lord of the Rings* and who brought a wealth of experience with specialist greens effects used in the film industry.

The garden

The garden was 10m wide by 11m deep on a slope that elevated 1.2m from front to back.

The theme of the garden was to be one of well-being and guardianship – the health and spiritual well-being provided by the land and all it encompasses. It was to depict a slice of New Zealand from the central plateau in the North Island out to the Chatham Islands. The idea was to encompass elements of Māoridom, indigenous flora and geology that could only be 100% Pure New Zealand. And so "Ora – Garden of Well Being" was conceived, taken from the phrase "kia ora" meaning "be well".

The garden was inspired by mythical Māori fairies or patupaiarehe, spirits that are believed to live under the cover of mist and the gardeners and guardians of our native forests. We wanted the garden to be distinctly Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Much Māori symbolism and lore was incorporated into the design. The essence of kaitiakitanga or guardianship was very important to the garden and as a result we went to great lengths to ensure the cultural correctness of our design. We believed if we got this right we would get the rest right as well.

Other cultural elements were incorporated into the design. There was a marae (traditional meeting place) and a moko waiwera (benevolent lizard form) carrying hot water from the puna (spring), cooling it so visitors to the garden could bathe in the nga wha (hot mineral pool). A cave, or te waha o Rūaumoko, was the dwelling place of the spirits of the garden. The cave was also to be the control centre for all the special effects Kim had planned for the garden. It was large enough to contain a sound system, which played sound tracks

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of bird calls and traditional Māori instruments, as well as housing pumps, water heaters, UV filters, smoke machines and compressors.

We searched for New Zealand native plants on the internet and spent many late nights making phone calls to the UK to source the thousand or so plants required to fulfil our design brief. We also planned to send 300 plants from New Zealand. Then in early November 2003 I made a trip to England to check on things and to source further plants to fill any gaps.

As part of the design Lyonel was going to carve some *whēkī-ponga* (*Dicksonia fibrosa*) which were to line the boundaries either side of the exhibit. This was bending the rules at Chelsea though as no structure was supposed to be more than 1.2m high within 2.4m of the front boundary of the exhibit. We wanted to go above 2m. To get around this we decided we would carve living ponga and then we could argue they were plants and not a structure. The concept of *te ihi kei roto i nga ponga*, the spirit which dwells within the tree fern was incorporated into the design.

Not surprisingly Lyonel is very well connected and he, Kim and Tina gained permission from Ngāti Whakaue in Rotorua to collect live ponga from the top of Mt Ngongotaha in Rotorua. This is a sacred mountain to Māoridom and also believed to be a traditional home of the patupaiarehe.

In late November 2003 the whole team, plus representatives from Ngāti Whakaue, a television crew from the BBC, another from TVNZ and various helpers and transport assembled in a valley near the summit of Mt Ngongotaha. We spent the weekend extracting the ponga, taking as much root-ball as we could manage with each one. A blessing and *karakia* was given as each ponga was removed and assembled for Lyonel to carve. It was an amazing experience and the first time the team had worked together on something tangible. We had spent a lot of time planning and having monthly meetings but this was the first physical thing we

did as a team and we believe it is the time when the patupaiarehe, the spirits, joined the project.

We decided to have a dress rehearsal in late January 2004. The Auckland City Council very kindly agreed to give us space in the Americas Cup yacht, Alinghi's old base in the Viaduct Basin. There we spent a good week assembling the structures Weta Workshop of Dunedin had made for us. We set up the moko waiwera, pumps, heaters, filters, special effects and a token assemblage of plants, ironing out as many bugs as we could. We then carefully packed all the bits and pieces into a large shipping container ready for transport to England at the end of March.

The monthly planning meetings continued and the media machine got faster and faster. Then all of a sudden it was 24th April 2004 and time for Doug and I to leave for England. We were arriving a week earlier than the rest of the team as we needed to check on the plants we had ordered, and those we had sent over, as well as look around for anything new that was needed. Although there were plenty of plants, they had just experienced a very harsh winter and were not in good condition. We realized we really had our work cut out for us and that there would be quite a lot of grooming to do to have them looking their best.

The day after everyone else arrived we were all assembled at Clandon House at Guilford. This is the ancestral home of Lord Onslow, once Governor of New Zealand. While in New Zealand he had purchased a wharenuī (meeting house) which had survived the Tarawera eruption. He'd had it taken to his estate in Guilford where it was reassembled and used for some time as a boat shed.

During World War II the estate was used as a hospital for convalescing soldiers. During a stay there two Māori soldiers saw the boat shed, realised what it had originally been, and knew people had sheltered in it to survive the Tarawera eruption. They were given permission to relocate the

wharenuī elsewhere in this very Jacobian garden and restore it to its original condition. Here, in this piece of New Zealand in the heart of England, we received a formal welcome by Ngāti Ranana, one of the iwi of London. We then went to the Chelsea site for a blessing and cleansing of the area. A small piece of Aotearoa-New Zealand had arrived at Chelsea.

Before arriving at the Chelsea site we had envisaged something like a nice grassy slope and warm sunny days. But the Royal Horticultural Society had stripped off all of the grass and left us with a very muddy site that we were to wallow around in for the next few weeks. The rest of the team were jetlagged but I think all of us were daunted by the prospect of what lay ahead.

At first there was a pleasant backdrop of mature trees to the rear of our site, but what we didn't find out for another couple of weeks was that several buildings, including a 3 metre high bright blue BBC semi-trailer were to be moved onto the area prior to the opening of the show.

At Chelsea everything is crammed in very tightly. Our site was next to the main entrance which at first we thought was going to be an advantage, but due to there being a one way system for vehicles during the build up we found we were right at the end of the delivery system for plants and materials. There were times when we knew a truck load of supplies had passed through the gate but it could take hours to finally reach our site.

Day one of the build up and it was raining again. We were up to our ankles in mud, but we remembered the patupaiarehe like it when it is wet and misty. It didn't just rain though, it hailed, was freezing cold and there was thunder and lightning. We also had our first plant delivery – the large cabbage tree or *Cordyline australis*. This was actually the first plant on site at Chelsea for 2004.

The next day it was still raining. We dug the hole for the spa pool. Patupaiarehe liking it or not we were ready for it to stop raining. Digging holes was the worst part.

Eighty two years of accumulated Chelsea gardens buried and just waiting to be dug up. Rocks, bricks, stones, concrete – you name it we dug it up.

After about four days it finally stopped raining. The cabbage tree was settling in, the replica silica terraces were in place on the liner and the rock structures were going in with the cave being built behind. I think the reason it stopped raining was because we had built the cave and the patupaiarehe had somewhere they could hide.

Day six, the spa pool was in and we were starting to lay out the paving. Lyonel had designed the paving in a patiki design with Hinuera stone – some natural and some oven baked which created a very three-dimensional effect.

Of course the Australians were there – sponsored by Fleming's Nurseries who grow 5 million plants per year. Their exhibit was designed by Jim Fogherty and built by Marty Semkin and his crew. They were a good fun team. They were well researched and had done a reconnoitre the previous year both during the build up and the show itself. They had selected a site with easy access, not too crowded and they were able to have containers on site for a week or more. They gave the impression of being like a well-oiled machine and were very professional.

We were fortunate to have a group of keen kiwis who got stuck in and helped us build the garden. Dan King and Marie Campbell were experienced set builders in the film industry and well used to tight time frames and thinking outside the square. Teena Petit and Pamela Russ provided expertise in plant care, grooming, plant placement and a lot of sheer hard graft to produce the garden. Lyonel's wife, Vicki Grant also worked extremely hard for the team both on and off the site.

Te ihi kei roto i nga ponga

The carved ponga arrived but their fronds were not in good enough condition for the high standards required at Chelsea. This was a great disappointment for the team but we were still determined

to use them somehow. We had put so much into producing them and getting them there that we were not prepared to give up on them. We decided to work late that night to try and have the problem solved and the ponga looking sharp before we went home. Pongas went in and out, new ones went in and were spliced to join alongside the carved ones. A few extra touches were made to the carving and a few hours later we had some compositions that we were really happy with set against the painted backdrop which was a representation of Mt Tarawera and Lake Rotomahana where the pink and white terraces once existed. Tina had to do the final touch-ups to the backdrop and then we had to blend it into the garden using the plant material.

The show begins

During the last few days of the build up the Tourism New Zealand public relations machine kicked in. Sloane Square tube station was decked out with posters saying "NZ now growing in the UK" and the native plant displays installed in the station during the week of the show looked great. When we saw the London double-decker buses with the New Zealand publicity splashed all over them we really felt like we had arrived.

Three days to go and although we were cutting things a bit fine we still felt it was completely manageable. That was until the film crews started appearing on the scene. These final three days were spent working around each other. Another thing we had to contend with were people in orange vests, the stewards who were there for safety reasons. Armed with load hailers they yelled at people every time a vehicle approached – "Watch your backs!", "Stand to one side!" During the show they would even yell at the visitors, "Move along!", as if they were herding cattle.

Security in general was extreme and we needed a pass for everything. Television cameras were everywhere and particularly focused in on our exhibit. While it was nice to receive the attention it was also very frustrating, as we

often had to stop work or work out of shot.

Then completely unannounced and without even so much as a "How do you do?", four judges walked onto the garden taking us all by surprise. This was the preliminary judging session, and stern, poker-faced they sat down comparing our technical brief to what we had actually done. They were giving nothing away and would make recommendations to the rest of the judges later that day.

Final judging the next day took place with the same protocol. These guys have a bit to learn about garden-side manner. Luckily we got everything finished with a small amount of time to spare.

Only one other exhibitor has won gold in their first attempt at Chelsea. This amazing achievement was made even more remarkable by the fact our team had travelled 20,000km to do it. Our exhibit cost 100,000 pounds sterling (approximately NZ\$300,000) to construct. Sheik Zayad who won Best of Show spent one million pounds. Two sites along had cost 280,000 pounds to construct and they got silver. All together there was approx 60 million pounds spent on exhibits at Chelsea that year.

Four golds were awarded in our category with our New Zealand exhibit being one of them. The garden had exceeded everyone's expectations. We had achieved what we thought was the impossible. New Zealand has not received so much television publicity in the United Kingdom since the Americas Cup. Coupled with the success of the films *Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider* we were on a roll.

When the 2004 Chelsea Flower Show opened to the public on the 25th May, the people came in droves. Winning Gold was great but the best part was the overwhelming appreciation we received from the public. People queued for 1–2 hours to see our garden. The Canterbury Horticultural Society was first on the scene and cheered loudly. Ex-patriot kiwis felt home-sick and the

British public were overwhelmed by the uniqueness of our garden.

Lessons from the show

There are many lessons to be learnt from this experience. One in particular is to do guardianship or kaitiakitanga and respect for our flora which is a priceless treasure that deserves our respect. I felt very privileged to be able to present such a wealth of unique flora to so many gardening enthusiasts. We are in an enviable position in New Zealand in that we have such a large number of indigenous plants not found anywhere else in the world. When these plants are used in a way that is sensitive to their natural habitats and associations they resonate Aotearoa-New Zealand. At Chelsea they glowed and as we had linked them inextricably with our geology and our indigenous culture the English public couldn't help but be touched. It was by far the most visited garden at the show

and I am convinced it was because of the spirit or wairua with which we created it.

Lyonel wrote a small piece in our technical brief that always springs to mind:

“He toi whakairo
He mana tangata”

“From artistic excellence
Comes human dignity.”

For the team this garden was a celebration of who we are as a people, a journey that transcends culture, the land and all it has to offer. It was a journey that touched millions of people and we are all very grateful and proud to have been part of it.

We are a country that has only had significant populations of humans for 500 years. We have done a lot of damage in that time. But we still have the most unique culture, geography and plants in the world. We have a landscape and a culture

that are intertwined. It is the essence of who we are as a people and that deserves celebrating, but it also deserves looking after. The world is changing at an ever-increasing pace. Conservation now is about managing that change.

I will leave you with this thought; it is something we said to ourselves when things got really tough: “We are all in the same waka – we just need to paddle in the same direction.”

Future of native gardens in New Zealand

I have a vision for the future of native gardens in New Zealand, especially public gardens. We have the opportunity in this country to actually create gardens that are unique to New Zealand, and need a good body of these gardens that resonate a sense of place and will leave an indelible mark on our visitors.

Planting list for “100% Pure New Zealand Ora – Garden of Well Being”.

Botanical & cultivar name	Common name	Use/comment
<i>Alectryon excelsus</i>	Titoki	Medicinal, culinary, bird attractant
<i>Anemanthele lessoniana</i>	Gossamer grass	–
<i>Arthropodium cirratum</i>	Rengarenga, rock lily	–
<i>Arthropodium cirratum</i> ‘Matapouri Bay’	Reinga lily	Medicinal
<i>Asplenium bulbiferum</i>	Hen and Chickens fern, moku	Culinary
<i>Asplenium flaccidum</i>	Hanging spleenwort, makawe	–
<i>Asplenium oblongifolium</i>	Shining spleenwort, huruhuruwhenua	Culinary
<i>Asplenium oblongifolium</i> × <i>bulbiferum</i>	Māori Princess fern, hybrid pikopiko	–
<i>Astelia chathamica</i> ‘Silver Spear’	Astelia	Silver leaves
<i>Astelia nervosa</i> ‘Alpine Ruby’	Astelia	Upper leaf surface red, lower surface silver
<i>Astelia nervosa</i> ‘Westland’	Astelia	Silver leaves with a red tinge up the centre
<i>Astelia solandri</i>	Perching lily, kōwharawhara	–
<i>Beilschmiedia</i> sp.	Tawa	Culinary, bird attractant
<i>Blechnum</i> “capense”	Kio kio	–
<i>Blechnum discolor</i>	Crown fern	–
<i>Brachyglottis repanda</i>	Rangiora	–
<i>Carex trifida</i>	Mutton bird sedge	–
<i>Chionochloa flavicans</i>	Tussock	–
<i>Clematis forsteri</i>	Clematis	Medicinal
<i>Cordyline australis</i> ‘Purpurea’	Cabbage tree	Purple foliage, bird attractant
<i>Cordyline australis</i>	Cabbage tree, tī	Medicinal, culinary, bird attractant
<i>Cordyline indivisa</i>	Mountain cabbage tree	Bird attractant
<i>Cordyline kaspar</i>	Three Kings cabbage tree	Bird attractant
<i>Cordyline</i> ‘Green Goddess’	Cabbage tree	Bird attractant
<i>Cordyline</i> ‘Jurassic Jade’	Cabbage tree	Bird attractant
<i>Corokia</i> × <i>virgata</i> ‘Silver Ghost’	Corokia	–
<i>Cyathea dealbata</i>	Silver fern, ponga	Medicinal
<i>Cyathea medullaris</i>	Black tree fern, mamaku	Medicinal
<i>Cyathea smithii</i>	Soft tree fern, ponga	–
<i>Dacrydium cupressinum</i>	Red pine, rimu	Medicinal, bird attractant
<i>Dicksonia fibrosa</i>	Golden tree fern, whekī	–
<i>Dicksonia squarrosa</i>	Rough tree fern, whekī	–

Botanical & cultivar name	Common name	Use/comment
<i>Dodonaea viscosa</i> 'Purpurea'	Akeake, purple hop-bush	Purple foliage
<i>Dracophyllum sinclairii</i>	–	–
<i>Elatostema rugosum</i>	Parataniwha	–
<i>Entelea arborescens</i>	Whau	–
<i>Euphorbia glauca</i>	Shore spurge	Endangered species
<i>Fuchsia excorticata</i>	Tree fuchsia	Bird attractant
<i>Fuchsia procumbens</i>	Creeping fuchsia	Endangered species, bird attractant
<i>Geranium</i> x 'Pink Spice' (<i>G. sessiliflorum</i> x <i>traversii</i>)	–	Geranium hybrid
<i>Griselinia lucida</i>	Akapuka	Bird attractant
<i>Gunnera prorepens</i>	–	Bird attractant
<i>Hebe</i> cultivars (various)	Hebe	–
<i>Hebe stricta</i>	Koromiko	Medicinal
<i>Jovellana sinclairii</i>	–	–
<i>Leptinella dioica</i>	Shore cotula	–
<i>Leptinella perpusilla</i>	–	Bronze, fern-like foliage
<i>Leptinella squalida</i> 'Platt's Black'	–	Dark brown-black foliage
<i>Leptospermum scoparium</i>	Tea tree, mānuka	Medicinal, culinary, bird attractant
<i>Leptospermum scoparium</i> 'Snow Flurry'	Mānuka cultivar	Bird attractant
<i>Libertia grandiflora</i>	New Zealand iris	–
<i>Libocedrus plumosa</i>	New Zealand cedar	–
<i>Lophomyrtus bullata</i>	New Zealand myrtle, ramarama	–
<i>Machaerina sinclairii</i>	Pēpepe, toetoe tūhara	–
<i>Macropiper melchior</i>	Three Kings kawakawa	Medicinal, culinary, bird attractant
<i>Meryta sinclairii</i>	Puka	–
<i>Metrosideros carminea</i> 'Red Carpet'	Crimson rata	Cultivar that does not climb like the species, but instead forms a low shrub
<i>Metrosideros excelsa</i>	New Zealand Christmas tree, pōhutukawa	Medicinal, culinary, bird attractant
<i>Metrosideros robusta</i>	Northern rata	Culinary, bird attractant
<i>Muehlenbeckia astonii</i>	Shrubby pōhuehue	Medicinal, endangered species
<i>Muehlenbeckia complexa</i>	Wire vine, pōhuehue	Culinary
<i>Myosotidium hortensia</i>	Chatham Island forget-me-not	Endangered species
<i>Parahebe</i> cultivars	Speedwell	White flowered selections
<i>Phormium cookianum</i>	Flax	Medicinal, bird attractant
<i>Pittosporum</i> 'Chantilly'	Pittosporum	Low growing with highly scented flowers
<i>Pittosporum tenuifolium</i> 'Tom Thumb'	Pittosporum	Dwarf, compact form of species
<i>Polystichum vestitum</i>	Prickly shield fern	–
<i>Pseudopanax arboreus</i>	Five-finger, whauwhaupaku	Bird attractant
<i>Pseudopanax crassifolius</i> var. <i>trifoliolatum</i>	Lancewood	Bird attractant
<i>Pseudopanax laetus</i>	Five-finger	Culinary, bird attractant
<i>Pseudowintera colorata</i> 'Red Leopard'	Pepper tree, horopito	Medicinal, culinary
<i>Pteris tremula</i>	Shaking brake fern, turawera	–
<i>Rhopalostylis sapida</i>	Nikau palm	Medicinal, bird attractant
<i>Schefflera digitata</i>	Seven-finger, patētē	Medicinal, bird attractant
<i>Scleranthus biflorus</i>	–	Moss-like ground cover
<i>Solanum laciniatum</i>	Poroporo	Medicinal, culinary
<i>Sophora</i> 'Little Baby' (<i>S. prostrata</i>)	Prostrate kowhai	Bird attractant
<i>Tecomanthe speciosa</i>	–	Bird attractant
<i>Vitex lucens</i>	Pūriri	Medicinal, bird attractant
<i>Xeronema callistemon</i>	Poor Knight's lily	Endangered species
Various species of mosses	Mosses	–

Trish Waugh is a landscape designer based in the Bay of Plenty, specialising in the use of native flora in innovative residential and commercial gardens.

In addition to being part of the gold award winning team at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2004, Trish and her husband Doug have also won several gold medals at Eilerslie Flower Show and the Melbourne International Flower Garden Show, as well as Landscape Industry Association awards. In 1990 they won the Landscape of the Year award with a large scale native planting.