

BEST OF THE REST

❖ Don't miss petrolhead presenter James May's Paradise in Plasticine (RHW42), which will form part of a BBC Two series. The garden as art is one of the key themes at the show – see page 6.



❖ Chelsea Flower Show and Motörhead are rarely seen in the same sentence – unless one is describing David Domoney's bikers' garden The Ace of Spades (RHW49). Sure to be a talking point.

Plots with perfect pitch

Diana McAdam talks to designers who produce astonishing effects in minimal space

In recent years, Chelsea's small gardens have attracted almost as much attention as the larger show gardens, and little wonder, as the imaginative designs confound expectation of what can be achieved in a restricted space. This year is no exception: exhibitors in the two categories, Urban and Courtyard, have created designs that are sure to thrill and inspire all who see them. Here are some to look for.

The Pilgrim's Rest

Chris O'Donoghue

RM16 (01580 240817;
chrisodonoghue.co.uk)

❖ This is Chris O'Donoghue's third Chelsea garden and like his previous two – 2007's Shinglesea, a seaside garden that featured a Victorian railway carriage, and last year's Moroccan-inspired courtyard refuge for SPANA – this thoughtful design tells a multilayered story. Chris, 58, has taken inspiration from monastic herb gardens for his design, which cost about £14,000. His main sponsor was 1066 Country Marketing (Hastings Town Council).

"I hope visitors will be able to gaze at the garden and get a real sense of peace, as pilgrims might have done centuries ago when they stopped off at a rural monastery while wending their weary way towards Canterbury," he says.

Monastic gardens provided plants, such as catmint, chamomile, wormwood and woad for culinary, medicinal and dyeing purposes.

"The beds would have been packed with wonderful forms

and textures, giving off the most delicious scents," Chris says. The aromatic herbs that spill from his raised beds and scramble up the hazel screens include *Angelica archangelica*, which was thought to cure indigestion, elder (*Sambucus nigra*) to treat colds and flu, and southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*), believed to be a remedy for baldness.

A wheelbarrow, thatched dovecote and straw beehives complete the picture. As with all Chris's designs, the attention to detail delights.

Robert Patch created the medieval pattern barrow and rustic bench, while Aylesford Pottery, which is within the grounds of The Friary, a Carmelite shrine near Maidstone, made the pots.

Nature Ascending

Angus Thompson and Jane Brockbank

RHW37 (07833 684491;
angusthompsondesign.com)

❖ Those of us whose gardens tend to be more untamed than manicured will enjoy Nature Ascending by Angus Thompson, 39, and Jane Brockbank, 43, who spent about £30,000 on the garden.

"We wanted a garden that celebrated the incredible diversity of wildlife to be found in the city but also satisfied our love of contemporary design," says Angus. Their solution was to combine informal planting with crisp landscaping to provide an urban garden that can be a haven for wildlife. People and nature can coexist harmoniously in this space, which was inspired by memories of "forgotten



Keeping it natural: Angus Thompson and Jane Brockbank, top, in a wilder landscape; Jeffery Hewitt, above, with elements used in his 'Victorian contemporary' garden

SLIDESHOW

See pictures of the plants and Show Gardens

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corners" in larger gardens or nature reserves. Nesting sites for birds and insects abound. The small pond, shady trees and naturalistic planting that includes *Anthriscus sylvestris* 'Ravenswing' and native grasses provide food and shelter, while the raised walkway allows them to flourish undisturbed.

Structure is provided by clipped yew hedges and elegant cultivars such as the tall and striking *Iris germanica* 'Quechee', while the diverse colour scheme ranges from the rich foliage of *Eupatorium rugosum* 'Chocolate' to the delicately hued *Digitalis purpurea* 'Suttons Apricot'.

Jacob's Ladder

Jeffery Hewitt

RM12 (020 8547 2452;
hewittlandscapes.co.uk)

❖ Anyone fascinated by the stream of carved angels, who for centuries have tirelessly scaled Bath abbey's wonderful west front, will be charmed by the gentle formality of Jeff Hewitt's courtyard design, which he describes as having "a Victorian flavour with a contemporary twist".

"I love the story of Jacob, who laid his head upon a stone to sleep and dreamt of a ladder reaching up into Heaven, and I wanted to include it in a garden somehow," says Jeff, 42, who didn't want to say how much he spent on the project.

This self-taught designer's imaginative solution includes a stone ladder rising to the top of the rear wall, flanked by birch trees and twin cascades of water. A herringbone path leads to the ladder, its rung-like bricks lined with "angels" – lush beds filled with white aquilegias, alliums, roses and peonies, and wing-like ferns. This scheme is interspersed with contrasting architectural foliage plants such as *Rodgersia* 'Irish Bronze'.

Wildflowers have also been incorporated into the planting, while sturdy geometric box cubes keep it earthbound. The result is timeless and soothing, and reflects Jeff's belief that harmony is achieved when the emotions are in equilibrium.

This is Jeff's second small garden for Chelsea – his first, in 2006, won a silver medal – and he has also designed two medal-winning gardens for Hampton Court Flower Show.