

A stately pergola flanked by a parterre of clipped *Buxus microphylla* 'Faulkner', interplanted with white-flowering Japanese anemones and Mediterranean cypress trees, lend an Italianate formality to the garden



Classic Romance

SET IN THE MIDST OF JOBURG'S HYDE PARK LIES A GREEN PARADISE DOTTED WITH PRECIOUS STONES, SCULPTURES AND UNUSUAL PLANTINGS

TEXT DI BARRELL PHOTOGRAPHS ELSA YOUNG

Both designers were greatly influenced by Iford Manor, architect Harold Peto's Italianate garden in Wiltshire



Saint Christopher, known primarily as the patron saint of travel, is also one of the patron saints of gardens and thus lends his name to this romantic oasis in the heart of Hyde Park. The Garden of St Christopher is the vision of landscape designers Debby Tenquist and Martine de la Harpe of Flower Power, who have nurtured this ambitious project into a magnificent reality over a four-year period, with future plans still in the works. A recent open day drew 6 000 visitors, with proceeds going to charity.

The three-hectare garden combines formal elements such as a stately pergola, clipped-box parterre and tapis vert

(unbroken expanse of lawn found in traditional Renaissance garden design), which evolve gently into the 'bosco' or wild garden. Both designers were greatly influenced by Iford Manor, architect Harold Peto's Italianate garden in Wiltshire where structural elements provide a strong framework for plant material. 'Even though Peto's garden is only 100 years old, there is a great sense of history and patina, with beautiful stonework inhabited by plants,' says De la Harpe.

Two years of painstaking initial groundwork were required – integrating the existing property with the recently acquired 1.5 hectares next door, transplanting large trees to ideal locations, dynamiting an entire granite seam out of the lawn (which was used later to clad the pergola) and working with no less than ►

FROM LEFT The columns of the pergola are softened by plantings of wisteria, white clematis 'Montana' and 'Petrea volubilis'; the unbroken expanse of lawn is used to integrate the two properties as well as provide a sense of scale as the eye is drawn towards the distance

OPPOSITE PAGE Colourful plantings of clematis, petunias and Bougainvillea 'Killie Campbell' complement the geometric design of a formal water feature



The design for the oval reflection pond was based on a similar one by the late British designer Russell Page. The stillness of the water mirrors the pinks and purples of myriad azaleas, irises and valerians



Meet the Designers

Debby Tenquist (left) and Martine de la Harpe (right) of Flower Power

DEBBY TENQUIST

WHAT GARDENS DO YOU ADMIRE? Les Quatre Vents in Canada, Ain Kassimou in Marrakech by Madison Cox and Marcel Wolterinck's Kuilenbosch garden in Belgium.

WHAT MAKES BOTANICA UNIQUE AS A NURSERY?

You can find unusual single-colour perennials, shrubs, trees and stylish garden accessories including hats, aprons, obelisks, bird feeders, furniture and bamboo screening.

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR GARDEN GAZING?

Italy and Japan.

MARTINE DE LA HARPE

WHAT GARDENS DO YOU ADMIRE? Folly Farm in Berkshire and the ancient moss garden (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) by Muso Soseki at the Koinzan Saiho-ji Rinzai Zen Buddhist temple in Japan.

WHAT MAKES BOTANICA UNIQUE AS A NURSERY? We specialise in clematis, a variety of giant salvias, and *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle', among other seasonal flowering shrubs, trees and perennials.

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR GARDEN GAZING?

Provence and Japan.

20 subcontractors, were the challenges that faced the pair.

The central motif of the Garden of St Christopher logo is a flowering magnolia, a testament to the essential role that trees play here. Copper beech, Cork oak, Cape Chestnut, Golden Elm and Indian bean trees were added to the original garden, which already featured unusual *Quercus nigra* trees, pin oaks and two venerable camphors. The duo wanted the garden to be home to a rich repository of plants and, since inception, has tracked down an extraordinary collection from all over South Africa: 150 mature camellias with 45 varieties represented, ornamental acers and 80 varieties of clematis leading the way. An impressive flowering season is enjoyed, beginning with the winter magnolias and heralding spring are


dogwoods, cherries, crab apples, azaleas and rhododendrons, shown to perfection in what is known as the oval reflection pond and the azalea bowl.

Water is also an integral feature in the garden and has been used in three diverse ways. The first is the oval pond, exquisite when viewed from above, especially in the late afternoon when the water mirrors a palette reminiscent of Monet. The second, a raised rectangular pond, echoes the formal quality of the parterre. And, lastly, the exotic tiger's eye cascade is reached by a raised wooden deck through artfully placed mineral gems from the client's collection, including verdite, amethyst, rose quartz and jasper.

The three water features are run as a closed system and are fully reticulated with the water naturally aerated and ►



ABOVE A pair of bronze cranes by sculptor Italia Greig nestle in a swathe of white, burgundy and dark-blue Louisiana irises which runs through the meadow garden



Water-loving plants such as arums, astilbes and a giant *Gunnera manicata* thrive in this pond. Many varieties of trees, from magnolia and cork oak to cherry blossom and acer, have been judiciously planted with space to grow

An exciting offshoot of their plant-hunting forays is the recently opened Botanica, a new nursery on the estate

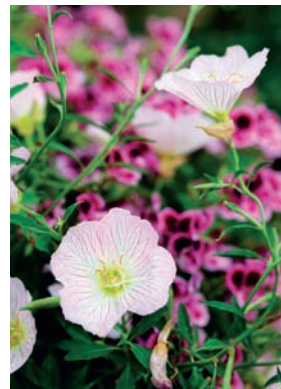


Spotlight

A cameo of sought-after species grown at the garden

PRIM AND PROPER

Groundcovers *Oenothera speciosa* are planted with the miniature *Pelargonium* 'Angel Eyes' which add colour.



ASIAN INFLUENCE

The blossom of the famous Japanese Tai haku or great-white cherry tree, just one of the many varieties of trees.



DOUBLE DOSE

Papaver somniferum or double opium poppies are sown from the seed. These are available from the Botanica nursery.



cleaned by the oxygenating plants in the bog garden, with no harsh chemicals used in the process.

Towering tree ferns, foxgloves and hostas add a lush magic to this garden as do the gnarled roots and branches of old upturned trees known as a stumpery – a late Victorian device revived by Prince Charles at Highgrove where old trees are used as vessels for plants, in this case streptocarpus and maidenhair ferns.

'Sustainability has been a guiding principle,' says Tenquist. 'We have re-used old stumps where possible, detritus from pruning is utilised for mulch, cut cedar trees have been employed as fragrant stepping stones and we also have a butterfly and bee garden to assist pollination,' she explains.

An exciting offshoot of their plant-hunting forays is the recently opened

Botanica, a new nursery on the estate – open by appointment only – where you'll find a large selection of unique perennials and climbers such as salvia species and many others.

It has been a remarkable project for Tenquist and De la Harpe, one that continues to challenge and evolve. 'To develop a garden of this scale with mature trees, and an extraordinary palette of plant material, together with the freedom to realise a carefully considered design, has been an incredible opportunity and privilege for us both,' says Tenquist. Happily, it is a privilege most generously shared with the community and garden-lovers alike.

■ *Garden of St Christopher*

📍 www.gardenofstchristopher.com;

Flower Power 📍 www.flowerpower.co.za

ABOVE FAR LEFT The client's collection of mineral gems has been used in this section of the garden – here, an unusual cascade constructed solely of tiger's eye catches the light through the waterfall, while pieces of quartz and verdite have been artfully placed among the lush planting of foxgloves and ferns

OPPOSITE PAGE A path leads guests through apricot foxgloves, ferns and streptocarpus to the cascading tiger's eye water feature

