

Wild is just champion at Chelsea

A garden accessible for spinal injury sufferers gains the top prize at the flower show, writes Adam Vaughan

A garden designed to be accessible for people recovering from spinal injuries has won the Chelsea Flower Show, as weed-packed, nature-friendly and rewilded gardens dominated the event.

After Chelsea ends this week Horatio's Garden, the best-in-show winner, will be transplanted to Sheffield to transform a grey car park into a haven for patients at Northern General Hospital, the NHS's second biggest spinal injuries unit.

Flowers and a water table are at the height of wheelchairs and hospital beds. The terrazzo floor is completely flat, to make a smooth ride for people recovering from a spinal injury.

"It's not only patient friendly, but it's environmentally friendly. Usually a terrazzo floor is made of cement. This is cement free, saving the equivalent carbon of three return flights to New York," Charlotte Harris, one of the garden's designers, said.

The "bump-free" flooring also allows for moveable planters. "If someone said I want my bed right here, we can move everything around them," Harris said.

Hugo Bugg, the garden's designer, said his creation also took account of the difficulty some people with spinal injuries had with regulating their body temperature. "So providing that canopy level [cover] and dappled shade ... is really important to the garden."

The charity Horatio's Garden was set up by the family of Horatio Chapple, a volunteer at a spinal injury unit, who was killed by a polar bear in Svalbard north of mainland Norway at the age of 17. It designs outdoor spaces for hospitals across the country.

Olivia Chapple, Horatio's mother, said of yesterday's win: "We've always had a dream to be here. Because we try to create mini Chelsea gardens in hospitals and we look after them really, really well, so that people always feel they're being appreciated."

Curtis Fraser, 58, said a Horatio's Garden at Stanmore Hospital had been hugely important to him after his back was broken in 2020. He said he loved the winning garden. "I wish I could bring it home," he said. Fraser said the garden during his rehabilitation had been crucial. Growing



The best-in-show winner, with its polished flat surfaces, low features and mobile planters, was designed to be accessible to visitors in wheelchairs and hospital beds

Stephen Anderton Comment

Chelsea's best show garden this year is quite a surprise, tucked not out of the way but certainly in a side aisle off the main avenue. Horatio's Garden, designed by Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg, left, was there to represent the

spirit of real gardens that the charity Horatio's Garden has been building at spinal injury units around Britain. These are serious flower gardens, often cared for by serious volunteer gardeners, and not surprisingly are the last word in accessibility.

I wish them well. But how was it as a garden? It was welcoming and warm, perhaps a little old-fashioned in its swirling easy-turn spaces, but certainly much more of a sanctuary than most of the so-called Sanctuary Gardens at the show. Its planting showcased limey euphorbias, lavender thalictrums and *Cirsium*

rivulare, or atropurpureum, but was most importantly a reliable planting scheme, both on the ground and in the trees, a scheme that would be manageable in most people's hands. And there was Aruncus Horatio of course, a new hybrid goat's beard. The trees hung nicely low; the spaces nestled.

Drystone peppercot cairns punctuated the beds, so much more eloquent than half-decent sculpture, and a water feature, part table, part clock, was intriguing without being too clever by half. To be wheelchair

friendly the paving was one long sweep of permeable bonded aggregate, polished flat like the smoothest of terrazzo corridors but which, unlike concrete, does not cause ecological offence. This surface apart, the materials were natural — stone, metal chairs, a wooden pavilion — so the whole effect was kind. No one was shrieking: "Look, I designed this!" Why was it awarded best show garden? It was superbly made, designed and planted. And perhaps the judges felt usability was at least as important as the latest fashion or ecology.

plants had been therapeutic for helping him to regain control of his hands.

Harris said the flower show had had a vintage year, with a continuing growth in wilder gardens. Last year's winner was a rewilded garden. Weeds were prolific at Centrepoin's garden, which won an award for construction. The garden, designed by Cleve West, features a derelict building, uprooted trees, weeds and bricks strewn around the plants. Though the crowds to see it were deep, it has been divisive. "It's touching a bit on the dystopian rather than utopian," one visitor said.

Wildlife was at the forefront of the RSPCA's first garden at the show, which picked up a silver gilt medal. Martyn Wilson, the designer, said he had been inspired by how much work the charity was doing with rescued wild animals. He said he hoped the garden, which will be moved to Cheshire for schoolchildren to visit, showed people that even small spaces could help nature.

