

Dig for glory

It's traditionally established designers who get to show off at Chelsea. But this year is different. Lia Leendertz meets the newcomers who are hoping to make a splash

Chelsea flower show's Main Avenue is usually home to flashy show gardens dominated by big names. But for 2014 this illustrious stretch of horticultural real estate is playing host to a lively bunch of newcomers. Here are the ones we're most excited about.

Hugo Bugg (below)

Being the next big thing can be a burden, but Hugo Bugg is taking it in his stride. He won the RHS's Young Designer of the Year award in 2010, and now, at 26, comes of age with his garden for the Royal Bank of Canada Blue Water Project. "All designers aspire to show here," Bugg says.

His waterscape garden highlights global water issues: "It's a beautiful garden with a strong message: [it] mimics nature's way of slowing down water, encouraging infiltration into the ground and taking pressure off urban drainage systems."

He adds: "Even within the brief time I've been a designer, styles and inspiration have evolved. I'm excited about the prospects for pushing boundaries further." But for now his eye is firmly on the prize. "I'm up against big names, but I'm really competing against myself to ensure this garden is of the highest standard possible."



Harry and David Rich (right)

Both in their 20s, Harry and David Rich created an artisan garden at Chelsea last year and have been bumped up to Show Garden status this year. "We want to make a very naturalistic space," says Harry of their night sky garden for Vital Earth. "It is sympathetic to a landscape we know well." The brothers grew up in the Brecon Beacons and will use dry stone walls to create "rooms". Their garden's central feature will be a grass star-gazing pit and the planting will evoke the Milky Way. "We have three weeks to make it look like it's always been there."

Harry relishes the challenge: "We feel honoured."

Matt Keightley (far right, top)

"If I had time to stop and think, Chelsea would be daunting," Matt Keightley says. "But I haven't had the luxury." He has been designing since he was 17, "when my folks wanted their suburban plot transformed and I took it on".

Now 29, he is creating the Hope On The Horizon garden for the David Brownlow charitable foundation. "It represents the path of recovery by wounded, injured and sick military personnel." The layout will be based on the military cross: "Granite blocks will represent the soldiers' physical wellbeing and the planting their psychological wellbeing at various stages of rehabilitation."

"I'd be thrilled with any award," Keightley says, "but I have my heart set on gold, best in show and people's choice - aspiration is key!"

Nicole Fischer and Daniel Auderset (far right, centre)

First-timers Nicole Fischer (one of the few women to make it to Main Avenue) and Daniel Auderset came to garden design after other careers, she from her Munich casting agency,



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he from telecommunications and healthcare. Both ended up at Inchbald School of Garden Design, where they became friends. Auderset had been a keen gardener for some time: "I've visited [Chelsea] many times, so it has been a long-held dream to create my own garden here." Their style is modernist - clean lines, limited materials and colours - and their Extending Space Garden takes inspiration from the Swiss Pfyn forest; they hope to capture the essence of that landscape in a small, urban space.

They also have more at stake than other newcomers: they were moved up to Main Avenue in autumn, so "were too late to get a main sponsor. We're funding it almost entirely ourselves," Fischer says. "It's a risk, but one worth taking to showcase our work at the highest level."

Mattie Childs (right, below)

"My head and heart have always been in the garden," Mattie Childs says, "but I never imagined I'd make my living from it. I spent 10 years suited and booted [he worked in advertising], but in 2005 I was injured in the London bombings, which made me rethink my future."

A 2007 visit to Chelsea put garden design on his radar. He cut his teeth on show gardens at RHS Hampton Court Palace flower show, where he won two gold medals in two years, and relishes the chance to step up. His tranquil garden for Brewin Dolphin will feature copper arches and greens and yellows suggestive of a spring morning. "I want to capture the idea that from the darkness of winter comes light and possibility."

But he's under no illusions: "I expect the Chelsea experience to be an intense rollercoaster, but I also know I'll enjoy every minute. I have 22m by 10m of amazing plants and materials to play with. Heaven!"

