

## Whistle Stop Chelsea 2005 Experience<sup>©</sup>

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### AN OVERVIEW

The Chelsea Flower Show was the highlight of a short visit back to London, the city of my birth. Visiting Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Chelsea on one of the Members Only days was exceptional. The area was lightly populated, allowing good viewing of the exhibits. The exhibits and exhibitors were fresh and sparkling.

The new Great Pavilion at RHS Chelsea contained a mix of show gardens, floral, and plant exhibits. Although our visit was on an overcast day, the light conditions in the marquee were excellent, and the colours almost natural. Walking in, we were overcome by the vastness of the Great Pavilion and by the sights and the scents held within its walls.

Outside, the show gardens, allied traders, floral arts, and horticultural displays drew much attention from all visitors. It was interesting to observe the medals system, in that excellence of display to a certain standard gave awards and that more than one medal could be awarded in each class if each exhibit met the strict judging criteria. It was good to note that timber products displayed or sold must have been harvested from sustainable forests and that alternatives to peat products were used in the displays. Exhibitors were also prohibited from using or showing non-native invasive plants in their displays.

Most of the exhibits gave the impression that the plants had been growing in their displays for years, defying the logic that all had been a grassy site just a few days before.

The first ever exhibit by the Chelsea Pensioners drew much interest. Depicting the soldiers' dreams of their homeland whilst serving in the Second World War, the exhibit included the village pub, village green complete with duck pond, and the home vegetable patch. Poppies and other wildflowers grew in the meadow alongside the pub.

The display of medal winning vegetables by Medwyn Williams, his ninth year and last display at Chelsea, and another Gold, drew much attention. The display included over 45 different vegetables, many grown in long containers and displayed with long roots intact. All were in neat bundles, perfectly even and unblemished, displayed to perfection.

Cascading mountains of mouthwatering, fragrant strawberries exhibited by Ken Muir Ltd. left the taste buds tingling.

### CLEMATIS

Clematis exhibited at Chelsea were superb. Different styles of display by each grower highlighted their plants. Many excellent new cultivars of clematis were displayed by Raymond Evison's Guernsey Clematis Nurseries. Plants displayed from staging up the walls of the Great Pavilion on a large corner site were flowering prolifically, resulting in wall-to-wall clematis flowers. These dwarf and very floriferous patio-style clematis are the result of Raymond Evison's intensive breeding program and so worthy of a place in the modern smaller garden. Clematis displayed

by both Thorncroft and Sheila Chapman Nurseries were on pergolas and frames, as they would be growing in the home garden. Immaculate displays, their hard work rewarded by medals yet again. The displays by various societies, institutes, and retailers were a source of both knowledge and articles for purchase. Everything from Wellington boots to watering cans, bumble bees, books, and RHS colour charts, and all things horticultural.

### **CONCLUSION**

In all, this was an experience to be repeated at a later date, this being only a sample of what was on offer. We can only imagine what the Saturday plant sales were like, when the numbers of people were far in excess of those allowed in on the privileged "RHS Members Only" days. We left in awe of the sights we had just experienced, vowing "We'll be back."