

THE Chelsea Flower Show attracts the cream of horticulturalists and once again the world's best garden designers will be competing for a coveted gold medal.

Among the big names creating show gardens this year are Jinny Blom, Chris Beardshaw and Diarmuid Gavin.

Here, we meet the designers and take a closer look at their show gardens, which promise to be among the highlights of Chelsea.

CHRIS BEARDSHAW

ONE OF the UK's foremost gardeners, Chris is perhaps best known as the host of such popular TV programmes as *The Flying Gardener* and *Hidden Gardens*.



A firm favourite at Chelsea, he has already won an RHS Gold Medal for his 1999 Dig For Victory garden, and is hoping that this year's offering will equally impress the judges.

The Chris Beardshaw Garden celebrates 100 years of the Hidcote Manor Garden, one of the country's most influential gardens.

He says: "Hidcote, more than any other garden, is responsible for who I am today. As a boy, I often visited and roamed the rooms and woodlands on a summer's day."

The garden at Hidcote in Gloucestershire was designed and laid out in 1907 by Lawrence Johnston, a major influence in the Art & Crafts movement. It was his vision of a garden as a total sensory experience that led to the creation of "garden rooms" at Hidcote, a model for the classic English garden.

Hidcote is about to restore much of Johnston's 1930s designs and Chris's 2007 show garden will offer a first glimpse of the original planting.

For the show garden's vibrant planting scheme, Chris has referred to an oil painting by Johnston of one of his borders, which illustrates his desire for a "jungle style" mix of plants and colour.

"There is a very large move in gardening at the moment towards trained plants. So we are using a 3.5m high and 1.5m wide hornbeam this year. It's a sculpted specimen," he reveals.

In creating this flamboyant, bountiful garden, however, Chris

Best in show

It's every gardener's dream to showcase their work at Chelsea. **MAGGIE MALLON** spoke to three designers on what it means to them

knows he has his work cut out. He says: "Chelsea means enticing 5,000 plants to sing in tune and in time to create a symphony that you hope the audience recognises and loves."

JINNY BLOM

JINNY is one of the favourites to land the coveted Best Show Garden award for her Laurent Perrier-backed display, known as *A Moment Of Reflection*.

Prince Charles, who is one of her clients, chose Jinny to design the Healing Garden for the 2002 show, for which she won a silver medal.

Warm, emotional and supremely picturesque, Jinny's work is very feminine and she admits to being inspired by the world of art.

She says: "Chelsea is like falling in love and in many ways reminds me of the Oscars. You know it's when the eyes of the world are on you."

This year her Laurent Perrier Garden has been designed to reflect life's journey. It is an element of a larger garden attached to the modernist-style house of an Italian art collector, and commemorates his "journey of life".

The garden is a warm, peaceful setting, naturalistically planted and with finely handcrafted details.

Jinny says: "In my view, gardens have an incredibly uplifting effect on people, architecture and the wider landscape. But with the change in our climate we need to make beauty with environmental

awareness. It's not a choice – it's an imperative."

Her 2007 show garden features marble paths on different levels to represent a journey through life, as well as impressive "moon gates" to and from the garden.

A bronze solar gate stands at the entrance to symbolise the beginning of life, and a floating lunar gate suspended above a dark, still pond with stepping stones symbolises the changes that life brings.

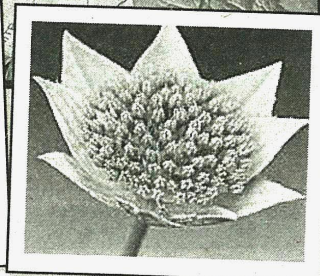
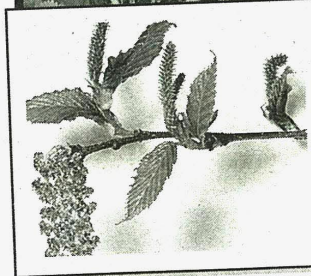
The planting is lush, floral and delicate, making lavish use of *Astrantia*. Strong sheer hedges, candle-shaped trees and sculptural structures balance it, and there are five fastigiated oaks in the garden. The dominant colours are burgundy, claret and soft pinks, shot through with lime green and flashes of orange.

She says: "I wanted to design a garden that anyone could relax in and contemplate their own journey of life and hopefully that's what I've achieved."

DIARMUID GAVIN

DIARMUID is no stranger at Chelsea, whether presenting BBC coverage or designing a show garden. His last garden here in 2005 was awarded an RHS Silver Gilt Medal.

After being inspired by his parents' own garden Diarmuid



LUSH: Jinny and her *Astrantia*, above right; Diarmuid's *Betula utilis*, above left

studied horticulture at the Botanic Gardens in Dublin and from there went on to set up his own design and construction business.

He says: "Chelsea is both wildly exciting and infuriating. For me it's like a drug – it gets in your blood. It has given me a career, it's a place to show off and it is about meeting old friends, exhilaration and exasperation."

His entry this year, The Westland Garden, is designed for an active and artistic mature couple. It includes a pavilion clad

in Western Red Cedar with two wings that intersect, providing two glass studio spaces, each with its own deck overlooking a pond.

Tiles are laid out in a giant floral pattern and he has suspended bubble chairs from metal rafters on an open deck over a pond.

He says: "It is a place for evening, for books, wildlife, dreaming and gazing."

The planting is green with small interludes of colour while the pavilion appears to emerge from a plantation of *Betula utilis*.

