

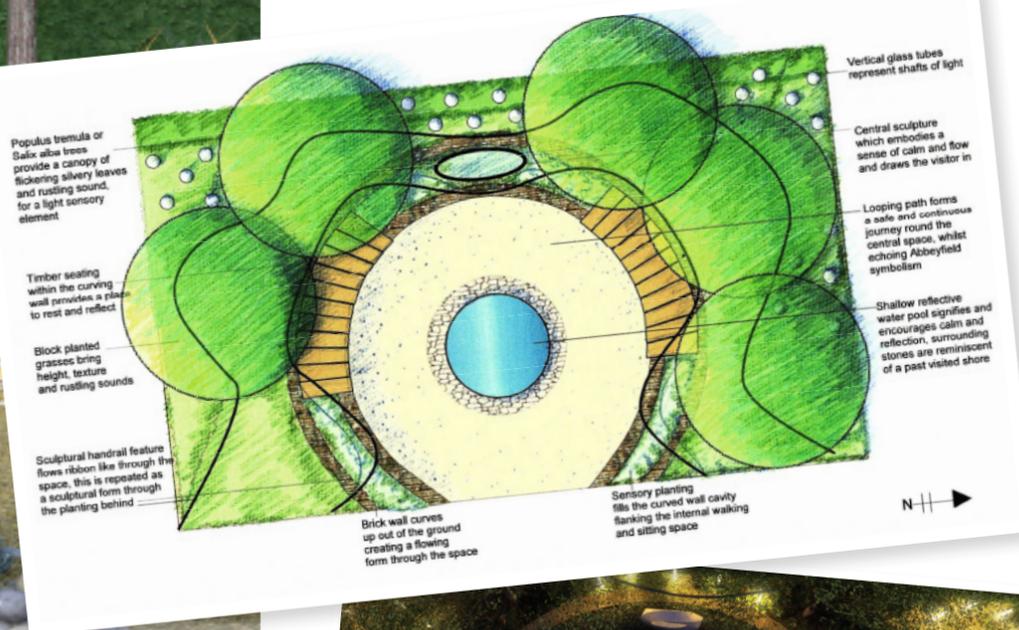


# A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Designer Rae Wilkinson and contractor Brian Herbert talk to Pro Landscaper about their RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show garden, The Abbeyfield Society: A Breath Of Fresh Air

2016 marks the 60th anniversary of The Abbeyfield Society, the housing and care charity that aims to alleviate social isolation for older people. This garden has been designed for a care home to provide an inviting outdoor space.

Visitors are drawn in by the central Mobius sculpture, can wander the circular path safely and sit on the wall seats to rest and reflect amongst sensory planting. A brimming water bowl in the centre is both diverting and soothing, whilst willow trees and blocks of grasses further enrich sounds and movement. Rae has designed a sculptural handrail which flows through the central space, and other materials have been chosen for familiarity, textural quality and colour.



**Rae Wilkinson**

## What made you apply to build a show garden at HCPFS in 2016?

I really enjoyed creating a show garden at HCPFS in 2015 and was asked by The Abbeyfield Society to create a show garden this year.

## Tell us about how you found your sponsor. Did they have any input with the design?

I had been working on some sensory gardens for a new dementia care home being built by The Abbeyfield Society. I was invited to be involved by their head of dementia innovation, and she was keen to launch their 'Breath of Fresh Air' project through a

show garden. My brief was to create an example of a dementia-friendly, calm and welcoming garden space.

## Do you think that creating show gardens is a way of marketing yourself as a designer, and have you secured work from it in the past?

Creating show gardens provides fantastic exposure. Though I didn't expect to secure work through the show last year, I did in fact gain a residential project.

## Why did you choose Outdoor Options to build the garden?

I have worked with Brian for many

years and watched him build fantastic award-winning gardens. His quality of work and standard of finish are outstanding. We have collaborated on a number of projects lately and a show garden was something we had discussed doing.

## What's the most nerve-racking part of the whole process for you?

Judging, of course, although I also get nervous about everything running to schedule – and budget.

## What are the main advantages of being involved in a show garden?

Creating a show garden involves every

element of the design process from concept to completion in an intensified and magnified form, which is a fantastic experience for any designer. HCPFS is a big and friendly show with a wide visitor demographic, which makes for an enjoyable build and an enjoyable show for everyone.

## What will be your favourite part of the show?

Installing the planting and seeing it all come together as a fully realised garden. That, and a glass of bubbly at the preview evening when it's all completed.

## Is the garden or any part of it going to be recycled after the show?

The entire garden has been designed for relocation at The Abbeyfield's Kew care home after the show, where it will provide an essential space for the care home's residents, their families and the staff.

## What is the most common question asked by visitors regarding your show gardens?

Most people ask about specific plant names, and it's not always the ones you think it will be!



**Brian Herbert**

## You have worked with Rae on several gardens projects but this is your first show garden together. Do you think this experience will be different?

Yes – very much so. Every project needs a fresh approach, especially show work. That comes with heightened expectation and making sure familiarity lets nothing slip through the net.

## As a regular builder of show gardens, what do you think will be the main challenge of this particular project?

Most likely our lovely English summers. Last time I built a garden at Hampton Court was in 2000, so I know it and am really looking forward to the luxury of space and its stunning setting.

## What sort of plan do you put together to make sure all goes smoothly with the build?

We always like to produce a timeline to make sure a critical path of dates for information and procurements is adhered to, in order to limit as many last minute reactive decisions as possible.

## How big is the team you're taking to work on the build of this garden, and will you personally be overseeing things?

We have produced steel work and pre-manufactured most of our bench wall off site to accelerate site progress and allow Rae and the planting team as much program space as possible. Hence crew will

only need to be two people, plus yours truly, for the first build stage.

## How long will you allow for building the garden at the show?

Build is 12 days total but most of our part will happen over the first six days, after which our role is more to support the all-important planting crew.

## What are your thoughts about contractor recognition with regards to show gardens?

I always think that as a route to market, show gardens work far better for designers, despite there being an equal proportion of commitment and knowledge from both, and contractors bearing far more financial risk. This does seem more openly recognised as of late, and the importance of the team bond is shining through.

## How different is building a show garden at RHS Hampton Court to RHS Chelsea?

They're completely different theatres, with one being the right side of Wandsworth.

## What will be your favourite part of being involved in this particular project?

6am, hose fresh on judging morning.

## Is building show gardens profitable for your business?

Profitability varies, but all of our show garden projects are most certainly healthy for the business.