

NEW FACES

# Mexican colour, a medieval boat, the Canadian wilds...

Three designers, all going solo at Chelsea for the first time, talk to *Alice Vincent* about inspiration, ambition and sleepless nights

## Manoj Malde

Manoj Malde may be making his RHS garden debut with his **Inland Homes: Beneath a Mexican Sky Garden** in the Fresh category (FR74), but he has noble ambitions when it comes to what he'd like to achieve with it: "Hopefully it will inspire people to use more colour in their gardens," he says. "I do think people tend to be a bit scared of colour – they play things quite safe. But colour is not scary, you've got to just try things out."

Colour has always been part of Malde's life. "My ancestry being Indian, as a child I was surrounded by women who wore beautiful saris, and I was born in Kenya, so I know of the colourful attire there," he says, explaining that he was "subconsciously drawn in" by the bright work of the late Mexican architect Luis Barragán: "When I first saw it, my instant reaction was, 'Wouldn't this make a fantastic backdrop to an amazing garden at Chelsea?'"

Malde spent 18 years in the fashion industry before training as a garden designer at the English

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Gardening School in London. He has previously worked on the show gardens of Chris Beardshaw, Diarmuid Gavin and, last year, of Nick Bailey, which inspired him to start creating his own submission.

"When you set out to do a garden for Chelsea, you're constantly thinking of how the judges will feel about it," he confesses. "But I got to a point where I thought, if I don't do it, I'll never know if I'm good enough."

Malde has created a courtyard painted in clementine, coral and cappuccino tones, and brought a mixture of Mediterranean and drought-tolerant herbaceous plants to provide even more colour. The plants, which, Malde says, "struggle to grow in arid landscapes", reflect the fact that Barragán wasn't



HEATHCLIFF O'NALLEY

Creative thinkers: all the planning, worry and hard work finally pays off

recognised by his peers until late in his career.

Malde has also included a nod to Barragán's most famous work, Cuadra San Cristóbal, a modernist equestrian estate that incorporated stables and pools for horses. One corner of the garden features a turquoise pool and a horse's head sculpted from aged copper wire by Rupert Till is another focal point.

Ultimately, though, Malde's intention was to stand out with his Chelsea debut: "My main thing was I wanted to produce a garden that was very different from what you generally see at Chelsea," he says.

With any luck, it'll bring some Mediterranean weather, too.

## Gary Breeze

All gardens start, in essence, with the ground. But for stone sculptor Gary Breeze, the beginnings of his garden emerged literally from the earth.

After winning Best Fresh Garden last year with a co-designer, Breeze returns to Chelsea for his first solo effort: **The IBTC Lowestoft: Broadland Boatbuilder's Garden** (AR565). The story began when Breeze was artist-in-residence at the Centre for Maritime Archaeology in Southampton, during which time a 900-year-old boat was discovered on the Norfolk Broads. Later, he took a sabbatical at the International Boat Building Training College to learn woodworking skills.

"I had a passion for the archeology of ancient boats and rebuilding them," he says. "So when the college asked me to design a garden for it to sponsor, it made sense to make it about the Broads and the boats found there."

Out of "archeological drawings taken from a load of wood squashed into the mud", a team of craftsmen created the boat that acts as the centrepiece of Breeze's Artisan Garden. "I'm amazed at how beautiful that boat is," he says. "It's like a gorgeous kind of brown leaf."

Breeze professes to "not being a horticultural expert at all", but he knew that, to evoke the air of a Norfolk boat-building yard in 1117, "all the plants needed to be native and appropriate to that environment". He

## Charlotte Harris

Charlotte Harris has been preparing for her first Show Garden at Chelsea as if it were a marathon, and when I speak to her, she must be nearing the 24th mile. From here on in, it's a case of being as well organised as possible and preparing for a lot of sleepless nights. "This is the toughest thing I've had to do in my professional life so far," Harris says.

It's almost fitting that the **Royal Bank of Canada Garden** (MA336) has pushed Harris to her limits, as its starting point was one of the world's most remote and unforgiving landscapes: the boreal forests and freshwater lakes of Canada. Inspired by RBC's brief to celebrate its Blue Water Project charitable fund, and the 150th anniversary of the Canadian Confederation, Harris explored the botany of Northern Ontario by floatplane, foot and canoe in what she calls "a spectacular kind of research opportunity".

The result is a garden that "evokes the feeling" of the Canadian wilderness. Granite boulders and copper reference the boreal geology, while larch timber work, Jack pines ("the archetypal tree of the boreal, which are gnarled and characterful") and woodland planting reflect the dense forest of her inspiration.

The relative warmth of the UK, however, has been problematic,



Harris says. "With April being hot, I've almost been crying because a lot the woodland planting has gone over." A month earlier, she lifted her showstopper tree to discover it had been fractured by snowfall. "They're very slow growing and quite rare, so it was really stressful."

Harris has done enough Chelseas (she has worked with Hugo Bugg and Luciano Giubbilei) in the past to be considered a "veteran", but is unusual as a woman making her debut with a Show Garden – and with an all-female design team.

Harris is philosophical about the emotional rollercoaster of designing for Chelsea. "I think a smooth process doesn't make for a great garden," she says. "I know that there will always be hard work and unanticipated things."



entrusted contractor Natural Gardens to supply 60 types of edible and aquatic plants. Although some on his wish list, such as early marsh orchids, were too rare and difficult to be included, Breeze is relaxed. "I'm not a fan of manipulating plants," he says. "So I'm not going to get too upset if things don't flower. It'll look very naturalistic. If we get it right, that in itself will be very beautiful, without too much artifice."

He's not fussed about medals either: "I don't feel that because I've got a gold I've got to win another," he says. "I just want it to look the way I think it should look... then it's got to win gold, because you envisage things to look perfect."