

Chelsea's early bloomer

First-time designer wins gold at flower show

KATHARINE BARNEY

A FIRST-TIME entrant to the Chelsea Flower Show has won a gold medal.

Caspar Gabb's The Green Room was the only garden in the City Gardens category to win the prize — showing he knows just how to make the most of London's small outdoor spaces.

Mr Gabb, 37, from west London, was previously a set designer before deciding to go travelling in Australia, New Zealand and Madeira.

"When I returned I took a garden job to earn some cash," he said.

"But I soon found I was in my element and I loved my new career so much.

"I already had my design training and experience so I did a course at the English School of Gardening in Chelsea and set up my own company, Natural Elements."

It was last August when Mr Gabb had the idea for his garden inspired by his trips abroad and the abundant plant life in those countries.

Aware of his lack of space, Mr Gabb used plants of several different heights and also made his garden furniture out of plant life.

The result is an area reminiscent

of a lush subtropical clearing that thrilled the judges. "I'm absolutely over the moon," he said.

"I put my heart and soul into this project and now I'm exhausted but exhilarated at the same time.

"Unless somebody wants to pay an extortionate amount of money for the garden I'll be removing it very carefully piece by piece and reconstructing it at my parents' house in Shropshire. There's no way I'm

destroying it now." Other winners at the show included Jekka McVicar and Rosie Hardy.

Both women took gold for the 11th consecutive year. Mrs McVicar, from South Gloucestershire, for Herbs Of Our Past And Future and Mrs Hardy, from Hampshire, for her Cottage Garden Plants display.

The pair, who were exhibiting next to each other in the Great Pavilion, last year became the first

women to win 10 consecutive golds for 10 years.

The most impressive run of gold medals, however, goes to Hillier Nurseries who this year took their 61st in a row.

One of the most talked about exhibits was the Head Garden with the largest ever mud and grass sculpture in the form of a naked reclining woman. The garden took a silver gilt award.



Growing talent: Caspar Gabb in his garden The Green Room, a Chelsea winner. Below, Jekka McVicar took gold for the 11th consecutive year

