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Arabella Lennox-Boyd update



Showbiz kids:
(clockwise from left) Caspar Gabb in his Green Room; Adam Frost; Kate Gould; Fernando Gonzalez; below, Philippa Probert



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Making waves in the design world

New garden designers are in the ascendant now that show season is here. Here are five names to look out for at the front of the pack
By Rae Spencer-Jones

Fernando Gonzalez: Metagardens, London

Science fiction, maths, chemistry and the forces of nature are all influences for Spanish garden designer Fernando Gonzalez. Using hi-tech computer animation programmes, he creates futuristic gardens that are unashamedly 21st century and deliberately bear no relation to their surrounding environment. "I want to get away from routine and through my gardens I aim to visit another dimension. Every client is unique so every garden should be unique – it is about creating the wow factor."

Fernando strives for innovation, employing plastics, concrete, timber or stone to achieve his special effects. Plants are chosen for their foliage, form and texture rather than their flowers and are planted as specimens instead of in traditional borders. "I use plants with strong personalities," he says, "so I they need to be given the room to breathe." His first show garden, "Pulsations", will be unveiled at Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, in the Small Gardens category. A recycled polystyrene-foam surface demonstrates how 21st-century technology can be used to create a contemporary garden that satisfies all the modern garden-owner's needs. ♦ 020-8993 6191; www.metagardens.co.uk

Philippa Probert: Outerspaces, The Wirral

Philippa Probert missed her own graduation because she was otherwise engaged at the RHS Tatton Park Flower Show, where she scooped a Gold Medal at her first attempt.

The private gardens she designs are modern, err on the side of unusual but are absolutely practical. Using materials that range from recycled concrete paving to living walls and roofs, Philippa also experiments with a wide variety of plants. "My designs are contemporary in structure but traditional in their planting," she says.

She's in the Urban category at Chelsea, with a garden called "Green Living". Designed for a young, busy couple, this plot explores how the minimum of space can be maximised with green living walls and a green roof. Stepping stones lead to a restful terrace which appears to float above a sheet of water, while water jets emphasise vertical space. At Tatton Park in July, "Aqua Life" focuses on natural water features in a design that caters for family activities and relaxation. ♦ 07734 157976; www.outerspaces.org.uk

Adam Frost: New Ground Landscapes, Lincolnshire

After initially training in landscaping, Adam Frost spent 10 years as Geoff Hamilton's landscape manager before branching out into design.

"Designing and building gardens is about communicating with people, understanding space and understanding plants," he says. He believes that each garden should be treated as a practical space: "Hard

landscaping should always reflect its associated buildings and work with the existing environment."

From city courtyards to 10-acre sites, Adam's designs always have strong architectural bones, which he softens with herbaceous plants, grasses, trees and shrubs. He won Gold for his first Chelsea garden in 2007 and this year is showing in the Urban category with a "A Welcome Sight", a bid to reinvent the front garden. The contemporary layout of cubed box hedges, raised steel water rills and borders presents the house well, but is also a space for relaxing and entertaining. ♦ 01780 764700; www.adamfrost.co.uk

Kate Gould: The Green Room Consultancy, Hertfordshire

Kate Gould won gold last year in Chelsea's Chic Gardens category (also scooping Best in Category), with a dramatic, funky vision of a city basement space, filled with lush, jungly planting, a daybed moulded with cushions, a trickling glass water feature and a balance of horticulture and decadence that was immensely appealing.

Kate's gardens feature ingenious modernist touches, such as the Perspex panels printed with a blown-up photo of a dry stone wall at Chelsea 2007. The panels, which had integrated lighting for a clubby evening ambience, got around the problem of how to use a textured and messy material in a difficult space. As Kate says, small city gardens are invariably accessed via stairs and corners, and usually over a cream carpet.

"Over the last 10 years our clients have become more and more design-savvy,"

says Kate. "Although it's nice to reinvent the wheel, as you get to do at Chelsea, in the real world my gardens are always client-led."

The winning Chelsea garden showed off Kate's flair for handling unusual materials, textural contrasts and bespoke features, but she is in some ways a traditionalist: "I like plants; my gardens are always very plant heavy," she says. And although she's missing out on Chelsea this year, she plans to be back in 2009. This year international commissions have kept her busy. ♦ 020 8930 3038; www.greenroomconsultancy.com

Caspar Gabb: Natural Elements Design LLP, London

"Will I earn a living before I'm dead?" wondered Caspar Gabb before he struck Chelsea gold with the "Green Room" (Best City Garden 2006). The popularity of that garden propelled him into the ranks of up-and-coming garden designers and on to the RHS Herbaceous Plant Judging Committee. His duties as an RHS judge preclude tackling another show garden for a few years.

That 2006 garden not only expressed Caspar's great love of plants, recycling and sculptural spaces, but captured the zeitgeist with its green-in-every-sense aesthetic. "That garden was my dream style," he says. "Shady and textural, it reflected subtropical and temperate places like New Zealand, which I adore."

Definitely not a minimalist, Caspar loves plants and combinations of foliage, colour and texture. When pushed to define his style he emphasises three-dimensionality. "There is an X-factor in my designs. They're not wacky but I try to create something that the client hasn't seen before. I focus on the structural layout and create interesting spaces – what's out there, what's round the corner?" ♦ 020 8960 9492; www.naturalelementsdesign.co.uk

