

Our History at the Chelsea Flower Show

Initially an image-building initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the immeasurable value of this event as a magnet for tourism has increased dramatically since the dawn of the New South Africa, in spite of the termination of government funding in 1995 in favour of other diplomatic expansion programmes. South Africa's participation has been sponsored by various corporate entities since then to promote the country as a prime ecotourism destination and showcase one of the world's richest and most diverse floral kingdoms. (A list of exhibits and awards appear on the inside covers of this brochure).

The South African Department of Foreign Affairs (Cultural Affairs, Bureau of Information) appointed a British floral designer, Pam Simcock, in 1976, to create the 'South Africa' exhibit on behalf of Kirstenbosch. By 1993 the exhibit had been awarded 17 Gold Medals and also won the Wilkinson Sword trophy for the 'Best Overseas Exhibit' for the four consecutive years that the award was made (1981 – 1984). The flowers, some of which were donated by various growers, were sourced and dispatched from Kirstenbosch to the South African Embassy in London each year. The National Botanical Gardens of South Africa (later the National Botanical Institute, and presently the South African National Biodiversity Institute [SANBI]) also sent a team of staff members to Chelsea every year to man the exhibit during the show week.

Since 1994 the exhibit has been sponsored by various South African businesses and banks, and more recently Kirstenbosch has raised funds by staging special Chelsea benefit concerts at the Garden. The design and construction has been undertaken by a core team from South Africa comprising David Davidson and Raymond Hudson as designers and a rotational group of SANBI staff members, assisted by an enthusiastic group of volunteers, from South Africa and abroad.

The design concept for the exhibit also changed at this juncture. It was decided to create landscaped exhibits that attempted to create a 'sense of place' and convey some idea of the actual geographical context reproduced in the displays, as well as endeavouring to answer some of the frequently asked questions about the plants, their growth forms, natural habitat and locality.

The designers

David Davidson and Raymond Hudson have been responsible for designing and creating the Kirstenbosch-South Africa exhibit for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show for 22 consecutive years, together with a small core team and an enthusiastic crew of volunteers. During this time the exhibit has garnered 16 RHS *Gold Medals* (bringing the total since 1976 to 33), as well as the *Anthony Huxley Trophy* (1995) and the *Lawrence Medal* for the best floral exhibit shown to the RHS in 2006. The exhibit was also the first recipient of the RHS *President's Most Creative Award*, introduced at Chelsea in 2008.

Plants and art have always been David's greatest passion, although he began his professional career in psychology and clinical social work. He later headed the Graphic Services Unit at the National Biodiversity Institute (Kirstenbosch) for 17 years – a role that included show design.

His current full-time occupation is as a graphic designer and scenic artist. He has also created floral exhibits in

other parts of the world including Palmengarten, Germany; the Royal Flora Expo in Thailand; the Singapore Garden Festival and the Gardening World Cup in Nagasaki, Japan.

Raymond obtained a Diploma in Horticulture and gained his comprehensive practical training and work experience with the Durban Botanic Garden. He subsequently obtained a Diploma in Parks Administration at the John Brooks School of Landscape Design (1984).

Ray's career in landscaping includes the design and management of numerous large estates and landscaping projects for Keith Kirsten Horticulture International such as the spectacular Cape wine estates of Delaire and Cavalli, whilst his speciality is domestic and small garden design.