



## WINNING WAYS

The 2010 show garden at Chelsea is designed by Scott Wynd, from TLC Pools, and built by the Mont Albert-based Ian Barker & Associates, with Fleming's Nurseries sourcing plants from Spain, Italy and Britain.

Wynd describes his design of the Fleming's and Trailfinders Australian Garden as outdoor rooms in two distinct sections: a pool/spa area above a decked seating space; and a cooking square. The pool area is shaded by a glass-sided pavilion with a circular roof window that lets sunlight play on the water below.

Dense plantings soften the straight lines to give the scheme a tropical feel, says Wynd. The foliage of *Strelitzia alba* dominates the landscape while tall bamboos add vertical strokes to the design. Plants in the lower canopy provide colour and texture.

Scott Tymkin, from Ian Barker & Associates, led the construction team.

The Chelsea win was double happiness for David Pontifex, a director of the Cheltenham-based Atkinson Pontifex. His company had taken out the top accolade at the 2010 HIA-CSR Australian Housing Awards, winning Australian Home of the Year a few days before the Chelsea show opened.

This is Fleming's sixth entry in the Chelsea Flower Show since 2004. The nursery did not compete last year because Black Saturday destroyed one of its largest planting areas in Taggerly.

Details of the materials used and people involved in this Chelsea garden can be found at: [flemings.com.au](http://flemings.com.au)  
[tclandscapes.com.au](http://tclandscapes.com.au)  
[landscape.net.au](http://landscape.net.au)  
[atkinsonpontifex.com.au](http://atkinsonpontifex.com.au)



**Man with a plan:** Scott Wynd waits to unfurl his design to the horticultural world.

**La alba:** *Strelitzia alba* is hard to find but spectacular to look at. (COURTESY OF FLEMINGS)

## AN ELUSIVE WHITE BIRD

The focal plant of Fleming's show garden this year is the white bird of paradise (*Strelitzia alba*), an exotic giant with paddle-shaped leaves and 30-35cm flowers. Considered a must-have specimen for tropical plantings, the white bird is, unfortunately, a can't-have plant in Melbourne, if not Australia, at this time.

Stephen Sayers, who runs his family-owned strelitzia nursery in New South Wales, says he has spent three years to get the alba ready for commercial production and is still working at it.

The more commonly found "white bird" is the Nicolai (*S. nicolai*), which has similar growing needs to the alba, says Sayers. Both these plants will grow to about 3.6-4.7 metres under temperate conditions. They are also quite drought tolerant and can survive temperatures down to about 3 degrees.

The most easily found strelitzia in Melbourne would be the common bird of paradise (*S. reginae*), which has crane-like, orange flowers. There are also dwarf and miniature strelitzias, Sayers says.

Feed strelitzias with well-rotted manure or a complete plant food that has a balanced blend of nitrates, phosphates and potash. And don't over water, especially in winter.

For more details on the range and planting requirements of the birds of paradise grown in Australia, visit [sayers-strelitzia.com.au](http://sayers-strelitzia.com.au)



**Chelsea garden:** Plants soften the geometric lines of this landscape.



REVIEW \ GARDENING

# CHELSEA OI! OI! OI!

For the past six years, an Australian nursery has been racking up gold, writes SIEW-CHING GOH.

**T**he Chelsea Flower Show needs no introduction. This prestigious flower show, held yearly in the grounds of The Royal Hospital, London, is a main event for plants and plantmen – not necessarily in that order.

What is less known is that one Australian nursery has been quietly gathering gold at Chelsea since 2004. It did it again this year and the tally so far is four gold and two silver-gilt awards in the show-gardens category.

If this were a sport, Chelsea would be resounding with "Oi! Oi! Oi!" come showtime. But gardening is not a sport ... or is it? Fleming's Nurseries director Wes Fleming makes it sound like one.

"Each year we invite a different designer and a different construction crew, with only the project co-ordinators remaining a constant," says Fleming. "If we take the same team, we lose the excitement, the thrill of competing against the best in the world."

Again, if this were a sport, it would be a team event. Seventeen pairs of hands are on site to transform a bare 20 by 10-metre patch into a lavish garden. The crew has about two weeks to take the project from concept to completion.

In that time they would have had to empty three containers of hardware prefabricated in Australia, move hundreds of plants past quarantine, build rooms, pools and a wet bar, then anchor the plants and clean up, ready to face the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) judges.

In this keenly contested event, the lead up to the challenge reads like a marathon; it takes more than a year to get a garden ready for the cross-continental trip. The final weeks of preparation play out like a sprint, with teams, equipment, trees and tempers charging through a site of about 4.5 hectares to the finish line.

This loosely draped analogy between the Chelsea Flower Show and a sporting event stops, however, on the winner's podium.

While today's sportsmen and women play for cash and expensive trophies, Chelsea winners get a piece of cardboard with a medal stamped on it. No cup. No vase. No plate; just a thick piece of paper looking like a certificate. It is tempting to throw our memories a long way back to recall the days when athletes strove to win laurels or olive branches.

"There is no monetary gain," says Fleming, wryly,



**Wes Fleming:** "Winning is a bonus, not the aim, but it's nice to get gold."

"winning is a bonus, not the aim, although it is nice to win."

Australian nurseries have for too long been looked upon as cottage industries, he says. Competing at Chelsea raises the profile and confidence of the industry and prepares the ground for the future. "One day we might move beyond Chelsea to the bigger issues, such as our role in greening the urban environment and planting underutilised spaces."

Until that day, the Aussies will continue to plant and party at Chelsea. Last year, Chelsea revellers quaffed more than 2000 bottles of champagne, sipped more than 46,000 glasses of Pimms and drank about 65,000 cups of Fairtrade tea and coffee, according to official statistics. That's part of the Chelsea charm, and it is cheery to know that Australians are not giving that bash a miss.

The ABC reports that next year, Cranbourne's Royal Botanic Garden will bring a miniature Australian garden to Chelsea.

Tickets for next year's show are already for sale at the RHS website, [rhs.org.uk](http://rhs.org.uk)

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