

BOTANICAL LIFE

A woman stands in a large, ornate hall, wearing a long, flowing dress made of yellow and white flowers. She is also wearing a gold and black feathered mask. The background shows large windows and a display of flowers on a table.

A FLOWER FIESTA
Special coverage of the Melbourne
International Flower and Garden Show



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The world-heritage listed site, The Royal Exhibition Centre and Carlton Gardens hosts the annual show

A FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS IS A FAVOURITE FOR ALL

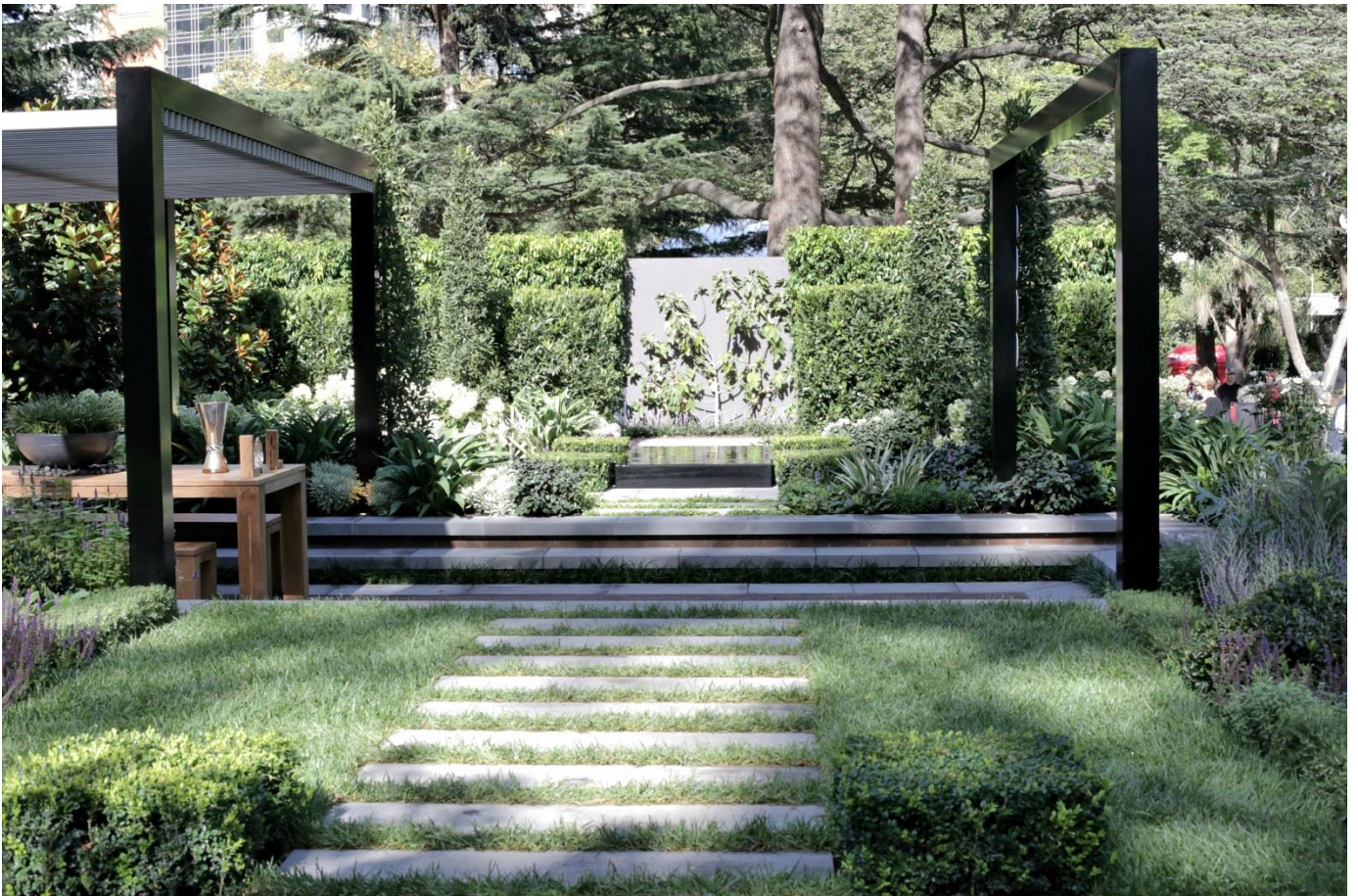
By Elizabeth Pillidge

Wednesday, March 23rd, 2016

Whether you are a gardening-enthusiast or you simply like the scent of roses, the biggest gardening event in the Southern Hemisphere had something to offer for everyone last week. The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens were packed as flocks of enthusiastic flower-fans and gardeners attended the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show (MIFGS), eager to observe the inspiring horticultural displays and to browse the various gardening merchandise.

With the use of over 10,000 flowers and plants, this year's display manifested a grand variety of ways to put your creative gardening juices into practice. From exquisite floral outfits to state-of-the-art gardens, the event was far from lacking in innovative charm and inspiration.

This year, a variety of competitions divided the show's displays into a number of categories. One of the more coveted awards, the *City of Melbourne Award of Excellence for Best in Show*, was given to *The Greenery Garden Centre Show Garden*, designed by Vivid Design and



The Award-winning *Greenery Garden Centre Show Garden*

constructed by Semken Landscaping. The garden exhibited a high level of innovation with meticulous planting and cascading levels leading to a peaceful sitting area. “You’ve gotta have a lot of artistic talent, you’ve gotta know your plants”, commented Horticulture Specialist and Furniture Manager, Kay. Kay also mentioned that such a landscape takes 12 months to design, a fact which encourages us to all the more appreciate the work behind the display.



Furniture Manager and Horticulture Specialist, Kay, explains what it takes to design a competition-standard garden

“You’ve gotta know your plants.”

HORTICULTURE SPECIALIST, KAY

Another set of competition displays worth feasting your eyes on were those of RMIT’s Fashion Design Students. The contest forms part of the curriculum’s third-year studies and allows for the students to explore contemporary fashion enterprise through public exhibition. This year’s theme, “Hot House: Danger, Desire, Delight”, sparked inspiration for unique plant-based pizzazz. It’s not until you see these quirky takes on floral fashion that you’ve truly experienced the artsy side of the Flower Show.

If neither outdoor landscapes nor floral fashion are your cup of tea, there were plenty of indoor garden displays and other floral phenomena to feast your senses on inside the Hall of Flowers (the Exhibition Building). Local Australian rose-farmers themselves, Peter and Margaret thoroughly enjoyed the indoor rose exhibits.



RMIT Design student Willow McKenzie’s take on this year’s theme is modelled



Rose-farmer Peter examines a rose exhibit

The couple was particularly fond of designer Evan McKenzie's *Australian Rose Collection*. "It's lovely," said Margaret, who also appreciated the "holistic design" of the exhibit. Peter, in regard to roses, explained that "they're a constant thing", taking two to three years to grow; yet another feat which adds to our high esteem for the work of the team who put together the spectacles.

Take a stroll up to the top level of the Exhibition Building and you could find an area dedicated to botanical-themed fine arts, most of which were created by students. This section featured an array of exquisite paintings on sale, including gorgeous landscapes of old country-towns,

"It's lovely."

*ROSE-FARMER,
MARGARET*

elegantly captured streets and simple-yet-sophisticated potted flowers. It was difficult to tear your eyes away from the consummate beauty they captured, making the section well worth a visit.

The show's ability to cater to all ages earned it a thumbs-up as there was something for everyone in the family to enjoy. A special children's area allowed for the young ones to unwind, with the *Disney Fairies Fairy Garden*, various colouring and craft activities, face-painting, and a funky chill out zone.

The Carlton Gardens provided not only a perfect outdoor setting for the event, but also plenty of space to bask in the sun and relax while lunching on Dutch pancakes and guzzling a soft drink from nearby refreshment vans.





Floral workshops taught participants how to make flower-crowns

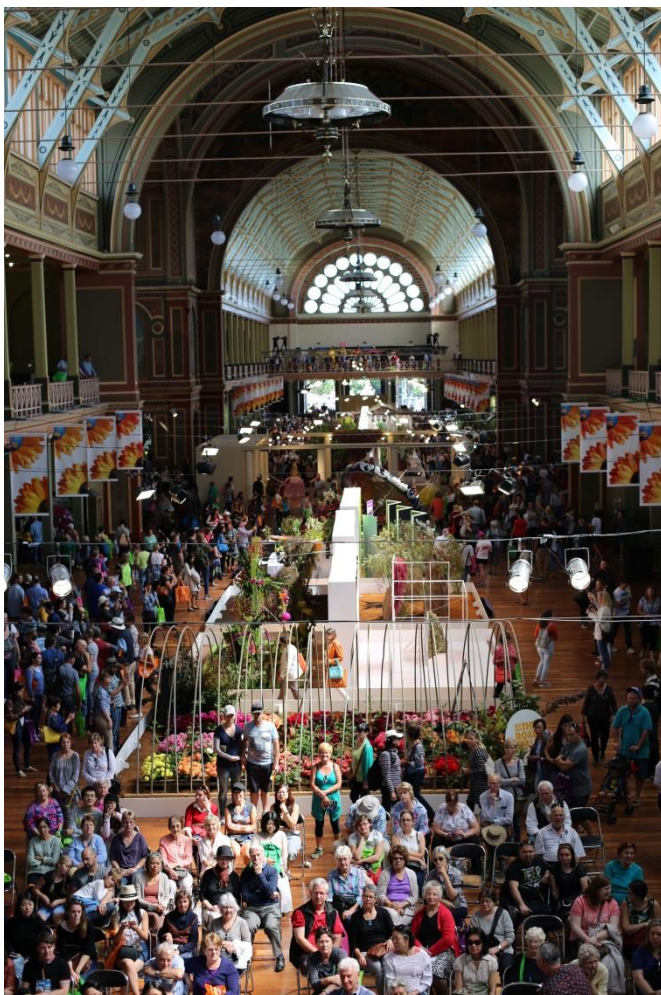


A range of gardening products were on sale in various tents

Whilst sauntering the outdoors area of the Show, it was difficult to avoid the temptation to gander the various gardening stalls as vibrant flowers and irresistible gardening paraphernalia caught the eye every few steps. There were over 200 retail stalls, offering just about every garden-related thing you can think of. Products on sale included your favourite gardening tools and equipment, water tanks, floral art, rare and exotic seeds, plants and much more. Also included in the mix was a fresh flower market located in the Hall of Flowers, with cheaper-than-usual fresh-cut flowers on sale by highly-regarded florists and growers.

If ever you tired from walking around countless botanical marvels and gardening retail, there was a chance to get your hands dirty with floral workshops held by *My Flowerhouse*, located in the Exhibition Building. These mini-tutorials allowed for those interested to put their crafting creativity to the test as they were able to learn the basic techniques of floriculture. Three different workshops allowed for participants to learn how to use fresh flowers and floral equipment to create a perfect flower bouquet, fresh flower-crowns and hanging glass mossaria.

The annual number of attendants to the show has remained at a relatively steady figure of 110,000, and event manager Kathleen Rushford said the number of designers desiring to participate is increasing. Each year the event attracts fellow garden enthusiasts on the hunt for new and unusual plants, arts and sculptures, tools and furniture as well as inspiration to create



their own botanical masterpiece. In its 21st year, the 2016 show drew a great variety of visitors, from tourists to garden-lovers to everyday Melburnians. People also had the chance to get to know the celebrities of the industry and to learn what gives a garden the wow factor, taking home with them new ideas for their own horticultural creations.

This year's MIFGS was nothing short of successful in modelling the fervour and ingenuity of Australia's best floral and landscape designers. Spectacular displays were not only aesthetically-pleasing, but also delivered an underlying environmental message for sustainable gardening in the Australian climate.