





Photo: RHS/Mark Vaughan

# The perfect partnership

With the delayed Chelsea Flower Show fast approaching, gold medal-winner Hugo Bugg tells KENDRA WILSON about the Harris Bugg Studio garden for this year's event

**T**he Chelsea Flower Show is always hotly anticipated, not only by garden experts and international media crews, but the Royal Family and general public alike.

After being postponed for a year and four months, the anticipation is stronger than ever, and for four days this month (September 21-25), some of the most talented garden designers from around the world will be showcasing their skills in the grounds of the Royal Hospital, London.

The most coveted spot on Main Avenue is, arguably, the garden designed for show sponsors M&G Investments: this year, the focus will be on Exeter- and London-based Harris Bugg Studio, led by Hugo Bugg and Charlotte Harris.

Bugg and Harris already have gold medal-winning form at Chelsea as individual designers, and it was during Charlotte's Chelsea debut in 2017 that the two friends announced their new working partnership. Since then, with Charlotte mainly in London and Hugo in Exeter, the studio

has taken on a dazzling array of projects, from vast public spaces to tiny town gardens.

Harris Bugg are known for bringing a unique and site-specific response to every project and client brief. Whether the garden is on a Devon estuary or moor, everything is examined – hedgerows, native plant species, local stone – and translated into a landscape design that is intended, with its strong sense of place, to have permanence.

They have recently completed a large rural garden in the West Country with tennis court, meadows, ornamental gardens and kitchen garden as well as the garden for a contemporary coastal property overlooking Polzeath Beach in Cornwall.

Harris Bugg are bringing this approach to their Chelsea garden, based on the idea of a 'pocket park' which could be made out of any urban, derelict or industrial space. Using found materials and robust, yet not always well-known plants, they believe that even the most unpromising location can be transformed into ▶

**LEFT:** Charlotte and Hugo already have gold medal-winning form at Chelsea as individual designers.

Photo: Harris Bugg Studio



**LEFT:** Hugo winning a Gold Medal for his 2014 Royal Bank of Canada Waterscape Garden.

**RIGHT:** One of the designs for the Harris Bugg Studio plan for The M&G Garden at RHS Chelsea 2021.

## HUGO BUGG, TWO-TIME GOLD MEDAL WINNER

At age 27, Hugo Bugg took the honour of becoming the show's youngest gold medallist in 2014, and on returning in 2016, his work was just as well-received.

Both of his gardens, and later, Charlotte's, were sponsored by the Royal Bank of Canada, all sharing a focus on fresh water resources.

Hugo's first garden showcased his ease with hard landscaping, with an elevated walkway taking the visitor over flowing water, with run-off being channelled into the planting. One of his goals was to highlight drainage solutions as well as the ever-increasing problem of urbanisation and flooding.

Hugo's second garden was a postscript to the first, showing the importance of water in culture, inspired by gardens that thrive with minimal rainfall.

*'Everything in the garden is reclaimed or reused, and it brings that layer of history, and story, into the garden'*

Photo: Christian Tate

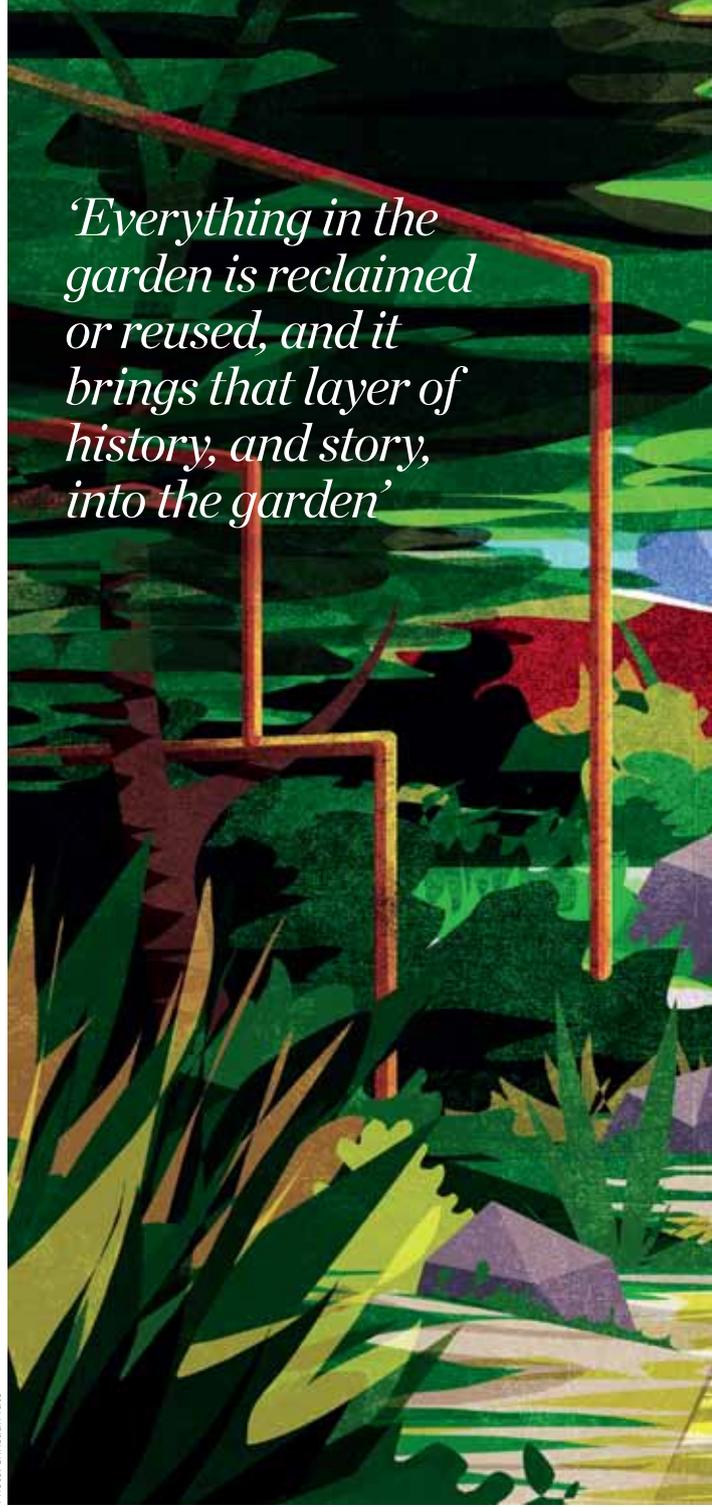


Photo: Harris Bugg Studio



**LEFT:** Charlotte and Hugo at work at Crocus preparing their Chelsea Flower Show 2021 garden.

**RIGHT:** Charlotte and Hugo check plants at Crocus.



Photo: Harris Bugg Studio



something calm and beautiful.

Since the garden is based on an idea of a place, rather than an actual location, Hugo and Charlotte examined various post-industrial sites, before scouring reclamation yards for corresponding materials. “We have old flagstones and paving from factories and yards; crushed aggregates, gravels and concrete for paths and mulch,” says Hugo.

“Everything in the garden is reclaimed or reused, and it brings that layer of history, and story, into the garden.” They are even putting up disused sheet piling for their boundary wall, which

could be a first for SW3, one of London’s smartest postcodes.

Charlotte and Hugo have had plenty of time to fit all the pieces together, during the long road to Chelsea. Initially postponed from May 2020 to May 2021, the world’s most famous garden show was pushed to a different season entirely when the September dates were announced.

For some designers, this might have led to a major rethink but Charlotte and Hugo’s garden was always intended to reflect ‘real life’. They have kept the bulk of their plants but they will be doing different things, to reflect

the season. Specimen trees (*Nyssa sylvatica*) will be casting dappled shade from leaves that are a warmer autumn colour, contrasting with silvery eleagnus. Irises will have seedpods, while roses will be sporting hips, rather than blooms.

There will be seasonal highlights from asters, grasses, persicaria and oak-leaved hydrangea, in a palette of dark red, white, bronze and silver. The extended growing season has not been without difficulties; the longer the plants wait, the more time there is for the effects of weather and pests. Fortunately, ▶



Photo: Harris Bugg Studio

**LEFT:** Charlotte and Hugo at work at Crocus preparing their Chelsea Flower Show Garden.

**BELOW LEFT:** Hugo's 2016 Chelsea garden was a postscript to the first, showing the importance of water in culture, inspired by gardens that thrive with minimal rainfall.

**BELOW:** Charlotte Harris receiving her Gold medal at RHS Chelsea Flower Show.



Photo: Marianne Majerus

Harris Bugg have the services of mega-nursery Crocus, who not only responded enthusiastically to Charlotte and Hugo's plant list, but are building the garden as well.

The beauty of using a large nursery like this is that the thousands of overspill plants can move happily into retail, a literal rendition of 'shop the look' for people who want their own version of a show garden at home.

Hugo and Charlotte have

always re-sited their show gardens in their entirety and for their first show together they wanted to create a garden that looked as though it had a past and a future.

"We wanted a May garden that showed that there was promise, so that you could imagine visiting it again later in the year," says Hugo.

"We got to put our design to the test, because we are now looking at it in September." ♦

[harrisbugg.com](http://harrisbugg.com)



Photo: Alan Pollock-Horns

## CHARLOTTE BEFORE WORKING WITH HUGO

Charlotte Harris' debut at the 2017 Chelsea Flower Show was so assured, there was no question that she would win a gold medal. She did what she said she was going to do in the brief, and RHS show garden judges like that.

In honour of Canada's 150th anniversary, Charlotte took inspiration from the country's vast boreal forest, all 1.2 billion acres of it, and condensed her ideas into a useable, modern design.

These northern forests are distinguished by waterways and conifers, and Charlotte's elegant rendition helped to fuel the renaissance of miniature conifers in contemporary garden design, while her 'crazy paving', sawn from jagged granite, was anything but suburban.