

People to Meet

Introducing the gardeners and public figures we most admire in British horticulture



Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg

The award-winning design duo on their favourite Chelsea Flower Show and working on the Barbican Conservatory's restoration

Hugo: I grew up in Devon and my earliest memories are of gardening with my dad. We built a grass tennis court by hand with a hoe and a rake one summer, and I'd have to race home from school to mow it before I could play. You might call it child labour now! Straight from school I studied garden design alongside a horticultural

qualification, giving me an education-led grounding. Over summer holidays throughout my degree I worked for a landscape contractor. It was fascinating watching builders try to interpret designers' drawings and it quickly taught me that levels and what happens underground are absolutely critical. That really stayed with

me when I started building my own gardens.

Charlotte: Hugo and I share the same values, though we came to them differently. I grew up just outside London, and my mum often worked two jobs so time spent together in the garden felt precious. After she died, when I was in my mid-twenties, I took six months off work and transformed my little concrete patio into a plant-filled garden. That hopeful process changed everything. I retrained in garden design and did an NVQ in landscape construction. I then worked for Tom Stuart-Smith for several years, which gave me a rigorous grounding in plants. A nurseryman introduced me to Hugo and we began helping each other on projects. We soon realised that we shared a vision and worked well together.

Hugo: It felt like a natural partnership from the start. We've always been able to challenge each other's ideas and offer honest, constructive criticism. We're inspired by similar things: local craftsmanship and landscapes that have stood the test of time. We're drawn to gardens that feel as beautiful and relevant as when they were first created.

Charlotte: I'd say our turning point was RHS Garden Bridgewater: to win that RHS-run competition to build a garden was a big deal. We designed a kitchen garden inspired by the industrial history of the site, with paths referencing the Bridgewater Canal. Despite lots of shady areas, it is beautiful and produces lots to eat. The process felt democratic, values-driven and progressive.

Hugo: I've got a soft spot for our 2021 garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. It was the biggest one we'd ever done and seeing our peers after emerging from covid restrictions was blissful. I don't think there'll ever be another autumn show, and it was cool to embrace our planned May planting palette to capture the beauty of those plants at a different stage of growth – though admittedly some were defoliating at the speed of light!

Charlotte: We didn't design what the hard landscaping in that garden would look like. Instead, we pulled out lumps of York stone from old trade station yards, responding to the beauty of what was already there rather than ordering in something new.

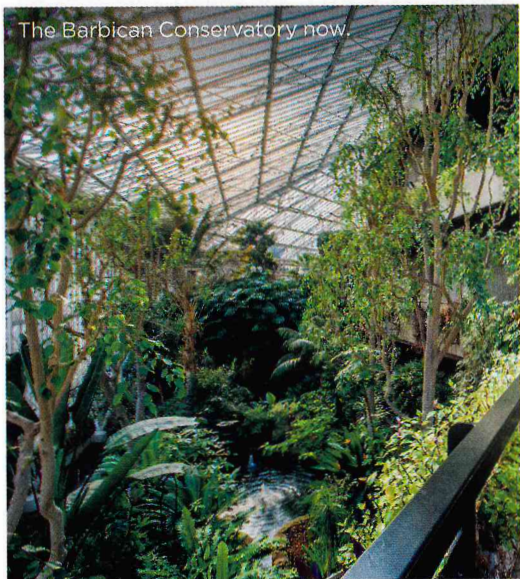
Hugo: One of the privileges of our work is seeing and shaping landscapes in very different contexts, both across the UK and internationally. You become aware that you're only ever one short part of a much longer story. We often talk about custodianship: you're looking after a place for a moment in time. That's why long-term relationships with clients matter to us. We still revisit gardens we designed over a decade ago. It's fascinating to see how they've evolved and how people live in them.

Charlotte: We're currently working on a major renewal project at the Barbican. I can't overstate the honour and responsibility of this. We're part of a large team led by the architectural firm Allies and Morrison, focusing on planting and substrates in the Barbican's Conservatory. Marta, the head

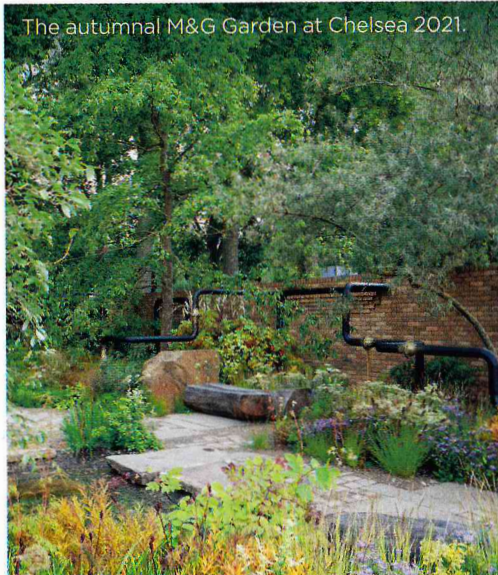
RHS Garden Bridgewater's productive Kitchen Garden.



The Barbican Conservatory now.



The autumnal M&G Garden at Chelsea 2021.



gardener, has an extraordinary depth of knowledge.

The first step in the process was to undertake a full audit of the plant collection, since there were no comprehensive records. With the Conservatory closing for several years, we had to decide what could realistically be retained. At the same time, we've been looking closely at the various practical needs of the gardening team: currently, the irrigation system doesn't work, but we are even looking at the logistics of tool storage. It's all about making sure

the space functions properly behind the scenes as well as front of house.

The conservatory is unique: it's the Barbican's only permanent collection, and it's an artwork in itself. It's all about texture, foliage and atmosphere. Our role is to amplify that cinematic feel. A key aim is making the whole space accessible, ensuring it can be enjoyed by as many people as possible after its planned reopening in 2029.

Hugo: For anyone considering a career in garden design, it's important to recognise

just how broad the field is. It's not just design: there's horticulture, arboriculture, ecology, construction. The more experience you gain across different veins, the stronger your understanding.

Charlotte: I'd encourage everyone to do it! It's crucial to know your plants and your construction. If you can, spend time working in a nursery or volunteer in a garden you admire. Design isn't just about the finished image as gardens are a process: creating one is only the beginning.
harrisbugg.com

OUR FAVOURITE GARDENS

CHARLOTTE'S CHOICE

Cambo Gardens

Fife

Cambo is led by the brilliant head gardener Callum Halstead, and it feels both magical and experimental. The walled garden is divided by a stream, and the planting through the woodland edges is joyous and regenerative, playing with decaying wood.

cambogardens.org.uk



HUGO'S CHOICE

Wildside

Devon

My local garden is Wildside, created by Keith Wiley. It challenges your senses and pushes boundaries, covering deep ravines to scree landscapes within a small space. The planting is immensely detailed and the sense of journey through the garden is curated in a brave way.

wileyatwildside.com

