

**BEST IN SHOW** This year's Garden DesignFest brings together a collection of top and budding garden designers, **Sarah Guest** reports.

# Designing ways

**I**F YOU WANT TO SEE HOW the experts do it, visit Garden DesignFest, where the work of 31 garden designers and landscape architects will be on display throughout Melbourne for a weekend.

The brainchild of landscape designer and *Gardening Australia* presenter John Patrick, Garden DesignFest features luminaries such as Jim Fogarty, Paul Bangay, Rick Eckersley and Andrew Seccull — and, of course, John Patrick — plus other designers who are making their marks.

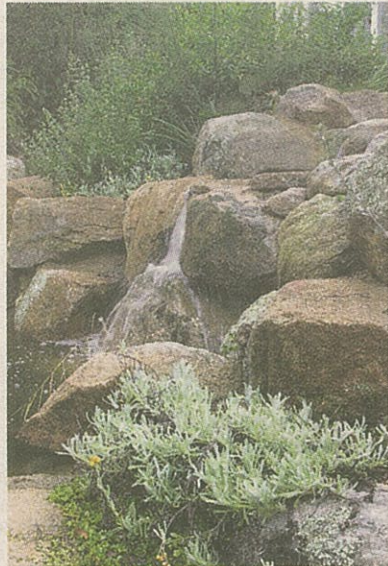
One, Mark Browning, has been chosen by Chelsea Flower Show winner Wes Fleming to create his next masterpiece at the 2007 horticultural pageant in London.

A charity fund-raiser for Kew Rotary, Garden DesignFest is a biennial event that promotes garden designers and landscape architects, especially the lesser-known ones, according to Mr Patrick.

Most of the gardens are private and being opened with the owners' permission, but some designers have opened their own or family gardens — John Van de Linde at Yarra Glen, Linton Lafontaine in Mornington and Rick Eckersley's mother's garden in Surrey Hills.

Some designing women are involved who really can create soul from soil space. Rae Jones-Evans works in the contemporary mode and, with a family background in visual art and design, knows how to manipulate space, which she treats like a piece of sculpture, balancing mass and void, negative and positive. It is only when her stage is set that she dresses it with plants and colour — bold, bright gutsy colour that is as likely to appear in and on the set as in the form of flowers or plants.

Carey Cavanagh stresses the importance of designing for clients and enhancing their way of life. Her intention is to create lovely spaces to live in. To formal layouts she adds shape, colour and the occasional free-flowing form. Personal preferences include mixing natives with exotics, using textured foliage and strong



colours such as red, not pale pink. Her passion is for well-sited plants; her dislikes include loose designs and ineffective squiggles. Carey observes that clients always ask for low-maintenance gardens and she always tells them there is no such thing! Sandra McMahon works from firm principles: tie the garden to the ground; plant for structure but not necessarily for symmetry; plant for the seasons; mix clipped shapes with free forms; add texture and mystery; establishment watering only. Then she listens to the client and interprets their cultural preferences. Mediterranean, native, indigenous, Asian, Balinese are all within her repertory. A dislike of pavers has led to some notable artistic expression, and in her hands paths become decorated ribbons as metre by metre she applies her own specially designed templates and presses coloured pebbles into patterns.

Among the blokes, Philip Johnson uses nature's method of collecting and storing water — the billabong. His passionate patter includes phrases such as: bringing nature back to the people; capturing runoff; being aware of rainfall; not allowing plants to become water-dependent; creating

habitat for wildlife; and good design is functional. His Yarra Bend garden, with 5000 indigenous plants, is now home to kookaburras, rosellas, yellow-tailed cockatoos, honeyeaters, wagtails, wrens, kingfishers, butterflies, dragonflies, native frogs and two large water dragons that have moved into the des-res billabong.

Steve Taylor focuses on a simple but essential principle, that of building a partnership with a client. He works in a modern, contemporary style and likes to match his designs

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to the existing domestic architecture, paying particular attention to the integration of indoor and outdoor life. He stresses that when aesthetics and functionality are successfully managed, pleasure in the garden will automatically follow. As will long-term financial rewards. All of which sounds a bit dry until you see his work and realise that it is both harmonious and visually striking.

Sam Cox received his training via the hands of some grand masters. He signed on for a week's work experience with the late designer Gordon Ford, who in turn worked and studied with Ellis Stones, and stayed. Also, his grandfather was a professor of botany. So, by inheritance and inspiration, his work is based on the achievement of a simple, familiar beauty and he uses

**Clockwise from top left: Design and photography Sam Cox; design and photography Rae Jones Evans; design and photography Steve Taylor for Creative Outdoor Solutions; design and photography Sandra McMahon; design and photography Phil Johnson for Greenmark Landscapes; design and photography Carey Cavanagh; design and photography Christian Jenkins for Advanced Horticulture.**



Australian plants and materials to emulate the local landscape. He aims to balance mass — boulder outcrops, mounds and plantings — with space pathways, grassed areas, water and paved areas. Traditional flower-full native plants, grevilleas, callistemons and correas are used near buildings but give way to indigenous stock as one moves away from them. To create a sense of space, he does not outline boundaries with heavy plantings. Of paramount importance, his plants are never watered.

Garden Designfest will be held on the weekend of November 18 and 19. For information visit [gardendesignfest.org.au](http://gardendesignfest.org.au) or email [graeandjaws@bigpond.com.au](mailto:graeandjaws@bigpond.com.au).

A tour of the gardens is available. Visit [goodgardensense.com](http://goodgardensense.com) or phone 0418 766 905

