



Photos: Julia Fogg Associates Words: Emma Reuss

FEW GARDEN DESIGNERS BRING SUCH A WIDE AND ECLECTIC RANGE OF INFLUENCES TO THEIR WORK AS **JULIA FOGG MSGD**; THERE'S MUSIC, THEATRE, AND EVEN A RARE SPIRITUALITY...

OPEN-AIR THEATRE

JULIA FOGG has been a successful landscape designer for almost 20 years, which classifies her as something of a veteran in this relatively young business. If she balks at the definition, for its disparaging (but specious) connotations, I shall alter her status to 'virtuoso', as her work appears to be as much about music, poetry and art as landscape. She definitely belongs in the cool camp, one of those enviable women who look youthfully hip, with a stylishly abundant head of hair of the variety that strips away the years.

Music played a major part in the concept for one the larger projects she is currently working on: a major replanting scheme for the Centenary Border at the Hillier Gardens in Hampshire. This 200m-long double border, planted by Sir Harold Hillier in 1964, is long overdue a facelift. The initial phase of hedge and shrub planting should have taken place by time of publication, with perennials to follow in spring 2012. Not content with 200m, Julia and her co-designer Anny Evason extended it to 250m.

"Sir Harold planted woods either side of the border," Julia says, "and it is now completely swamped scale-wise, as well as being overshadowed by the encroaching woodland and undermined by tree roots."

A musical journey

The beds have been all but cleared out, and the woodland edge reduced back. But where does the music come in?

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"With a double border that size, where do you start?" Julia says. "The idea came to me like a bolt from the blue when I saw the Fairy Queen at Glyndebourne. I thought the Hillier site rather magical and wondered fancifully what happened after the mortals left, like the opera."

"I thought it would be interesting to mind-map what the music said to me, in terms of form, shape, texture and colour. While I listened, strong themes came through and it seemed that the episodic idea could work. Essentially, it's putting words to plants instead of to music!"

Julia illustrates how the concept is actually represented: "If Love's a Sweet

Passion' is one of the songs in the opera. We interpreted it with 'kissing' plants, as well as grasses with silky tassles."

The plans are a departure from the old borders. Major paths intersect the central axis at the same angle, while sinuous paths run along the outside.

Stage managed

There is a sense of theatre here – which is not unexpected, as Julia trained originally as a theatre designer. Marriage and family followed, along with long periods living in parts of Europe. On her return to the UK, the inevitable travel demands put paid to any ambitions of rejoining her old trade. ➔





“I learnt in theatre design that actors always perform better if they’re put in the right costumes and in the right environment. I try to achieve this with my garden designs”

➤ At the time, however, her mother was a huge fan of Beth Chatto’s style of planting, and Julia became interested as well. She found there were connections between garden design and theatre design, most notably three-dimensional awareness, the presence and movement of light and shade, and the question of how people move around an area. “I learnt in theatre design that actors always perform better if they’re put in the right costumes and in the right environment. I try to achieve this with my garden designs; helping clients feel at home in their gardens.”

Julia enrolled on a year’s garden design course, followed by a post graduate diploma in landscape architecture. “I wanted to know about all the stuff below the surface, like geology and engineering.” She was also influenced by Kathryn Moore, a tutor on the course, who taught design from a conceptual viewpoint. “I cannot design something without having a really great idea that runs right through from first gut reaction to the site to the final detailing.”

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A passion for design

Julia started practising straight after university. She worked with a contractor as an in-house designer for a while, which she found invaluable. “He would say, ‘I’ve got all that stone left, so it’s going in the next job’. What I learnt was the cutting-edge of all things practical. When you come out of college, all you have are paper plans, but you also need the wherewithal to get them built.” Later there was also a breakthrough business moment, when she landed a large family garden. “It was big, they had a lot of money and they didn’t interfere. I think what I did was probably awful, but I learnt a lot and got work off the back of it.”

After a few years, Julia also started teaching at Inchbald, eventually taking over running the garden design course from Andrew Wilson. It seems that the focus and drive she showed as a student persists in her teaching.

Marcus Barnett, who she trained at Inchbald, says, “Julia was like a platoon sergeant; she pushed us hard! She never

allowed us to settle for ‘OK’. I genuinely believe my practice prospers largely because of her, and her passion for design.” Julia in turn describes Marcus, and his erstwhile co-designer Philip Nixon, as her biggest successes. “I really egged them on to do their first show garden,” she says. She now teaches Planting Design to the MA students at Greenwich University a couple of days a week.

There’s history with the SGD, as well as *Garden Design Journal*. “I was student representative on the SGD council years ago; when GDJ first started I used to do the advertising, although after it became more established I left them to it.”

Coastal Fogg

Julia and Anny work on projects mostly in the South East, occasionally travelling further afield. The office is at home in St Leonards on Sea near Hastings, where Julia moved after giving up her London office in Spitalfields. Happily they are currently enjoying their busiest spell ever, despite the recession, but there’s no



room for permanent staff and freelance help is brought in as necessary. There also seems to have been a choice made between seaside and garden. Seaside won. A double allotment (with a view) nearby makes up for this for the moment, but there's a definite yearning for a larger plot. "I want to be in France with some land in three years time," Julia says. "I've got some ideas in my head about jardins de curé, and looseness of planting."

The design of the Hillier's border has been a challenge. "I've never tackled such large areas of planting before. You can mass plants together, but this is public planting where people are looking at everything quite closely. Being principally an arboretum, the Hillier gardens are all about trees and shrubs, so these needed to be incorporated along with perennials. They've also asked us to include 120 new varieties, many that aren't even in the country yet!"

Julia shares her view of the landscape around her in the form of a blog, 'Terrain'. It contains rather good photographs of her surroundings, and underlying these there's a strong spiritual seam expressed both in the short captions and the eclectic collection of verse that accompanies

them. It provides a fascinating window into her general verve for life.

Sources of inspiration

There are clues to what inspires her style in this visual imagery, but Julia is keen to stress that other landscape designers have also influenced her work: "Piet Oudolf for sure. I love Gilles Clément's style of planting. I saw Tom Stuart-Smith's own garden years ago and it really impacted on me. Then there are the more conceptual designers who are a bit whacky, like Kathryn Gustafson and Martha Schwarz. I think they challenge our preconceptions."

Some years ago, Julia wrote a book, *Creating Privacy in the Garden*. Take this passage, pruned from her introduction: "We are still aimlessly wandering around in the conservative world of lavender, billowy roses, topiary and off-the-peg trellis panels. Remember that there is more to life than mass-market products from the nearest garden centre. In garden terms we are steeped in preconceptions that result in mongrel gardens..."

One thing is certain: Julia Fogg really doesn't mince her words! ☘

More information: www.juliafogg.com

