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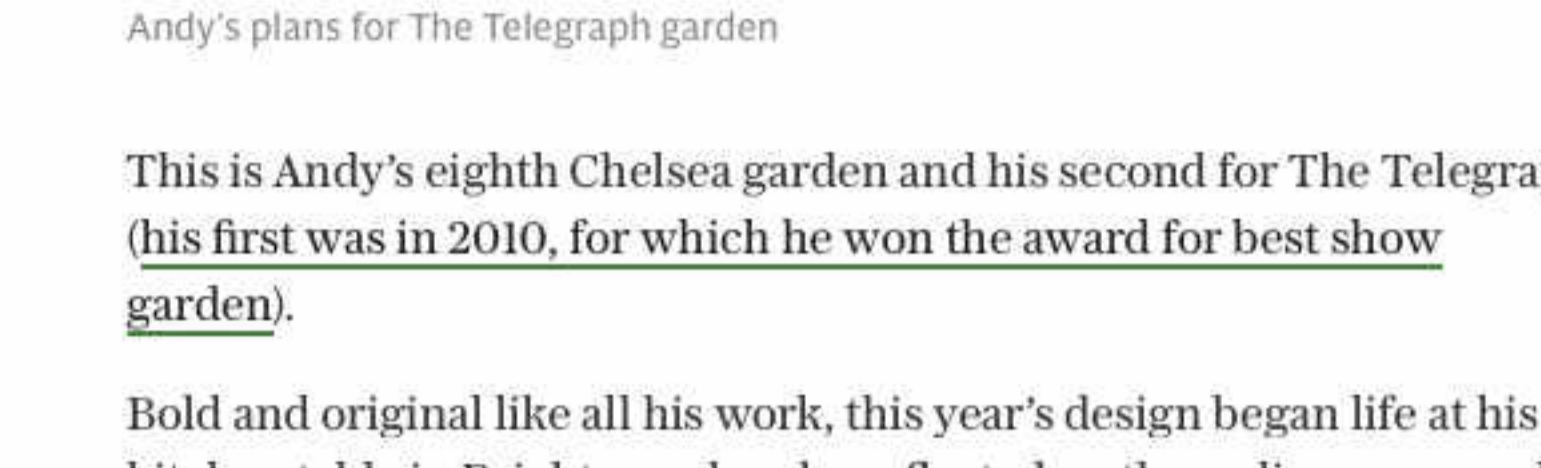
Chelsea Flower Show 2016: a guide to The Telegraph garden



By **Stephen Lacey**
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This year's **Telegraph garden** is about "the big stuff", says its designer, **Andy Sturgeon**.

It is about the monumental forces of nature and the mind-boggling time span of history. And it is about the "wide-eyed wonderment" and sense of our own insignificance that epic natural phenomena can engender – the awe and excitement that Andy himself remembers experiencing as a small child gazing up at the dinosaurs in the Natural History Museum, and that he has witnessed in his own three children when taking them on Boy's Own adventures through vast empty deserts, primal rainforests and stormy seas.

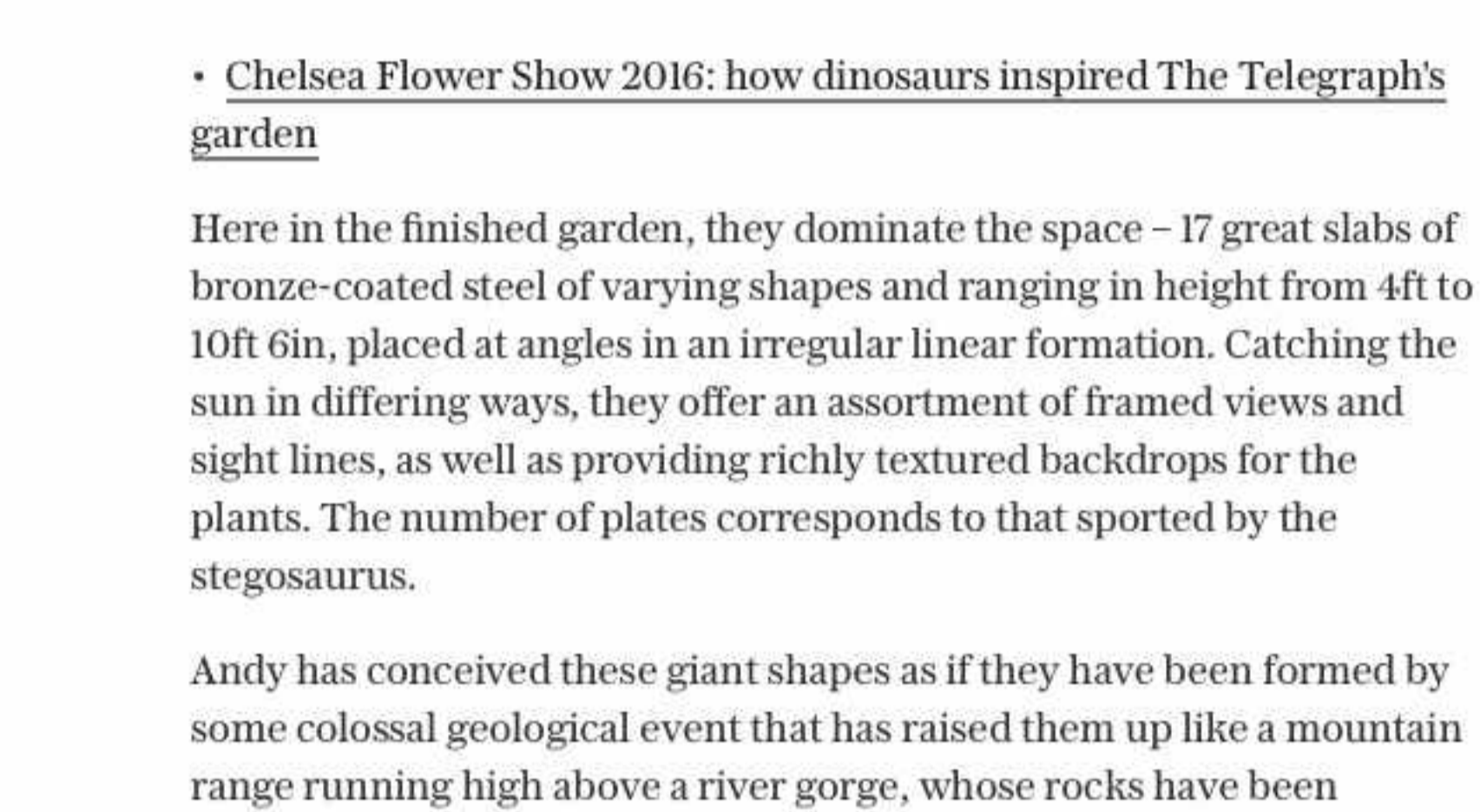


Andy's plans for The Telegraph garden

This is Andy's eighth Chelsea garden and his second for The Telegraph (his first was in 2010, for which he won the award for best show garden).

Bold and original like all his work, this year's design began life at his kitchen table in Brighton, when he reflected on those dinosaurs, and specifically on the stegosaurus with its giant bony back plates.

In the cardboard model he started by making, those plates became the defining feature of the garden, too, providing the strong sculptural theme that has, in some form, been the hallmark of all his Chelsea compositions.



How The Telegraph garden will look when finished

Chelsea Flower Show 2016: how dinosaurs inspired The Telegraph's garden

Here in the finished garden, they dominate the space – 17 great slabs of bronze-coated steel of varying shapes and ranging in height from 4ft to 10ft 6in, placed at angles in an irregular linear formation. Catching the sun in differing ways, they offer an assortment of framed views and sight lines, as well as providing richly textured backdrops for the plants. The number of plates corresponds to that sported by the stegosaurus.

Andy has conceived these giant shapes as if they have been formed by some colossal geological event that has raised them up like a mountain range running high above a river gorge, whose rocks have been smashed into long shards and massive boulders. Quarried on the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset, the free-standing rocks, that can weigh up to three tons, are loosely scattered across the garden. They date from the same Jurassic period as the stegosaurus.

"I have not subdivided the site or gone for a straightforward Chelsea pattern," says Andy. "I want you to read the whole scene at once, and for the massive scale to overpower the shape of the plot." He has not domesticated this striking and fractured scene, but it has been sufficiently honed to make it into a seductive garden – "one that is part of a wider, wilder landscape".

Throughout, refined modern lines and surfaces play against rough, ancient materials. In one spot, the bronze plates are clustered around a seating area of smooth limestone and a stone plinth, on which sits a fire bowl of hammered bronze, made by blacksmith James Price. It will be alight throughout the show.

At the front of the garden, the soil banks some two foot down to the water, which enters the garden through bronze shutters resembling rough organ pipes. You cross it by means of smooth limestone bridges and a central island. In contrast to the bridges, the oatmeal-coloured limestone of the paving has been hand-worked to look rough and aged. Sourced and prepared in Portugal, it is full of Jurassic fossils.



Andy Sturgeon in The Telegraph garden with the Crocus planting team

The garden's back wall has been rendered to look adobe-like and earthy. The accompanying planting is suggestive of a warm, temperate climate. "It is not a recreation of a habitat, but it is inspired by my travels and by working on projects around the Mediterranean," Andy says.

"There is a lot of the Karoo (South Africa's flower-rich semi-desert) in the garden, but also touches of South America, Croatia and of course Italy, which I have fallen in love with. I am fascinated by the plant communities in such countries, and how you see connections between them even across different continents as plants have adapted to similar conditions."

Setting the mood is a 30ft-tall evergreen Mediterranean oak, *Quercus ilex*, together with a strawberry tree, *Arbutus unedo*, leaning gently over one of the paths. They are joined by two other evergreen tree species from South America, both with elegant, cloud-like foliage, *Myrtus boaria* and *Schinus molle*.



The dream team behind The Telegraph's Chelsea Flower Show garden

In spite of its hardness, maytenus is seldom planted in the UK. "It is a good small tree for creating character, as is the schinus, which is reliable, certainly in London."

In the foreground, sloping down to the water, the planting is predominantly a tapestry of grassy and other leaf shapes, "mainly green but nudging into silver and bronze", featuring species such as blue moor grass (*Sesleria caerulea*), coppery New Zealand sedge (*Carex testacea*), grey-blue Australian flax lily (*Dianella revoluta* 'Little Rev'), white-flowered *Polygonum scoparium*, and orange *Libertia peregrinans*. Green tufts of soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) are repeated along the river's edge.

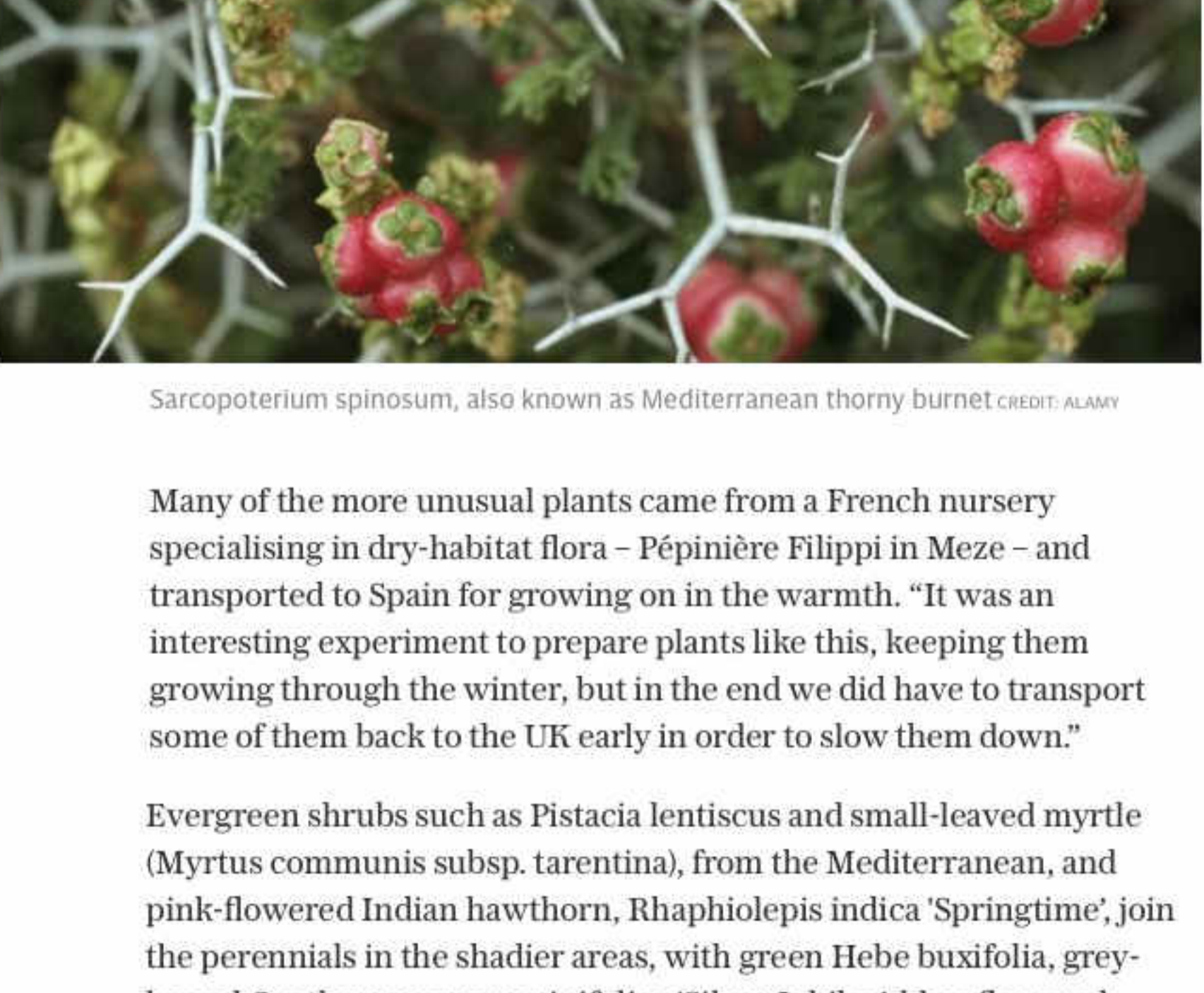


Andy Sturgeon at Crocus Nursery with the Anigozanthus orange - also known as the Kangaroo Paw. CREDIT: ANDREW CROWLEY

Weaving through this dry, meadowy and gravelly mix are the hazy blue-greens of *Euphorbia pycnantha* and *E. verticillata*, together with *Prostrata E. rigida* and the elegant white asphodels (*Asphodelus fistulosus*) and pink salsify (*Tragopogon porrifolius*).

But the more flowery ingredients are mostly grouped on the garden's fringes, where the company includes alliums, red *Echium russicum*, orange *Bulbine frutescens* 'Hallmark', coppery *Isoplexis canariensis* (now known as *Digitalis canariensis* and "tougher than it looks – easy to grow in Brighton"), and fiery Australian kangaroo paw.

"The planting is more naturalistic than I have done at Chelsea before," says Andy. "I want to capture the feeling of summer dryness, so have used lots of wiry shapes and rusty tints. Lots of these wilder species won't have been seen at Chelsea before, such as *Sarcopoterium spinosum* (Mediterranean thorny burnet), which looks like tumbleweed."



Sarcopoterium spinosum, also known as Mediterranean thorny burnet. CREDIT: ALAMY

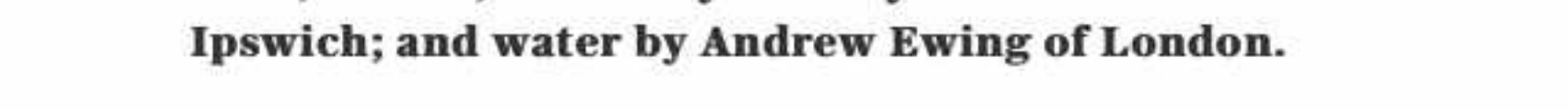
Many of the more unusual plants came from a French nursery specialising in dry-habitat flora – Pépinière Filippi in Meze – and imported to Spain for growing on in the warmth. "It was an interesting experiment to prepare plants like this, keeping them growing through the winter, but in the end we did have to transport some of them back to the UK early in order to slow them down."

Evergreen shrubs such as *Pistacia lentiscus* and the Mediterranean myrtle (*Myrtus communis* subsp. *tarentina*), and pink-flowered Indian hawthorn, *Rhaphiolepis indica* 'Springtime', join the perennials in the shadier areas, with green *Ilex buxifolia*, grey-leaved *Ozothamnus rosmarinifolius* 'Silver Jubilee', blue-flowered *Westringia longifolia* and sparsely clad *Sophora* 'Little Baby' – all from the southern hemisphere – accompanying aromatic *cistus*, *santolina*, purple-flowered Texas sage (*Leucophyllum langmaniae*) and spiny *Parkinsonia aculeata* from Mexico in the sunnier foreground. Deciduous bog myrtle, *Myrica gale*, grows near the rushes.



Andy Sturgeon in The Telegraph garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. CREDIT: CLARA HOLDEN

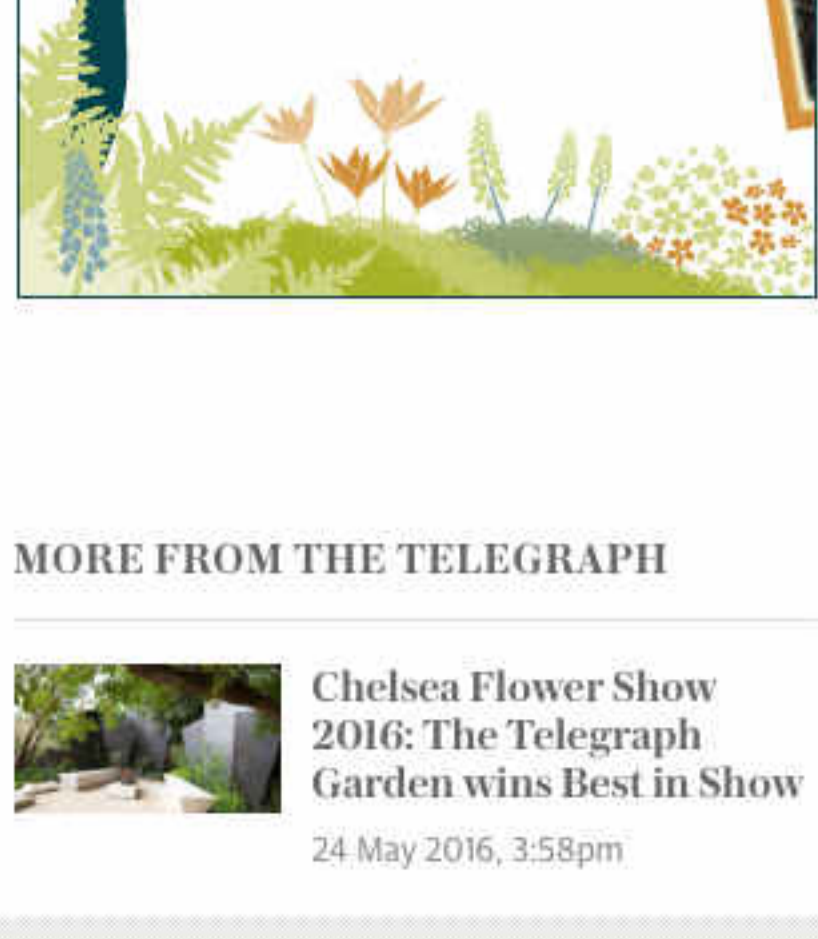
"The garden's monumentality and slight chaos may divide opinion, and it isn't particularly related to anyone's real garden, but Chelsea gardens ought to provoke and I wanted it to be dramatic and unexpected," Andy explains. He is confident it would be a popular garden with children. "It is rocky, there's water, and you can climb on it and hide in it."



For adults, it offers the pleasure of sitting out under the stars "drinking a beer and chewing the fat while gazing into the flames and setting the world to rights." As for Chelsea visitors, "I hope it will take people on a voyage," he says.

And with the garden's themes of awe and wonder, it should indeed be a thrilling one.

The Telegraph garden was built and project-managed by crocus.co.uk. Steel fabrication is by Outdoor Design of Ford, Sussex; bronze by Bradleys Metal Finishers of Ipswich; and water by Andrew Ewing of London.



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