

Evening Outing – **Capel Manor's Show-winning Gardens.**

Capel Manor is very fortunate to receive donated gardens from the big horticultural shows, such as Chelsea and Hampton Court. Ann Luder, a retired lecturer and garden designer, explained how gardens are awarded their medals, and what happens afterwards. A Show garden requires huge effort, starting at least 18 months earlier. These gardens need big money, and attract well-known garden designers and sponsors. The Show gardens can be bought as an entity and transplanted elsewhere. They can cost anything upwards from £50K for a 6ft square and the main ones will be in the region of £500K plus. (Christmas present anyone?) The design is absolutely key, and the brief must be highly detailed and shown in three dimensions. However, there are drawbacks. The gardens are designed to be beautiful for the week of the show, not year-round creations, and may use plants totally unsuited to our climate. They are meant to inspire and make you think differently, whether you love or hate them. There were fewer show gardens this year, and many of us felt these were more art installation than garden. They are meant to educate, or reflect great moments or garden design movements, whether minimalist with few plants or a very naturalistic rural scene.

The judges start very early, and the garden must meet the brief. Judges award points for ambition, overall impression, spatial and three-dimensional construction, planting design, plant associations and planting implementation. You must not be able to see the rims of pots, fallen leaves or wilting blooms so heavy rain the night before or a windy morning can cause real problems. The judges must have no personal preferences for plants or style, and may judge horticultural or floral exhibits. Their points are scored and the award given.

When Capel receives a garden, it will need to be changed to reflect reality and give some interest year round, and the gardens evolve in their new settings. Students may be asked to redesign the garden as a competition. Capel once had a panic-stricken call from Chelsea as someone had dropped out and you cannot have an empty stand, so Capel had three weeks to come up with and prepare a bean garden! It was very interesting to see Ann's "before and after" photographs of the show gardens and what they actually became when practicality had to be faced. A very different talk and something we had not encountered before.