



JANE POWERS

## gardens

# Not your average shed, Ted

Alternative garden structures were inspiring at the recent Bloom garden festival

**WHEN I WAS** looking at the show gardens in Bloom two weekends ago, I was intrigued by the structures that the designers chose for their spaces. They were a million miles away from the flat-pack shed or summer house that most of us end up with in our gardens – and then wonder how we can disguise its too-orange timber.

There were three in particular that I would have loved to have brought home to my own garden – if I'd had a space large enough to accommodate such a diverse trio (and a few thousand euro lying about to fund them). All were obviously hand-crafted, and as such, had the kind of honesty that imbues a thing that is the product of human dexterity and creativity.

The first was the nest in Focus Ireland's *A Place of Belonging*. The garden was designed by Damian Costello, with significant input from the clients of Focus Ireland – people who had experienced homelessness. At the heart of the beautifully-planted space was the shelter, a hybrid between a teepee and an up-turned



**BLOOM GARDEN STRUCTURES**  
Clockwise from above: Willow nest in Focus Ireland garden, designed by Damian Costello; gazebo designed and made by Christy Collard, in Tim Austen's garden; seating in Anne Hamilton's *The Orb* garden.

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willow basket. It had been made by the designer, a willow weaver, and a team from Focus Ireland. Its rounded contours and embracing woven-work made a warm, secret and safe cocoon.

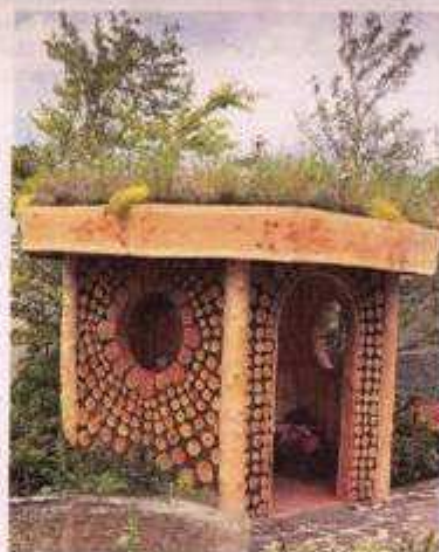
Of all the exhibits in Bloom, this one had a visceral effect on me (and on a lot of other visitors too): it managed to convey the feeling that someone had just vacated it, or that it was waiting for the next occupant. Its interior resonated with human presence. It was the kind of place that, when I was a child, I would have loved to have spent an afternoon in, either alone, or with a special friend. According to Andrew Wilson, one of the show garden judges, a pair of finches were in residence when the judging panel arrived, and were picking over the ground inside – so it had won the avian seal of approval also.

In Tim Austen's *Grouse Garden*, Christy Collard's larch and Douglas fir gazebo ([woodspiraldesigns.com](http://woodspiraldesigns.com)) was delightfully mesmerising, with its concentric roundels of amber-coloured larch cushioned with moss. It was an organic-looking structure, obeying the rhythms of nature, and looked as if it might have been put together by a hive of industrious bees. The materials were all sustainably grown and harvested, including the moss, which the Collards have in plenty in their woodland at the family nursery business, Future Forests, near Bantry.

Christy's work will be known to visitors to the Electric Picnic; he has made several hand-crafted timber stages and pagodas there.

He works closely with his clients. Every construction is different, but all are instantly recognisable. His aim is to show that we can "create beautiful structures out of what is growing in our own woodlands". It is a gentle approach to building that draws lightly on the planet's resources. His structures start at around €5,000, and have a lifespan of at least 20 years.

In Anne Hamilton's *The Orb* ([foxgardens.com](http://foxgardens.com)) there was more



skilled handiwork. In this case, the focal point of the garden was a near-semi-circular seating area made of native larch and oak (the latter was used for the footing, where the structure was in contact with the ground). Great arcs of larch curved above the C-shaped bench, like the rib cage of a whale, or the skeleton of a boat. The woodwork was, in fact, made at a famous Irish boatyard, Hegarty's of Oldcourt, near Skibbereen. The structure (which costs around €12,000) is still looking for a home. It may be too large for most domestic gardens, but it would be perfect conversation area for a business campus or public space. [jpowers@irishtimes.com](mailto:jpowers@irishtimes.com)

### Galway garden opening

Dr Dilis Clare's herb garden (44 Seacrest, Knocknacarra, off the Ballymooneen Road, Galway) is open noon-6pm tomorrow (Sunday, June 19th). Donations for local charities

### Rose week

Altamont Gardens, Tullow, Co Carlow: Monday June 20th to Friday June 24th. Guided tours (€2 per person) of the rose collection, and rose cultivation advice. See [carlowtourism.com](http://carlowtourism.com).