



# SCULPTING HARMONY

Our gardens are a natural extension of our homes; a living canvas for our personal style. Velvet's Melanie Taylor explores how carefully chosen outdoor art brings structure, focus and a sense of purpose to your garden design

Henry Moore  
Double Oval sculpture

Pictures: Melanie Taylor

"Sculpture must, above all, be a thing of beauty; it must uplift the spirit and enhance its surroundings," says sculptor Simon Gudgeon. On a visit to Kew last year, I was captivated by Simon's figurative 'Leaf Spirit' sculpture. Inspired by the tranquil peace we find when surrounded by trees and the natural landscape – and its ability to calm our busy minds – I was struck by its beauty.

Describing the creative process behind the piece, Simon says: "I gathered Norway maple leaves from trees in the grounds of my sculpture park in Dorset and used these as my pattern to apply onto the basic bronze face. By leaving gaps and holes around the face it allows us to glimpse the natural world behind her, leaving her to subtly blend into and become part of the landscape."

The blending of personal narrative with the living landscape was a key element

of **Henry Moore's** iconic sculptures. Throughout his career he turned nature's complex beauty into abstract human forms, believing that the natural architecture of the environment amplified its visual and emotional impact.

Running until January 31 2027, the **Monumental Nature exhibition at Kew Gardens** places 30 of Moore's monumental sculptures directly in Kew's heritage landscapes and living plant collections. Visitors are encouraged to reflect on how they perceive and interact with the natural world. An interactive family trail guides younger visitors around a selection of sculptures through sight, touch and sound. Looking through his 'Double Oval' and 'Oval with Points' sculptures, it's easy to see how the light and shifting skies change how we experience them. When I met Pembroke College Head Gardener Sarah Claydon earlier this year she told me that their 'Figure in a

Shelter' sculpture is on loan to Kew for the exhibition – [kew.org/kew-gardens/whats-on/henry-moore](http://kew.org/kew-gardens/whats-on/henry-moore) A secondary exhibition is running until May 23 2027 at Kew Wakehurst in Sussex. Closer to home, visitors can visit Moore's studios and sculpture gardens at Perry Green near Much Hadham – [henry-moore.org/studios-and-gardens](http://henry-moore.org/studios-and-gardens)

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the recent **Art for Cure** exhibition at Wyken Vineyards near Bury St Edmunds, which raised £100,000 for breast cancer research and support services. The exhibition perfectly demonstrated how smaller sculptures can work in domestic gardens.

**Lucy Lutyens'** abstracted sculptures on display in the rose garden had a birdlike elegance and sat beautifully amongst the roses and geraniums.

The tactile surface of **Carol Peace's** bronze resin figure 'Volta' gave her a



Leaf Spirit by Simon Gudgeon



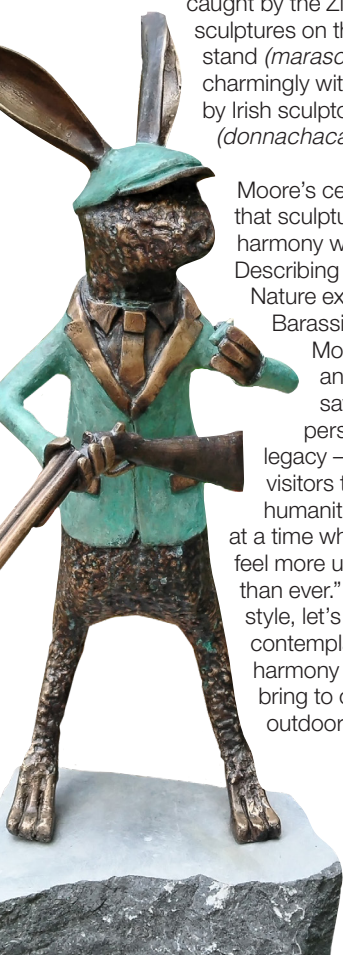
The Gardener by Donnacha Cahill



Stone pieces from Mara Sculpture

playful character, whilst **Ruth Richmond's** painted 'soul poles' were a colourful interjection to the planting. I also loved **Allan Mackenzie's** humorous figures keeping watch over the planting on the East Terrace and **Martin Duffy's** whimsical animals in the Red-Hot Borders. The fused glass panes by **Arabella Marshall** would look stunning in any size garden. Arabella plays with colour, rhythm, balance and shape. Using paint as her medium creates a liquid glow which cleverly changes with the passing sun. View and shop their online gallery at [artforcure.org.uk](http://artforcure.org.uk)

I always recommend visiting the trade stands at **RHS Chelsea** for ideas to take home. While some sculptures carry eye-watering price tags, more modestly priced options ensure there is something for everyone. This year my eye was caught by the Zimbabwean stone sculptures on the **Mara Sculpture** stand ([marasculpture.com](http://marasculpture.com)) and the charmingly witty animal bronzes by Irish sculptor **Donnacha Cahill** ([donnachacahill.com](http://donnachacahill.com)).



Moore's central tenet was that sculpture should exist in harmony with its surroundings. Describing the Monumental Nature exhibition, Sebastiano Barassi, Head of Henry Moore Collections and Programmes, says it offers "a fresh perspective on Moore's legacy – one that invites visitors to reflect on nature, humanity, and the environment at a time when those themes feel more urgent and relevant than ever." So whatever your style, let's enjoy the stillness, contemplative thought and harmony that sculpture can bring to our gardens and outdoor spaces.

Donnacha Cahill's  
The Country Gent

## BRING YOUR GARDEN TO LIFE WITH SCULPTURE

Sculptures anchor a garden design by creating focal points and sightlines to draw the eye. They signal our journey through a garden and invite us to explore further. Place them at the end of a garden to lengthen the view, or on a curve to widen it. Hidden sculptures nestling in a hedge or amongst diaphanous planting surprise us and heighten our curiosity as to what lies beyond.

The style of your sculpture can be used for emphasis or to bring attention to a particular spot and set a mood. Think about what ambience you want to create. Is your garden relaxed and natural? Or classical and formal? Choose your materials accordingly for a cohesive scheme. Select natural wooden, willow and hazel structures for relaxed, naturalistic gardens or stone and marble to complement a formal garden. Weathered textures and patinas work very well in cottage gardens. Sculptures also provide year-round structure long after the leaves on deciduous trees and shrubs have fallen to the ground. Marrying their textures to those of your planters, water features and edging, for example in Corten steel, unifies the material elements of the garden into a clear design statement. Maximize small gardens by using wall space. Mount plaques or sculptures at eye level to draw attention upward and free up ground below for planting. Strategically placed mirrors behind trees and shrubs reflect the greenery and make the area feel larger. Trees and plants can also be used as architectural living sculptures creating structure and



Wyken Allan MacKenzie figure

year-round interest. Don't be afraid to use large plants in smaller gardens to make them feel much bigger and more densely planted than they actually are. Pleached trees like beech and hornbeam trained on a flat elevated frame are perfect for screening unsightly views or creating privacy if your garden is overlooked. Large tree ferns and hardy Japanese banana plants *Musa Basjoo* instantly give rise to a cocooning jungle feel in a courtyard garden. Multi-stemmed trees like *Amelanchier lamarckii* (Serviceberry) and *Prunus serrula* (Tibetan cherry) frame perspective and have a strong visual impact. The airy globular shape created by the myriad of stems draws the eye further into the garden. Think about the seasons when choosing sculptural specimen trees. The *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' (Eastern Redbud) has deep purple leaves in summer which turn a fiery orange and crimson in the autumn.

For help designing your own garden, contact Melanie by emailing [melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk](mailto:melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk) or visiting [hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk](http://hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk)