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Chaumont 2010

France's six-month 'Festival International de Jardins' in the Loire Valley, is in its 19th year – and it's both thriving and expanding... ➤

Words: Janine Wookey Photographs: Richard Hanson

SHOW REPORT



☉ here can be made into paper: bamboos, papyrus and hemp. Mulberry bark is sliced thinly and put between transparent panels to great effect. Hemp as thick as rope makes a tactile partitioning and is woven between young birch trees to hold them together as a screen.

This is one of the most elegant gardens at the show. The shape – a combination of curves and rectangles within rectangles – pulls you in, encloses you and gives a feeling of spaces within spaces. Thick sheets of embossed glass act as sculptures and wide gravel paths symbolise 'the river of life' that leads you along the way. Water lies still in rills (with just the merest hint of a water mist cloud) and the planting is all green. There are no flowers to distract from the concentration of shape and form.

A garden by three French designers entitled **My Earth Mother** uses lines of trained green willow – a variation on the poles theme – to lead into a central vortex (the womb of the earth mother) where a circle of willow stems, stripped back to bleached wheaten whips, are arched backwards tapering to soft ends and bent to form relaxed chairs. It is very natural and

pleasing on the eye, and the planting is equally natural with delicate white *Polemium caeruleum*, *Phlox divorticata* and *Geranium pratense* against dark fennel and darker poppies.

A ghostly optical illusion, that grabs public attention, is a garden with a glasshouse and random chairs that seem to float on a darkened pool of water – as if everything is skating on ice. This entry is called **Angels' Hair**, and the greenhouse is hung with the silver airplant *Tillandsia usneoides* as 'a plant without a beginning or an end. Untouchable in its glass box, like some supernatural being'. Strong reflections in the dark water create the feeling of something having gently floated down – which might just as easily float away again.

A grand piano in the garden? Of course – for a Dutch homage to soul singer Billy Holliday, **Homage to Lady Day**. It sits in a planting of *Papaver somniferum*, white malva and frothy gypsophila, all surrounded by a black fence. The music, via speakers positioned in the planting, is surprisingly evocative but will the piano withstand six months exposure to the elements? Does it matter? This is Chaumont, after all.

Clockwise from above left: **Homage to Lady Day**, encourages visitors to sit and contemplate this hybrid garden/jazz lounge whilst listening to music; Marchalot and Fortuna's ethereal **Angels' hair**, uses *Tillandsia usneoides* as an extension of the soul floating above the highly reflective surface of shallow water; the central vortex of the **My Earth Mother** garden by Olivier Hostiou, Marie Foret and Laurent Weiss, features natural planting and represents the womb

So, 20 plus gardens, a few dozen art installations, a wonderful old castle, spectacular views of the languid Loire river and six months exposure to the visiting public. What's not to like about Chaumont? Director Chantal says she is more than delighted to hear from any Brits who might like to apply – and British designers have much they could bring to the party. ☉

Sources

Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire; +33 054 209922, www.domaine-chaumont.fr
The 19th Chaumont-sur-Loire International Garden Festival continues until 17 October 2010. Evening visits from 10pm to midnight for illuminations, daily between 1 July and 31 August, and on Saturdays from 1-15 September.