

CHRISTIE'S

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CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE GARDEN OF THE YEAR AWARD 2008 WINNER: BLENHEIM PALACE, OXFORDSHIRE SPONSORED BY HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION AND CHRISTIE'S



London - The magnificent gardens of the famous Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire have won the 2008 Garden of the Year award sponsored by the Historic Houses Association and Christie's. This prestigious national award, celebrating its twenty fifth anniversary this year, is designed to recognise the importance of gardens with outstanding horticultural and public appeal, either in their own right or as the setting for an historic house.

"Christie's is pleased to sponsor the Garden of the Year Award in association with the Historic Houses Association and is thrilled that in this, our 25th anniversary, the prestigious award has been given to such a well-deserved winner as Blenheim Palace. The vast park and gardens of Blenheim Palace are immaculately kept with attention to every detail, and could not be a more fitting setting for such an illustrious country house" says Charles Cator, Deputy Chairman, Christie's International.

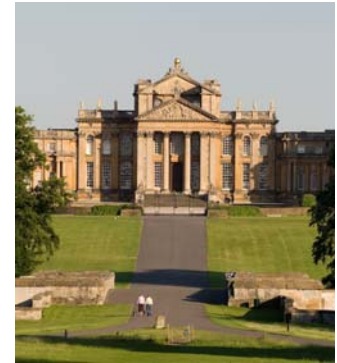
"The Association is delighted to be celebrating 25 years of the Garden of the Year Award which has so successfully drawn attention to the many beautiful gardens owned by members of the HHA and open to the public. It is very fitting

that we are presenting the Award this year to His Grace the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim Palace. His Grace's exemplary care and development of these magnificent gardens has been a lifetime devotion," said Edward Harley, President of the Historic Houses Association

"We are extremely honoured to receive this prestigious award in recognition of the Formal Gardens here at Blenheim Palace. This award recognises the vision and enthusiasm of my illustrious ancestors as well as celebrating the excellent work undertaken here today by the gardens team. We look forward to welcoming visitors to see the gardens this year and we hope that everyone enjoys their visit to this important World Heritage site" said The Duke of Marlborough.

HISTORY

Blenheim Palace is home to the 11th Duke of Marlborough and the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill. Conceived in 1705 by Sir John Vanbrugh, this unique Palace is a masterpiece of English Baroque architecture, built on Queen Anne's orders for John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, in recognition of his victory at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. In his design for Blenheim Palace, Vanbrugh's aim was to house a national hero and to celebrate England's newly won supremacy over the French in a blaze of architectural glory to rival Versailles. Its function, therefore, was to be a monument, castle, citadel and private house – in that order. The splendour and tranquillity of the 2,100 acres of landscaped parkland and the Formal Gardens are unrivalled anywhere in Britain. The Palace interiors carefully balance the delicate with the awe-inspiring, from the imposing vastness of the Great Hall, to the intricate detailing of the State Rooms. Blenheim Palace was created a World Heritage site in 1987.



THE GARDENS

The gardens at Blenheim Palace are all-encompassing, and from the Secret Garden, the Italian Garden, the Water Terraces, the Pleasure Gardens (which include the Marlborough Maze), the Rose Garden, and the Arboretum, there is beauty to be found in all seasons. Sometimes, when a new house is built, the design of the grounds is left until later, but not at Blenheim Palace. Vanbrugh reported that *"the Garden Wall was set agoing the same day with the House"*. Beautifully restored, renovated and maintained by twelve permanent garden staff, led by Trevor Wood and his wife Hilary, who has worked at Blenheim Palace for over 25 years, the gardens are totally awe-inspiring in their apparently effortless style and splendour.

The Secret Garden



Marking the events of over three centuries of history, the gardens at Blenheim Palace must adorn over a million memories. In 2004, whilst planning a suitable project to mark the tercentenary of the Battle of Blenheim, His Grace, the 11th Duke of Marlborough, was reminded of his grandfather's remark: *"there is no building in Europe, except Versailles, which so perfectly preserves its original atmosphere"*. This led to the decision to bring his father's Private Garden back to life, preserving the original layout but introducing new features, to be enjoyed by everyone.

Created four years after the house was opened to the public in 1950, this haven was designed as a romantic English garden. It had become completely overgrown and almost forgotten when its restoration was undertaken. Trevor Wood, the head gardener, replanted it and established new paths and water features in record time for the official opening in May 2004, creating a 'garden for all seasons'. It was renamed the Secret Garden and five years on it has matured delightfully.

The Marlborough Maze

The Secret Garden is merely the most recent of many projects showcasing the Duke of Marlborough's inspired means to retain the magic at Blenheim Palace, and welcome a wide-range of visitors through the gates. Some twenty years ago, His Grace established a new hedge maze (the second largest symbolic hedge maze in the world at 1.8 acres), in a conscious effort to provide an entertaining garden for the younger visitors. It was particularly designed



with elements of military symbolism celebrating the career of his illustrious ancestor, John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough and the victory for which this great house was his reward. The maze was constructed within the walls of the old kitchen garden (the only part of Vanbrugh's original construction to survive), once planted with espaliered fruit trees (pineapples, peaches, melons, eight different varieties of grape), and neat rows of vegetables, stocked by the royal gardener, Henry Wise. Fruit and vegetables are still grown within the grounds for the palace.

The Park and Rose Garden

At Blenheim the overriding legacy is 'Capability' Brown's, and it is this setting which helped Blenheim Palace gain its World Heritage Site status. The landscape setting he devised in the 1760s provided a sublime form of beauty and harmony that every generation of the Marlborough family has endeavoured to preserve ever since. Glorious views were created both to and from the house, the finest of which is the majestic panorama observed on entering the Park through Hawksmoor's Triumphal Arch at Woodstock - the shimmering expanse of the lake, the Grand Bridge, and the dense canopy of trees on the rising ground beyond. Although Vanbrugh built the bridge, it was Brown who



provided a worthy setting by constructing a wide cascade dam and creating a lake unparalleled in size and beauty at the time. For a long period Brown's grassy landscape came right up to the steps of the Palace and prevailed largely untouched even though several smaller garden schemes came and went. Of these only one remains today, a circular Rose Garden created by John Winston, 7th Duke, and restored by Trevor Wood, the present Head Gardener.

The Italian Gardens and Water Terraces

John Winston also returned a degree of formality to the east front when he laid out a symmetrical Italian Garden in the 1860s, which still remains private, but can be seen from the raised public walkway. In the early 20th century the 9th Duke of Marlborough redesigned the Italian Garden on the

advice of his French architect, Achille Duchêne. Formal symmetrical scrollwork parterres in box and yew replaced the earlier scheme of carpet bedding after a new bronze fountain by the American sculptor, Waldo Story, had been installed. These box-hedges are kept in pristine condition – each of them trimmed using spirit-levels, and string, as well as many hours of dedicated hard work.

Duchêne was also responsible for the Water Terraces on the west front, inspired by both Italian and French designs, creating a perfect link between Vanbrugh's baroque architecture and the informality of the Brownian landscape. In a vast engineering project undertaken from 1925-30, different shapes and levels of water were formed in each terrace, centred on an axis between the building and the lake.



“As the present guardian of this great estate, including more than 80 acres of formal gardens, I am conscious that Blenheim Palace is not merely a residence for my family - its heritage, its scale and its beauty make it much more. The only English stately home designated a World Heritage Site it is unique amongst country houses and remains, as intended, a national monument in an exquisite setting.” Duke of Marlborough.

There will be an opportunity for media to visit the gardens, film, take photographs and interview the gardeners on 28 May 2009.

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MEDIA OPPORTUNITY

Presentation of the Award to His Grace, The Duke of Marlborough and informal Garden Tour:

On: Thursday, 28 May 2009
At: 11.00 am Interviews with Head Gardener & Photo Opportunity
12.00 midday Formal Ceremony with Champagne
RSVP: Leonie Ashfield, Christie's Press Office
Tel: 020 7389 2398 email: lashfield@christies.com

Notes to Editors:

BLENHEIM PALACE

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Opening Times: February – December 2009

- Blenheim Palace opens from February 14th until December 13th 2009. It is open daily until November 1st, and from November 4th to December 13th the Palace and Formal Gardens open from Wednesday to Sunday. The Park is open all year round except Christmas Day.

- The Park: 9am – 6pm; the Formal Gardens: 10am – 5.30pm; the Palace and Pleasure Gardens: 10.30am – 5.30pm. Last admission: 4.45pm
- Full details of ticket prices available on request
- 24 hour information line: 08700 60 20 80

THE HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION

The Historic Houses Association (HHA) represents the interests of Britain's historic houses, castles and gardens that remain in private ownership. These owners make a very substantial contribution to the preservation of Britain's heritage and to rural economies through tourism and other commercial activities. Currently representing over 1500 members, the HHA is an association of these owners which exists to assist the people who own important properties with the special range of challenges and problems they face. The 'Garden of the Year' award is designed to reflect public enjoyment of gardens rather than specialised historical or botanical interest.

FRIENDS OF THE HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION

The winner of the 'Garden of the Year' award is decided through the votes of the HHA's 26,000 Friends. The Friends scheme gives free access to around 300 HHA houses, castles and gardens which open on a regular basis. For a single subscription of £37 Friends also receive the HHA's quarterly magazine and can join organised outings in the UK and overseas, often to houses which are not open to the public.

For further information please contact:

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Visit the HHA's website at www.hha.org.uk

CHRISTIE'S

Christie's, the world's leading art business had global auction and private sales in 2008 that totaled £2.8 billion/\$5.1 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 57 offices in 32 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai and Hong Kong. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

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