

REVIEW: Anne Wareham, **thinkinGardens**

<http://www.thinkinggardens.co.uk>

## **Nurture, not Nature**

**Society of Garden Designers Conference 28.03.09 with:**

**Hugh Ryan, Erik Dhont, Jinny Blom, Tim Rees, Roberta Silva, Ulf Nordfjell.**

It's one of the garden world's best kept secrets – if you're interested in garden design you can attend, for £120, the Society of Gardens Designer's conference in London, usually in the spring and the autumn, and see presentations of the work of some of the best garden designers in the world, by the said designers.

They usually seem to be men, but this year's spring conference did include Jinny Blom, and she was the best of the lot. Mostly you should ignore whatever title the conference offers – what you will almost invariably get is a slide show of the designer's work with explanations. Sometimes, rarely, like a good designer should, you might well think, they keep to the brief. Jinny did.

The brief in this case was 'Nurture not Nature'. The introductory text indicated that this was about *'what influences the way you design? – Our speakers will explain how their own particular cultural experiences show in their work. They will also discuss the challenges of designing in environments less familiar to them. Is meaning lost in translation, or do the cultural layers maintain their richness?'* – umm, like I said, the designers do a presentation of their work.

There were six presentations plus a brief one from the sponsor, Scotscape Ltd., which was stunning in its courtesy and consideration: Angus Cunningham kept it amazingly brief and earned everyone's appreciation, given that six presentations makes for an exhausting day. Scotscape's Living Walls merited a longer look – but you can visit the website: <http://www.scotscape.net>.

The generosity of being offered six presentations (*Doubled. For some reasons there are two screens so you see everything double. Interesting if peculiar, in its own right.*) probably went a little under appreciated too, for the pressure that it produced to rush through the breaks and the questions at the end. The breaks are a critical part of the event for most participants, who welcome the chance to meet their colleagues, catch up on gossip and demolish the presentations. And to recover from the shock of learning just how incredibly, shockingly mega rich the clients featuring in the presentations are. (though at least one has gone broke. Hurray?)

And perhaps also from discovering that the designers' backgrounds were not necessarily in garden design. If these are the successful ones, it appears that an experience of other disciplines enriches a designers' competence.

So, a chance to be inspired, spot the trends (mixed borders, of all things) and socialise with a hall full of garden designers.

The next conference will be "Heavenly Gardens in Hellish Places", 3rd October 2009. See [www.SGD.org.uk](http://www.SGD.org.uk)

Anne Wareham [www.veddw.co.uk](http://www.veddw.co.uk)