

Books

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Landscape of Dreams

Isabel Bannerman **296pp**, 2016, Pimpernel Press, ISBN 9781910258606, RRP £50

Julian and Isabel Bannerman might be the most unfamous famous garden designers in Britain. They have done one garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show (in 1994 with Clifton Nurseries) and are seldom seen on television or in magazines; not because they lack ambition or creativity but because, as this book so handsomely demonstrates, the majority of their work is on a huge scale and most commissioning editors are probably terrified of seeming out of touch with 'average' gardeners. What a mistake, as we all love to dream.

This book tells the tales behind 16 of their gardens ranging from a tiny courtyard in a London club to a bevy of glorious projects scattered across the stateliest of stately homes. Their design process is a gloriously eccentric cascade of remembered dreams, old books, history and a lifetime of being interested – in people, in

ideas, in nature and, most of all, in places.

Their work is a contrast between great flights of fancy and soft drifts of planting. They may not be the most innovative of plantspeople, but their eye for the right colour and texture to complement their buildings and structures is impeccable.

And what buildings: great temples, obelisks, stumperies and grottoes made of colossal chunks of oak and gatherings of antlers and shells, all put together with skill.

In all, a well-written book with an interesting mixture of illustrations, original sketches and cleverly composed photographs, plus family snaps and scanned Polaroids. The Bannermans' designs combine monumentality with carefully balanced humour and it is a pleasure to learn how they come to fruition. ●

James Alexander-

Sinclair is a garden designer and member of RHS Council



Snowdrop

Gail Harland **256pp**, 2016, Reaktion Books, ISBN 9781780234922, RRP £16

This is the latest in the publisher's botanical series. These fascinating books consider plants botanically and horticulturally while investigating their cultural contexts and social impacts.

Apparently fragile yet remarkably resilient, snowdrops have been multi-faceted symbols, variously representing purity, piety, hope, consolation, death and rebirth. The author has diligently unearthed a wealth of references, uses and depictions in literature, folklore, medicine, music and art to show the plant's reinterpretation in various cultures over the centuries.

This is not a practical guide, although cultivation, propagation, pests and diseases are touched on, and some notable cultivars are illustrated and described. The genus and all the currently recognised *Galanthus* species are introduced (though only 11 are illustrated). Less expectedly, the descriptions are interwoven with brief biographical notes of people connected with the species.

Indeed the book seems at times a dizzying whirl of colourful personalities: composers, artists, poets and writers (some of whom seem to have scarcely mentioned snowdrops) jostle for space with botanists, plantspeople and noted galanthophiles.

This book is beautifully illustrated with an eclectic selection of images and objects, from Pre-Raphaelite paintings to cigarette cards, ceramic thimbles and Italian biscuits. Some of the Victorian creations are insufferably twee: pity the poor boy who had to wear Wilhelm's snowdrop costume.

A must for dedicated galanthophiles, this book will also appeal to those interested in Victorian art and literature, or the rich sociocultural background of *Galanthus*. ●
Simon Garbutt is an artist, writer and galanthophile

Rosie Sanders' Flowers

Rosie Sanders **160pp**, 2016, Batsford, ISBN 9781849943970, RRP £30

For the many fans of botanical artist Rosie Sanders this superb book illustrating her paintings of flowers will not disappoint. For those previously unfamiliar with her work it will excite and inspire.

Flowers are her obsession and this is highly apparent in her breathtaking depiction of the showy plants she loves best; iris, amaryllis, tulips and orchids. Her love of dark and strong colours and ability to show light shining through the petals is remarkable, reminiscent of stained-glass windows. Her skilful and imaginative compositions also include humble wildflowers, which she represents in equally dramatic ways dancing across her paintings.

The translucency and vibrancy

she achieves is reproduced well in this fine book. The close-ups give an excellent and striking insight into the wide range of colours she uses, something surprising to other artists who rarely achieve this depth and clarity of colour. Her works, often up to 1 x 1.5m (3 x 5ft) and much larger than

most botanical artists would attempt, convey more excitement than a photographic illustration allows.

The introduction by renowned Swiss botanist Andreas Honegger gives information about this fine artist, whose ability to paint flowers, often in a sensuous way, leaves us wanting more. ●

Shirley Slocock is

an RHS Gold medal-winning botanical artist

