

One to Watch Local Business in Profile

This Month: We take a stroll through the lush and abundant Hunting Brook Gardens, in Blessington

By Mary D'Arcy



Far, far away from the manicured lawns of south Dublin, on the side of a peaceful, verdant valley in west county Wicklow, (quite close to fairyland), there is a

particularly lush, and abundant garden. This garden is special for several reasons. Firstly, it's been created on the skeleton of a 7th century ring fort. Secondly, it contains many dramatic plants and grasses, exotic species

that originated on the other side of the globe (in fact, you never know quite what flower you'll find next). The garden is set on land Jimi Blake inherited from his family, and I visited it one sunny day, quite recently.

Jimi, a noted garden consultant, is clearly proud of his creation and wants all to come and appreciate it. He developed an interest in gardening from working with his mother initially on the family farm, then spent 12

years in Airfield Gardens, Dundrum, which is where he came to the pinnacle of his trade.

There are many intriguing exotic plants at Hunting Brook, Jimi says he sources a lot of them on his travels, from far flung places like China and India, and shows me a species of lily I've never seen before. How does he grow them all? "The whole garden was grown from seed." Jimi selects plants carefully for higher ground, which will be



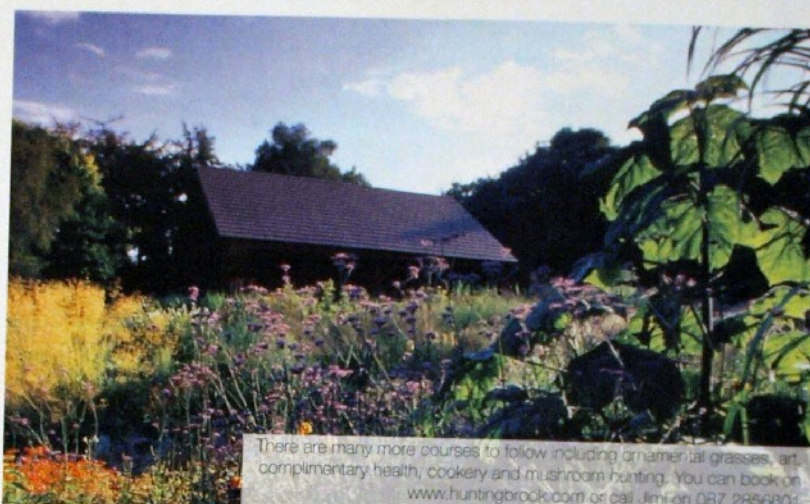
more likely to thrive here. I asked Jimi if he saw gardening as an art or a trade: his answer shows he lies very firmly in the artistic arena, "I see it as an art form as one needs to know where to plant, in the shade or not, what type of soil and how to place plants. Obviously no artificial fertilisers or pesticides are used. As well as a garden there is a vegetable and herb garden."

Jimi's garden is constantly evolving; he doesn't strategically plan it. He is very far from being a control freak, preferring a holistic, non rigid approach. He doesn't really work well with manicured lawns - preferring lush grasses, and is hoping to get more into tree planting. In relation to climate change and how this has influenced genetic diversity, Jimi is convinced that things have radically changed in recent years, he sees varieties growing here now that would not have in the past.

Jimi also offers garden design consultancy, and is keen to open up the place in new ways; the BBC series *The Tudors* will be creating a set here at some stage! The website is his key tool for foreign tourists.

So, what's coming up at Hunting Brook Lodge apart from the plants? The Gardens are open to the public as part of the Wicklow Gardens Festival on 16th-17th August and 13-14th September. Let's Talk Plants (€15) is an evening stroll through the Gardens, with a glass of wine or homemade lemonade, and takes place on Thursday August 21st at 7pm.

- Good Planting - Designing with Plants (€200) in association with Fergus Garrett from Great Dixter Gardens, UK, takes place on 23rd August.
- Photography in the Garden (€120) with Paul Flannigan takes place on 30th August.
- Gardening Masterclass (€150), with Helen Dillon and Jimi Blake, takes place on 6th September.



There are many more courses to follow including ornamental grasses, art, complimentary health, cookery and mushroom hunting. You can book on www.huntingbrook.com or call Jimi on 087 2856801.