



Balancing the best of both worlds

An intriguing theme provides an award-winning Ellerslie Flower Show garden anyone would like to take home.

Barke is a great name for a landscape designer, and it's stood

Tania Barke in good stead. Her display garden at Ellerslie, called 'The Best of Both Worlds,' scored a silver, and attracted a vast amount of positive comment from punters, who immediately recognised and appreciated the appeal of the theme.

Inspired by M M Kaye's *The Far Pavilions*, the exhibit is an oasis-style garden brimming with unusual plants, big palms, sand, a water feature and a romantic curtained pavilion. Tania's message is about balancing the chaotic and restful sides of life, and this is reflected in the sharp, spiky plants and undulating terrain which gradually give way to lush, subtropical plantings that speak of warmth and reflection.

As well as exploring an easily recognisable theme and demonstrating the considerable skills of the team involved in putting it together, the garden ticks all the boxes for home gardeners looking to enhance their outdoor living space.

The colour palette is necessarily restrained, with clean white pavers inset into sand taking an angled path from the front of the garden to the pavilion, shrouded in floating white curtains, at the back. Pale grey and white rocks provide a framework for lush plantings of mainly foliage plants, with a handful of red blooms tying into the elegant red loungers in the pavilion.

LEFT Contemporary loungers in a strawberry shade add a splash of vibrant colour.
ABOVE Touches of red in a garden mainly dominated by foliage pick up the red of the loungers.



The backdrop to this appealing scene is a unique wax painting by Helen Soffe which contributes to the theme. (See page 89).

Tania's interest in landscape design began 14 years ago when she was living in Japan. With a university degree in languages and a very young family to look after, she came up with the idea of retraining in the area of horticulture.

"I didn't like the concrete of Tokyo," she explains. "So I studied extramurally in the evenings while juggling family life, and achieved a diploma in horticulture through Massey University.

Tania started her design business, *Through the Garden Gate Landscape Design Ltd*, three years ago as a way to use and express her design ability. The decision to exhibit at Ellerslie grew from a conversation with artist friend Helen, and the two decided to combine their talents to create the garden.

"I'd always wanted to do something on the scale of the Ellerslie Flower Show," Tania says.

The garden was very much a joint effort, with Tania and Helen providing the initial design input, and a variety of construction experts and suppliers contributing to the award-winning end result.

ABOVE The water feature with its rocks and palms provides screening for the pavilion and adds to the atmosphere of seclusion.
OPPOSITE TOP AND BOTTOM Helen Soffe's wax painting adds to the 'best of both worlds' theme.



Helen Soffe – An Artful Addition

Certainly outdoor art has become a large part of garden design over the past decade, but Helen Soffe's wax painting for 'The Best of Both Worlds' is something else again.

A 9 x 2m span, the painting reflects the theme of balancing the chaotic and restful elements of life.

The forms of the plants, rocks and shells in the garden are echoed in this piece of artwork, and bring an added ambience to the exhibit.

Helen is a self-taught artist and has been doing encaustic art for the past five years, selling through a number of Auckland galleries. She has had several exhibitions and won two awards at the Royal Easter Show.

"It's been a long process of trial and error, using different techniques on different surfaces, and playing with colours, until I found a style I'm happy with," she says.

Helen has been living in New Zealand for 12 years, and loves the beaches and the bush, both of which have inspired much of the work. **a**