

World Tour

Landscape designer Franchesca Watson suggests exploring the world's gardens



The Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent **BELOW** Visit the High Line garden, a public park in Manhattan

All gardeners, garden designers and garden appreciators love to visit other people's gardens. It's a source of provocation, inspiration and knowledge in a field replete with creativity, quasi-scientific know-how and subdued competition. There is an element of voyeurism too – I don't know many garden lovers of any kind who can resist an invitation to view a garden with possibilities and, even better, to meet the creator behind the garden and perhaps also the people who maintain the garden on a day-to-day basis. This gives one the opportunity to ask penetrating questions about the possible history of the garden, the vision of the

owner/designer and the nuts and bolts of the particular garden's construction and care, not to mention the chance of picking up some great ideas and tips. It also hones one's taste and sets one's standards.

The network of garden visitors stretches over the globe and seems to be expanding exponentially as gardening and garden aspirations gather momentum with green-planet consciousness. On offer are opportunities ranging from the many world-wide exhibitions, such as the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and the Singapore Garden Festival, and amazing public gardens such as our own Babylonstoren near Franschoek and the exhilarating High Line garden in Manhattan, to smaller limited tours that take in private and public garden spaces and can be tailored

the Hidcote Garden. This network often gives the opportunity to understand architecture, interiors and gardens as one holistic conception. The ever-fashionable Chelsea Flower Show features internationally designed show gardens that always have a broad spread, from traditional to cutting edge. Visiting gardens and shows elsewhere in Europe such as the Chaumont-sur-Loire Garden Festival can inspire one to attend events on other continents, such as the San Francisco Flower & Garden Show or the Australian Landscape Conference in Melbourne, which is particularly relevant to South African garden-lovers. At conferences there are often world-class speakers and add-on garden tours forming part of the proceedings.

However, to my mind, the best kind of garden visiting is exploring a region's gardens with a like-minded friend who knows or lives in the area and who has insider information and connections. And the best way to make these international friends is to attend South African garden events such as the Bedford Garden Festival (which attracts people from all over the world) – extend this to a few organised happenings such as the Australian Landscape Conference – and get chatting to all those wonderful garden people out there. Gardeners are generally supremely generous with their knowledge and reciprocity is a byword.

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to suit your particular interests, often led by eminent garden designers, plantspeople or industry experts. Garden visiting has become ever-more popular and accessible, benefiting from the eagerness of most gardeners to broaden their horizons and meet other gardeners and, whether owner or appreciator, the opportunity is there to learn, and in a field that is so diverse, fragile and inaccurate, exchanging information is a wonderful bonus.

Most South Africans start with visiting gardens in the UK that are part of the National Trust, such as the Sissinghurst and

