



CULLINAN STUDIO

PRESS ENQUIRIES

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PRESS RELEASE

RHS GARDEN HYDE HALL HILLTOP COMPLEX: A PLACE TO EAT, LEARN AND CONNECT TO NATURE

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The hilltop at the Royal Horticultural Society's Garden Hyde Hall in Chelmsford, Essex, has undergone a major transformation with the development of two new buildings masterplanned and designed by Cullinan Studio. What was once a working farmstead for the site is now a hub for enjoying and learning about how we can nurture our natural world, and a space to inspire the gardener in all of us; furthering the RHS vision to enrich everyone's life through plants and make the UK a greener and more beautiful place.

The garden at Hyde Hall has been steadily evolving over 25 years, but was lacking key facilities, namely a dedicated education facility, a multipurpose event space and a restaurant to nourish visitors after their exploration of the extensive gardens. Cullinan Studio masterplanned new buildings on the hilltop to house these essential aspects of the visitor experience. They comprise the Clore Learning Centre, funded by the Clore Duffield Foundation, and the Hilltop Lodge, home to a new award-winning field to fork restaurant and new activity barn.

RHS Garden Hyde Hall is the charity's largest site and encompasses 136 hectares of beautiful rolling hills, fields, pastures and woodlands; 10ha of which are managed gardens and visitor facilities, including the Hilltop Complex buildings. The site was originally a farmstead dating from 1716, before it was donated to the RHS in 1993. Although a charming thatched barn provided a small restaurant on the hilltop, it was surrounded by tarmac and tractor sheds with a rudimentary former barn used for education activities.

Cullinan's initial commission was for the Learning Centre only, but their methodology included exploring future plans for the whole of the hilltop. Looking at the bigger picture revealed that the hilltop could be developed as a series of perfectly proportioned courtyards; sheltering the wind but catching the sun, and most importantly, allowing separate events to be hosted in each courtyard without any conflicts. So, a private event can be held in the thatched barn courtyard while visitors have lunch in the restaurant courtyard, while school children can dig away in the Learning Centre courtyard garden. This holistic approach led the RHS to instruct Cullinan Studio to also design the Hilltop Lodge and carry out additional masterplanning for the whole of Hyde Hall.

The Hilltop Complex buildings form part of a wider investment programme by the RHS in recent years to improve education facilities and the visitor experience across all of its four sites. It completes the Society's nationwide purpose-built education spaces, equipping Hyde Hall with the facilities to drive forward the RHS Campaign for School Gardening, inspiring schools to provide children with gardening opportunities to enhance their skills and boost their development, improving physical and mental well-being.

Designed as a family of buildings which enclose and open up to the landscape so that it can be enjoyed in all seasons, it is a fitting location for the RHS to fulfil its long-term objective to inspire passion and excellence in the science, art and practice of horticulture. As well as supporting the RHS's expanding education programme by accommodating twice the capacity, from 5,000 to an expected 10,000 visiting school pupils per year, the new buildings create a landmark to draw visitors through the landscape, and a vantage point from which to enjoy the views. The restaurant has been a particular success, overtaking the busy arrivals café in popularity, and even winning a Field to Fork Award for its delicious menu made with Hyde Hall grown produce.

The Hilltop Complex was delivered by design and build contractor Brooks and Woods Ltd, with Concertus Design and Property Consultants providing the architectural and technical design in response to Cullinan Studio's masterplan and concept design.

The project, which was completed April 2018 and opened to the public in summer 2018, has seen a 13% increase in annual visitor numbers year on year, and an increase in the average amount of time spent at the attraction.

For the surrounding garden design, award-winning landscape designer and BBC Gardeners' World presenter Adam Frost worked closely with Cullinan Studio, Concertus Design and Property Consultants, and the design and build contractor Brooks and Wood to devise a strategy for the gardens that skilfully blends the variety of distinct gardens skirting the hilltop with new buildings and horticulture. The design intentionally provides visitors with ideas for their own gardens by displaying what's possible in shade, sun, wind and shelter.

Built from robust materials - including glulam timber structures, zinc cladding, brick, and timber boarding - to withstand the exposed nature of the site, the new buildings are designed to sit in harmony with the farmstead vernacular, complementing a neighbouring thatched barn. The two buildings are distinguished by the profile and colour of their roofs, their most striking feature, purposely designed to be silhouetted against the sky.

The Clore Learning Centre is a new single-storey barn distinguished by a black zinc roof with four steep serrated pitches, which sits atop red brick wings enclosing a sheltered west-facing teaching garden. Inside, rooflights flood the building with daylight. A movable wall offers flexibility to convert the open plan learning space into two smaller, intimate classrooms and retract again for larger groups. Both arrangements have direct access onto the teaching garden so that students of all ages - from toddlers ('Little Acorns') through to retirees - can move freely between indoor and outdoor spaces.

The Hilltop Lodge is a substantially larger building, characterised by its pitched, red zinc-clad roofs with ridge lanterns and generous overhanging eaves that shelter full-height windows, oak-clad walls and visitors looking for shade. Like the Learning Centre, the Lodge has a U-shaped plan opening onto a courtyard, with two barns flanking it. One barn houses the restaurant and the other a multipurpose event space. Internally, glulam timber columns and beams rise to support a linear ridge lantern. Through an interplay of simple forms, natural materials and natural light, Cullinan Studio has created a calm space where the eye is drawn to views across to Hyde Hall's renowned Dry Garden and the rolling Essex hills beyond.

Sustainability has been a key driver for the design, as evidenced by the specification of durable materials and sustainably sourced timber, the inclusion of rainwater harvesting, photovoltaic panels, natural ventilation, and low energy light fittings. It was also crucial to the design team that the buildings worked symbiotically with the gardens, enhancing the enjoyment of the gardens as well as creating a space in which to enjoy some of the produce which is grown and served on site.

The Hilltop Complex has cemented the RHS's reputation as a trusted charity for all gardeners and future gardeners for generations to come, and Hyde Hall as a premier visitor destination in the East of England and Thames Gateway.

Cullinan Studio's lead architect Carol Costello explains the practice's holistic approach to the masterplan:

"Every project has a wider context, and through our work on significant garden estates over the years we have learned that the seamless integration of buildings with their immediate landscape and heritage is fundamental to the success of a project. At Hyde Hall we imagined these precise roof forms silhouetted against the sky, rising out of lush gardens and enticing you to walk up the hill. Once at the hilltop, you arrive at a garden framed by buildings which offer refuge and prospect. Each building plays a part in fulfilling a larger ambition to create a very special place that will leave a lasting impression. Hyde Hall is a magical garden and we are proud to have been able to help the RHS realise their vision."

Ian Le Gros, Head of Site, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, said:

"The completion of this key investment project has totally transformed RHS Garden Hyde Hall from its humble beginnings as a farm. Visitors can enjoy a truly inspirational garden along with a fantastic new dining experience, and schools can learn in an environment that will nurture a passion for horticulture and gardening."

Jill Baker, Head of Education, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, said:

"We are very proud of our new Learning Centre, it looks amazing and it's such an adaptable and calming space to be in. It has made a huge difference to education at the garden because we now have a building that suits our needs and can be used all year round as a base for learning, for children and adults alike. It has helped us expand our programme and to reach new audiences, especially older pupils who have used the Learning Centre for art study days and, following on from this, transformed the Learning Centre into a gallery to display their work."

Adam Frost, garden designer and RHS Ambassador, said:

"The new hilltop buildings presented a great opportunity to bring the garden together and develop new spaces for visitors to enjoy. The buildings offered the chance to take lines and vistas into the surrounding garden, from the diagonal flooring seamlessly moving between inside and out, to the planting weaving right up to the windows. It was important that the buildings, with their strong architectural shape, would sit well in the landscape and the existing gardens they connect to. The developments of the former 'farmyard' area also needed to link into the wider garden, as well as turning the yard into a beautiful, but usable space."



NOTED TO EDITORS

Location	Creep hedge Lane, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 8ET
Internal floor area	Clore Learning Centre: 330m ² Hilltop Lodge: 764m ²
Final construction cost	£4.25M
Construction dates	May 2017 – May 2018

Design & Build Delivery Team

Client	Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)
Funding	Clore Duffield Foundation and RHS
Principal Designer	Brooks and Wood Ltd
Lead Technical Architect	Concertus Design and Property Consultants
Landscape Architect	Concertus Design and Property Consultants
Building Services Engineers	The Energy Practice
Design & Build Contractor	Brooks and Wood Ltd
QS:	Dudley Smith Partnership
Project Management	Dudley Smith Partnership
Garden designer	Adam Frost

Clore Learning Centre at Concept Stage

Concept Architect/Masterplanner	Cullinan Studio
Concept Structural Engineer	Smith and Wallwork
Concept M+E Engineer	Couch Perry Wilkes
Concept QS	Jackson Coles
Project Management	Jackson Coles
Planning Consultant	Boyer Planning

Hilltop Lodge at Concept Stage

Concept Architect/Masterplanner	Cullinan Studio
Concept Structural Engineer	MLM
Concept Services Engineer	EEP
Planning Consultant	Boyer Planning

Photographer	Paul Raftery
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Cullinan Studio

Cullinan Studio believes that architecture is a social act, both in its creation and its impact on people and planet. Too often the built environment is unnatural, unhealthy and unfair. Cullinan Studio engages with organisations and communities, seeks local, low-carbon, non-toxic solutions, and strives to connect people to nature. Through that connection, the practice raises awareness and fosters care of the planet.

RIBA Royal Gold Medalist Ted Cullinan founded the practice in 1965 based on cooperative principles. The London-based architectural and masterplanning practice has created award-winning projects for Kew and Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, Cambridge and Warwick Universities, and the BFI, with Maggie's Newcastle epitomising the practice's natural design philosophy.

The studio works across all sectors and scales, from education to housing and workplace. Recently completed projects include 2019 Civic Trust Awards Commended Spring at Stonebridge Park, a housing regeneration scheme for Hyde Group, Wembley; National Automotive Innovation Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry; and a new-build family home in Amersham.

Projects built in this sector include the multi-award winning John Hope Gateway, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (2009) and RIBA Award winning Kew Herbarium, Library, Art and Archives Wing for Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (2010).

Following the success of the Hilltop Complex, the RHS has commissioned Cullinan Studio to develop a masterplan for RHS Bridgewater in Salford. The architects are also collaborating with landscape and garden designer Adam Frost on a new commission to create a series of pavilions in the grounds of Shrubs Wood, a modernist house in Buckinghamshire by Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff.

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