

DESIGN FOR LIVING

GARDEN HARMONY

By ROSEMARY HILL



Hammocks by Elizabeth Milner, and clay pot, 53in high, by Monica Young. Details of all work on this page from the Oxford Gallery, 23 High Street, Oxford

FROM gnomes to nymphs, the English, up and down the social scale, display an uncharacteristic vein of whimsy when it comes to decoration in the garden. This seems a good time of year, as the evenings continue to shorten but the summer has not quite gone, to take a long and more co-ordinated forward look at what, apart from plants, we put in the garden. All the pictures here were taken in the garden of High Wall in Oxford, where the Oxford Gallery recently exhibited the work of some of its artists and craftsmen and women in an attempt to take "A New View in the Garden".

What I like about these pieces is that they cross and recross the gulf between arts and crafts. It is a gap which exists in galleries, but it is

never apparent in domestic interiors, so why should it apply in the garden? Whether you buy something to sit on or stare at, it can be chosen to enhance the other objects in your garden as well as the setting.

At the most obviously functional end of the range are Elizabeth Milner's comfortable woven cotton hammocks. She uses subdued colours, suggestive of the light falling through leaves, and says she finds the hammock shape satisfyingly unfussy. She searches ships' chandlers for interesting rope and braid to decorate them, and will make any colour scheme to order. In High Wall, the hammocks blended beautifully into the trees. In a small garden they would be more striking, and Elizabeth Milner likes to see them in city backyards,

slung between washing-line post and fence, to add a touch of softness.

In the very different work of John Makepeace and Monica Young, the functional and the sculptural start to blend. Makepeace's work needs no introduction to most people, but as he has moved more towards designing for interiors, this was a welcome opportunity to see his sectioned seating for a garden. Its austere curves reflect those of the tall trees against which it was set.

Monica Young, too, enjoyed seeing her huge pots in a setting where the garden dominated. Her work can be seen in public and embassy gardens in many countries, but she, like Elizabeth Milner, likes to see her pots in more intimate settings, suggesting that they

"shrink with familiarity". Perhaps a more realistic argument, and one that makes the point again about seeing our gardens as we see our living rooms, is that the pots take up no more room than an armchair.

Extending the garden's control of nature to water, organising its form and flow, has been a source of pleasure for time out of mind. William Pye's *Crater Lake*, formed on the huge lines of Cadet Idris, brings us out into the realm of fine art. But we are a long way from the sculpture park with what Pye calls its associations with the used car lot or the cemetery. His use of water and warm, weathering textures draws from its surroundings as much as it gives back. The Oxford Gallery telephone number is 0865 242731.

Photographs: Richard Holt.



William Pye's *Crater Lake*, bronze, one of an edition of six, and John Makepeace's seating in four sections, softwood with yacht lacquer

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