

Lack of Government backing blamed for British absence at premier European show

By Jack Sidders

The absence of British involvement in one of Europe's premier horticultural events has been blamed on a lack of Government funding and interest, according to the industry's biggest organisations.

Ghent Florales attracts more than 300,000 visitors and 300 exhibitors but, for the first time since the early days of its 200-year history, there was no British involvement in the quinquennial event.

The RHS last organised an exhibition in 2000, funded in conjunction with the HTA and BBC. "It's a lack of funds," said RHS shows director Stephen Bennett.

"The European exhibitions, similar to shows in Singapore, China and Taiwan, are all heavily funded by their Governments, as I guess the Governments of those countries see those events as both supporting the horticultural industry in their countries and also providing a destination for incoming tourism.

"It should be noted that there are no such Government-funded events in the UK and the question why there was no British representation at Florales boils down to whether investing in an expensive foreign show serves the objectives of a commercial company or organisation like the RHS.

"It's extremely expensive to do and difficult to justify without some Government funding. If our own Government doesn't want us to fly the flag for Britain, it's difficult for us to justify. It is a pity though."

The RHS, HTA and Commercial Horticultural Association all said no British companies had expressed an interest in the show. Demand from British tourists was more buoyant and tour operator Gold Crest said it had sold 500 places on its three-day package to the Belgian show.

British tourist Amanda Deyton told *HW* she was attracted by the spectacular blooms. She said: "I have been here before and I should



Ghent Florales: world's biggest indoor garden show featured living walls and more than 300,000 flowers

PRIZE WINNERS

King's prize for the highest number of prizes:
AVBS

President's prize:
De Groene Verbeelding

Azalea prize: **Jules Block NV**

Small garden: **DMnL De Mol**

Large Garden:
Pepijn Florent Verheyen

Public prize: **VLAM**

Small artistic stand:
Denis Plants

Large artistic stand:
Exotic Plants

Foreign individual exhibitor:
Jardin Exotique de Monaco

Belgian individual exhibitor:
Deroose Plants

Foreign co-operative: Taiwan
Floriculture Export Association

Belgian co-operative: **AVBS**

think I will come again – you have never seen any thing like this."

Garden writer Peter Seabrook said it was the best show he had seen in 50 years of visiting. "The sheer quality is unbelievable, particularly in *Dahlias, Hydrangeas, Bromeliads, Brugmansias* and *Orchids*," he said.

"They were all beautifully staged. The show was double the size of Chelsea, only 20 euros to get in

and attracted 300,000 visitors. But this was the first year that there were no British exhibitors." Joining the numerous Belgian exhibitors were exhibits from 12 different countries.

European Nursery Stock Association president and Belgian grower Willy de Nolf exhibited at Florales for the fourth time this year. "It's not an exhibition like any other, it's something special," he said.

"It might not be a business exposition but you take part to show what the sector can offer, what Belgium can do and for the prestige for your company. It's a shame that there were no British plants or companies. I suppose it's like Chelsea but less commercial."

To see more pictures from the show, visit www.hortweek.com

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