

Laudation Egeskov Park & Gardens

Jens Spanjer, Jüchen

Egeskov castle park is one of the most important and largest historical gardens in Denmark. Above all during the last decades, substantial restoration and careful development of the gardens has taken place on a purely private basis. This was one of the basic statements put forward by Gunar Erikson, our jury member from Sweden, as a reason for nominating Egeskov.

During the further extensive discussion regarding the best development of an historical garden, the outstanding work carried out over the last decades by Graf Ahlefeldt, his family and the gardeners working at Egeskov became increasingly clear to the jury.

I had the opportunity to visit the gardens in Egeskov myself this spring. Rarely has an overall ensemble of park, gardens, castle, exhibitions, restaurants and activities for families filled me with such enthusiasm. Dear Graf Ahlefeldt, this was also because you gave me such a warm welcome and showed me around the castle and grounds for almost a full day.

My lasting impression is that you manage like nobody else to convey to visitors your enthusiasm for the park and gardens along with the history of the castle related to them. You told me how important it is to you to have personal contact with your visitors. And your need to welcome each of your 200,000 visitors personally is truly tangible. That impressed me greatly. Because of your very warm personal approach, Egeskov remains a true private garden despite its 200,000 visitors. And you share not only the garden and park with your visitors but also your castle. You even bring them right up to the castle attic!

Of central importance however, is the high quality of the park and the many gardens at Egeskov. The impression made by the large number of tree-high hedges, which have been continually maintained for over 280 years, is absolutely overwhelming.

Of historical importance is the hedge maze dating from 1733, which is rivalled in Europe only by that at Hampton Court Palace. The transition to the English landscape garden works successfully, with a line of sight running past the castle as far as a teahouse which has been restored by you. The Renaissance garden at Egeskov was restored in 1962 by French garden architect Ferdinand Duprat. A kitchen garden such as is otherwise only found in English gardens supplies the castle restaurant and café.

The large number of gardens makes a visit to Egeskov into a veritable garden journey. This is an indicator of the successful further development of the historical garden. With the new maze designed by artist Piet Hein, you have created a link to the historical maze of 1733. An herbaceous garden at the edge of the park was re-designed in the 1990s. Modern themes such as the grey foliage garden and the scented garden complement historical features such as the rose garden and the fuchsia garden with its more than 100 different types of species, some of which are very old.

All the newly created gardens fit in sensitively with the historical elements. The focus is always on the visitor's experience, whereby the underlying foundation for this is formed by the carefully-maintained historical garden and castle buildings. An almost dream-like world is created by additional elements such as playgrounds, events and museum exhibitions ranging from china to dolls and children's toys, from gardening implements to carriages, vintage vehicles, fire engines and even airplanes. This is done without a lot of fuss, the focus rather being on playfulness and mystery.

Conservation of garden culture is taken seriously yet is presented light-heartedly. This is something the equal of which is hard to find in Europe and which you and your family, and above all your ancestors, have developed consistently and enthusiastically.

Over recent decades you have received help from your gardeners in particular, many of whom are long-standing staff who originally worked in agriculture and have thus had to familiarise themselves with garden maintenance. Today, garden care is highly professional and is headed by a Royal gardener.

Thus I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Graf Ahlefeldt, to your wife and - on behalf of all those working at Evesgov - to your head gardener Peter Bonden and your director Henrik Neelmeyer who are present here today as winners of the European Garden Award in the category "Best Further Development of an Historical Garden"

Congratulations...