

EUROPEAN GARDEN AWARD 2016

Laudation: Ballymaloe Cookery School



This year the special award of the Schloss Dyck Foundation was dedicated to kitchen gardens, and I can assure that during the jury meeting there has been a very strong competition because the jury members selected 17 important European examples of this category.

Kitchen gardens are both contemporary and traditional or historical. In the renaissance, garden vegetables and fruit trees were cultivated amongst statues and fountains in front of the villas or castles, as in Boboli garden in Florence in the renaissance time or in Villandry in France which is a modern interpretation of a renaissance kitchen garden.

At the beginning of the XXI century a kitchen garden represents at the best level the relationship between men and nature and culture, because it is the place where to grow useful and ornamental plants and where we can develop the idea of a low impact garden.

The decision to give the award to Ballymaloe Cookery School and its diverse kitchen gardens was based on two principal considerations:

The first point was the beauty of the garden composed today by nine different gardens.

The second point was the strong connection between the garden, the kitchen, the school and a philosophy concerning food and life.

“Be a local hero buy local food.”

“Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do and are trying to achieve here at Ballymaloe Cookery School. We are in the fortunate position of being able to grow a substantial proportion of our own food here on our organic farm. In addition, we support as many local growers and market traders as possible, and what we can't source in the immediate vicinity, we purchase from a wider network of Irish producers. As we are an international cookery school, teaching a diverse range of cuisines, we naturally must source ingredients which cannot be grown locally or indeed in Ireland. To fulfil those requirements, we work with a carefully selected network of international suppliers, always endeavouring to purchase from organic and ethical sources.”

I can add that I am convinced that food is culture, and I have dedicated some of my researches to kitchen garden in renaissance Tuscany.

Ballymaloe is an organic farm of 100 Acres near Cork not far from the sea bought by Allen Family in 1948. They started farming and in 1964 they opened a restaurant. Myrtle Allen is now one of the most influential and culturally significant people in Ireland. The documentary “Myrtle Allen a life in food” tells the story of her life, and the quiet revolution she started in 1964 when she opened the restaurant.

“Although times have changed at Ballymaloe, the essential spirit of the place is rooted in these improvised beginnings and in the relationship of the farm to the table which underlies the elegance of Irish Country House cooking.”

The garden restoration started in 1983 together with the beginning of the culinary school.

Now people can visit nine different gardens:

The water garden, the ornamental fruit garden, the kitchen potager, Lydia’s garden, the herb garden, the old pleasure garden, the herbaceous border , the soft fruit garden, the celtic Maze and wildflower meadow, the farm walk.

As the special award is mainly concerned with the kitchen gardens, we can give them a look in more detail too: The ornamental fruit garden and the kitchen potager, with heritage tomatoes and heritage apples; the enchanting herb garden with more than 70 different herbs. And the soft fruit garden planted in 2005 with a selection of gooseberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, loganberries, autumn raspberries, blueberries.

But even with a focus on kitchen gardens and produce, the spectacular herbaceous borders are worthwhile to be mentioned here and to be visited at Ballymaloe.

The connection between garden and food is one of the strongest elements of the place. A place where you can also learn to cook with short and long cookery courses, for adults and kids, guest chefs. And they also organize the “Ballymaloe Garden Festival” which was opened from 3 to 4 September.

We congratulate the entire Allen family members who are still working and managing everything and we invite Toby Allen to receive the Schloss Dyck Special Award.

Laudation by: Mariachiara Pozzana