

The Hillier Ruin

Construction Guide

INTRODUCTION: The Hillier Ruin was designed and built for the gold medal winning Hillier Chelsea Flower Show 2002 exhibit. The 'Artist's Garden', designed by Andrew McIndoe, was not the first time that Redwood and Hillier had worked together but was, perhaps, their most ambitious project to date. For this romantic garden Andrew wanted something to act as a focal point, a feature and to add a story line to the soft, undefined, impressionist planting. What better than to take a leaf from the garden design book of yesteryear; a temple, a pavilion, a Folly!



THE HILLIER CHELSEA EXHIBIT: A garden Exhibit which covers 1000 square feet, includes in excess of 4,000 plants delivered by 11 trucks, is staged by over 30 people and includes a masonry structure as impressive as this ruin cannot be all built in advance. However, in the case of the ruin it was essential to have a practise run to check timing and feasibility and to let ideas develop. Having formulated the design and drawn up a plan of work we decided that the ideal place to practise would be in Andrew's garden, at the top of the hill under mature oak and birch trees. We had a strict limit of three days for the actual build at Chelsea and it was imperative that this would be met.

SITE PREPARATION: Although Andrew had chosen a perfect site for the ruin it was certainly not the easiest for access - as he would find to his cost later. This would be the one part of the build that would be different for real than at the show. Here we were building an antiquity for the future - good foundations were needed. The ground-work is the most laborious and least satisfying of the work involved and as Andrew was available on site we decided to leave this to him before we Arrived for the fun bit! We organised for him to dig the foundations and fill them with concrete over a weekend so that when we arrived in the week everything would be ready to attempt a lightening two day build. It rained solidly on the chosen weekend, but, to his credit, Andrew stuck to the task even though suffering a mishap when losing control of the loaded wheelbarrow on the treacherous incline!



DAY ONE - Building to Cill Height: We arrived early to deliver all the materials to site in time for a prompt start only to find Andrew hobbling a bit following his fall at the weekend. Fortunately we had brought my old Land Rover which negotiated the slippery slope somewhat better than he had! In addition to the Redwood Stone Gothic Folly components we had a lovely selection of reclaimed bricks, and flint to add some local flavour. The most important task of any Folly build is the setting out of the plinth course. If



you take great care to lay everything out correctly, checking all levels, openings and dimensions the ensuing build sky-wards should go smoothly - it's always much more difficult to correct errors later. Now just make sure you get to cill and arch column height by the end of the day.



DAY TWO - Brushing Out: With the mortar left to harden overnight we are now ready to head skywards. However, before we do there is a very important detail to deal with. All the joints from the previous day must be brushed out first thing the next morning with a wire brush, taking care not to remove any moss or destroy the aged surface of the bricks. This brushing out leaves irregular joints and exposes the aggregate in the mortar lending to a more authentic aged look to the build.



The Ruined Arch: In this case we are not building a complete Gothic Arch but a ruined one (for information on fitting a complete Arch please see relevant construction guide), however, the principles are the same. The most important piece of kit for this job is the wooden arch centering - it may look archaic and indeed it is - this method has been used for fitting arches, vaulted ceilings and the like for centuries. The centering must be secured in place as it will take all the weight of the arch until the keystone is in place. In this case there will be no keystone so we are using extra strength dowelling and epoxy resin glue to ensure that our folly does not become more of a ruin than intended! In fact we were very careful to make sure that the columns were well reinforced and solid before we fit the voussoirs and will also take the precaution of tying the voussoirs into the surrounding brickwork with dowels for extra strength. The centering will remain in place until the glue and mortar is set hard.

The Tracery Window: The standard Double Light Tracery Window is relatively easy to fix, but some sort of scaffolding or raised platform will be needed, as with the Arch. The first job is to fix the jambs in place with dowels, glue and mortar and to build the brickwork around them to give extra support. Great care must be taken with levels and opening width as we want the one-piece head to sit accurately on the jambs. One tip here is that we do not fix the mullion at the same time as the jambs but later just before the window head. The reason for this is that we do not want there to be any danger of the window head pivoting on the mullion. We set the mullion slightly lower than the jambs so that all the weight of the head is transferred down through the jambs. More detail is available in the relevant construction guide.



We have been pushing on with many other details on Day Two; Ted has been making progress with the Chapter House Stairs in the background and while Steve has been overseeing the fitting of the Arch and Windows I have been assigned the job of adding some detail with the flint and fitting the Ruined Window - a task that requires much more skill and artistic flair than Steve and Ted would have you believe!



DAY THREE - (or in this case at the end of Day Two): In normal circumstances we would have left the fitting of the Parapet and Rail until the third day, but we had taken care throughout to time everything so that all of the sections would set in time for us to carry on to the finish on Day Two. Notice that we have left the Arch centering in place so that everything is fully supported and we take great care not to pass any serious jolts down through the structure while working at this height. The design of this final piece of work is entirely down to personal taste - here Andy has gone for height and majesty, with the Garden Façade you will see that we have opted for a more delapidated look.



Job Done: As you can see we are pretty pleased with our two day's work and all that remains now is for Andy to wave his magic wand and add the planting that will make this Folly look hundreds of years old. Joking aside this has turned out to be a very valuable exercise in preparation for the Chelsea Flower Show three months later. Not only have we done the all important dry run to iron out any problems, we have pictures for the Hillier Gardening Club magazine Chelsea Preview and have inspired Andy to design an extra feature into the Folly which will add an all important extra vista to the Artist's Garden. In view of this addition we are now definitely planning for a third day for the actual build at the show itself.

THE CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2002

From a crisp but lifeless February day to the abundance of colour at Chelsea in May - what a difference.



Ricky Dorlay, who is responsible for the preparation of the 4,000 plants used in the exhibit looks happy with the new introduction; Digitalis 'Saltwood Summer'. The additional Secret Door to the right of the Ruin is reached by way of a path of stepping stones across the stream with hot Azalea 'Fireball' in the foreground fading to cool Azalea 'Northern Hi-Lights' across the water.



Project Construction Guides:

The Potting Shed
The Hillier Ruin
The Garden Façade
Tools and Materials

CONSTRUCTION GUIDES

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Component Construction Guides:

The Gothic Arch
The Tracery Window
The Secret Door

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