

# GET<sup>THE</sup> LOOK

Humphrey Bowden's stunning fountains adorn gardens all over the globe. Antonia Edwards reveals how a background in metallurgy inspired his unique method and how the direction and control of water flow is an integral part of his design



## The Designer

Humphrey's passion for making things began at a young age. An initial interest in painting rapidly developed into designing and making working models and lamps, turned wooden boxes and carvings. Instead of going to art school, however, he was persuaded to go to university to study physics and do research in metallurgy. He then went into industry to design and develop new products for large companies. Fifteen years ago he started making fountains and his work was exhibited in Eva Henstead's show garden at Hampton Court. He has since carried out commissions for private gardens in Africa, America, the Far East and Russia as well all throughout the UK.

HUMPHREY BOWDEN has always had a fascination with shape and form. "I particularly loved making flowing organic shapes and was an Art Nouveau enthusiast," he says. The idea of making fountains in plant shapes arose from a discussion with his brother, an artist who was visiting from Australia and had made fountains in clay and resin. Humphrey realised the slender shapes of plants could be best achieved by working with a ductile metal such as copper.

He developed a number of techniques analogous to those used by coppersmiths: "I start by cutting out the elements of the fountain by hand from appropriate thicknesses of copper and soften them by annealing," he says. "They are then beaten to shape, using steel chisels or round-headed hammers against oak blocks with different sizes of grooves or hollows cut into them. The various elements of the fountain are then brazed together with a silver/copper braze. If you control the various heating stages, you can produce wonderful red/brown oxide colours, which then gradually weather to take on an attractive grey/green patina."

Inspired by the plants he sees mainly in Sussex gardens, his fountains are designed with their surroundings in mind. The dramatic shapes of his Thalia Fountain are strong enough to stand out at a distance against a varied background. Water is projected up the leaves and ripples down over their ribbed surfaces. Rather than using simple squirting jets, the flow of water is made sympathetic to the forms of the plant and carefully controlled to create beautiful light effects and gentle sounds.

Humphrey's workshop is at his home in Sussex, which has a number of working fountains that can be viewed by appointment. For more information call 01798 344114 or go to [www.humphreybowden.co.uk](http://www.humphreybowden.co.uk)



From top: Thalia Fountain for a Wiltshire garden, 6ft high; Bamboo Fountain for a Sussex garden, 6ft high. The water runs down its curved stems and drips from individual leaves, glistening in the sunlight. Image of Humphrey Bowden by Diana Poole





Clockwise from top left: Willow Tree Fountain, 3ft high; Convolvulus Vine Fountain, 2ft high; Water Lily Fountain, 18in diameter; Acer Palmatum Fountain, 3ft high. In contrast to the Bamboo Fountain, the Acer Palmatum Fountain is at a smaller scale. Its compact rounded shape and slender drooping leaves work well in a more intimate space, shown here in this small Sussex garden. Water drips or streams from the tips of each leaf, catching the light and making a gentle splashing sound.