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Stylish and innovative

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Paul's solar-panel parasol combined with an inventive and contemporary garden plan pushed his scheme to the forefront for the Most Innovative section

FOR one lucky man, the Volkswagen Clever Use of Space Garden Challenge means a trip to the BBC Gardeners' World Live 2007 show next June to see his Best-in-Show winning design brought to life as a show garden.

He is Paul Titcombe, 42, who delighted all four of the judges with his contemporary design based on the clean lines of modern architecture underlaid with stylish yachting touches.

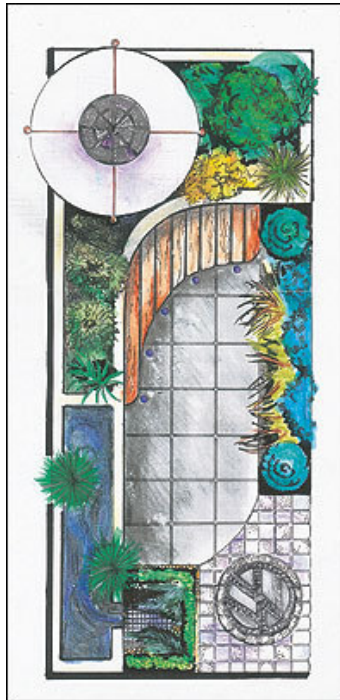
He also won the Most Innovative section, thanks to his remarkable solar-panel parasol to power the water feature, lights set into the paving and a parasol remote-control.

"The solar-panel parasol would certainly be possible to make, because solar powered units are getting smaller and smaller," said Paul, "although I'm not sure whether they would generate enough electricity for everything in the design."

The Volkswagen Garden Challenge is the first garden design competition Paul has entered, so he was particularly thrilled to win it.

"I'll never forget the phone call to say I had won," he said. "I was driving up the M50 to Wales for a music festival and had to pull over to the hard shoulder because I was so excited - it was such a shock."

Paul, who is a product manager for publishers



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Reed Elsevier, added: "I was very surprised to be chosen."

The simplicity of Paul's designs is one of the main reasons it was selected as Best in Show by the judges.

"I thought about what would be good for a modern garden and came up with modern architecture which has clean lines and shapes and angles. The yachting comes out in the cherry wood seat and the innovation part was the parasol," said Paul, who lives in Byfield, Northamptonshire, and is studying garden and landscape design part-time at Warwickshire College.

"I quite like architecture and structure and I'm keen on all types of design. From a garden design perspective I'm interested in hard landscaping and how that works as a structure.

"You have to get the hard landscaping right first and the planting comes in later. It's like the soft furnishings when you create a room."

Louise Jackson, RHS show manager for BBC Gardeners' World Live show, said: "It is a very contemporary garden. The innovation was relevant to the garden and very mindful of contemporary issues, such as energy conservation and water conservation, so it is a very topical garden and also very chic."

Paul's planting plan provides year-round interest – something the judges were particularly keen on, as David Hurrion, of BBC Gardeners' World magazine explained.

"We were looking for people who had some idea of making maximum use of planting to provide interest throughout the year and who could balance plants with hard landscaping," he said.

Paul used evergreens such as box, rosemary and juniper; grasses including stipa and sesleria; provided colour with irises, salvia and clematis, and interesting foliage with ferns and hostas.

"We really liked the level of planting, which gives you a little bit of depth and height without being too overbearing," said Claudine Beaumont, deputy gardening editor of The Daily Telegraph.

The judges were also impressed that Paul had left enough room in the space for it to be of use.

"The planting is very sparing and includes lots of architectural plants packed around the sides leaving a central space clear so it could be used as a functioning garden," said Claudine.

David added: "Also, he had attached a seat to the wall and built up the wall to raise the planting behind the seat, which is a very clever use of vertical scale and gives a sense of enclosure behind the seat." But it was the solar-panel parasol which fired the judges' imagination.

Catherine Woolfe, marketing communications

manager for Volkswagen, said: "We really loved the idea of a solar-powered sun parasol, which is something which could be designed quite practically, but would be quite ingenious.

"From a green gardening point of view, the fact that it was used to power lights and water is a really nice way to capture the very idea of innovation."

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