

Photo by Diana Post



The Potting Shed

A Book About Plants, History... & Friendship

By Betsie Blodgett

Friendship played a big part in Elizabeth McLean's latest work, *Peter Collinson and the Eighteenth-Century Natural History Exchange*, an elegantly written and thoroughly researched book she co-authored with her great friend, Jean O'Neill. It was a labor of long-distance love, given that Elizabeth lives in Wynnewood, PA, and Jean, until her death in July, 2008, lived in southern England.

It was an apt partnership, since their subject himself was known in his day as a friend to many movers and shakers of the eighteenth-century natural history world on both sides of the Atlantic: from Linnaeus and John Fothergill in Europe to John Bartram and Benjamin Franklin in America.

"Friendship was a large part of this book for me," Elizabeth says of her collaboration with Jean, whom she first met in 1981 when she helped organize an exhibit for a Philadelphia garden consortium, headed by the Morris

Arboretum at the Chelsea Flower Show. With their mutual interest in Collinson, it didn't take long before they teamed up to write a book about him. Jean had already written an article about him for *Country Life*, and Elizabeth, an expert on the Anglo-American horticultural relationships of the eighteenth century, was familiar with his achievements. For just one example, Collinson is credited with introducing more than 150 plants to horticulture, most of them through John Bartram.

Most of Jean and Elizabeth's work took place before the era of Google and email. "We had computers, but they didn't 'speak' to each other," Elizabeth says. "We had to retype everything, which slowed things down." She travelled to England once or twice a year to do research and work on the text with Jean.

Collinson soon came alive in his letters and other material they tracked down. Elizabeth recalls, "The most exciting moment for me

was to visit the National Library in Wales." The library houses Collinson's personal copies of *Gardeners Dictionary*, written by Philip Miller. "To open that book and see all the annotations in his hand ... I almost felt his presence," she says.

Elizabeth also collaborated with her son, Will McLean, a graphic artist who designed the jacket with an illustration he did 27 years ago. It's filled with exquisite details of Collinson's achievements, represented by two ships crossing the Atlantic: one headed west with research books and equipment from Europe, the other headed east with plant specimens from America.

Elizabeth hopes readers experience Collinson as she and Jean did and appreciate the influence he had on his contemporaries—and friends. "One man can make a difference," she says. "He did it for love. He was self-educated, yet he made enormous contributions to natural history in the eighteenth century.

"And," she adds with a laugh, "he was so nice." 🐾

Elizabeth's next book is *Country Houses and Landscapes of Colonial Philadelphia*, which she is co-authoring with architectural historian Mark Reinberger; she expects it to be published next summer.

Scandinavian Modern!

Come to Kristin Voreland's Floral Design Workshops



"My flower arranging style is very clean and simple, with just a few materials and colors added in," says Norwegian floral arranger Kristin Voreland. PHS is hosting the acclaimed designer for *Scandinavian Modern Contemporary Floral Design at Home*, a series of events this fall. Ms. Voreland has lectured around the world and won the prestigious Europa Cup in 1986. Her

work is in great demand, and every year she has the honor of decorating the Norwegian Royal Summer House. This is her first trip to the United States.

Ms. Voreland's design approach is attuned to world concerns about sustainability. She advocates using fewer flowers but enhancing them with natural elements from our gardens. "I'm planning to show the students what is typical of my style, and also what are the hallmarks of Norwegian design in general," says Kristin. "In one of the classes, I will show designs created upon a welded construction, which we will cover

with natural branches. I have designed most of the floral bases, so the students will mostly be creating unique shapes on top of them."

On Wednesday, October 28, Kristin will give a demonstration for all skill levels (with an optional lunch buffet). This will be followed by hands-on workshops on Thursday, October 29, and an all-day master class for more advanced arrangers on Friday, October 30.

For more information about these once-in-a-lifetime floral design events, visit the PHS website and click on "Calendar," email program-reg@penubort.org, or call 215-988-8869. All the events will take place at the Philadelphia Cricket Club in Chestnut Hill, and free parking is available. 🐾



—Betsy Gullan