

Event review

# FLORIADE 2012

**Daniel Jauslin** of the Landscape Architecture school at TU Delft, reviews the once-a-decade extravaganza

**WHAT:** Horticultural World Expo Floriade  
**WHEN:** 5 April to 7 October 2012  
**WHERE:** Venlo, The Netherlands

**THIS SUMMER**, the sixth edition of the Horticultural World Expo Floriade takes place in Venlo, The Netherlands. Unlike other national or regional garden exhibitions around the world, many crafted after the Chelsea Flower Show, Floriade has global aspirations – rather peculiar given that Floriade has never left the Netherlands since its first appearance in 1960 in Rotterdam. However, the Office of World Exhibitions in Paris will not attribute the name World Fair to any event that is held more than once in ten years in one country. So the Floriade happens roughly every decade in The Netherlands but nowhere else. Floriade 2012 is at once regional, national and international – a balance that is struck not through a structured plan, but rather through a thematic zoning akin to a Disney-style amusement park.

Venlo is the capital of the hilly southern province of Limburg and their successful bid to the Dutch Horticultural Society means they are the first region outside of the Randstad to succeed in hosting the Floriade. Originally inspired by the 1958 Brussels Expo, the Floriade has been held in several locations over the decades: the bombed and resurrected Rotterdam in 1960; twice in Amsterdam; and later, in the newer settlements of Zoetemeer (near Delft) and Haarlemmermeer (near Amsterdam Schiphol Airport and the renowned Keukenhof Bulb Flower Show).

**“The Floriade makes you appreciate how big horticulture is and how smart the region has been to profit from it”**

Photos www.floriademeeges.com



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE**  
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 xxxxxxx xxxxxxxx;  
 architect Jo Coenen's Innova Tower is the undoubted focal point at the Floriade;  
 xxxxxxx xxxxxxxx  
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## BIG IN GERMANY

Of the expected two million visitors to this year's Floriade, 40% are expected to come from Germany and 40% from the Netherlands; 20 million Germans live within 100km of Venlo (mostly in the Ruhrgebiet), while the entire population of the Netherlands – 16 million people – is spread throughout less densely populated areas.

Venlo also acts as a main distribution point to the east and for the mostly street-based export of horticultural products to Germany, including cultivated plants and cut flowers, as well as fruits and vegetables. A visit to the Floriade makes you appreciate how big a business horticulture is; and how smart the region has been smart to profit from its development. The same week that Floriade 2012 began, the new A74 motorway – planned for 30 years – finally opened, connecting Venlo to Germany and to public spaces along the banks of the River Maas that form the core of new developments in the city.

Even the Floriade's 66-hectare site is not disposable or hastily planned, but

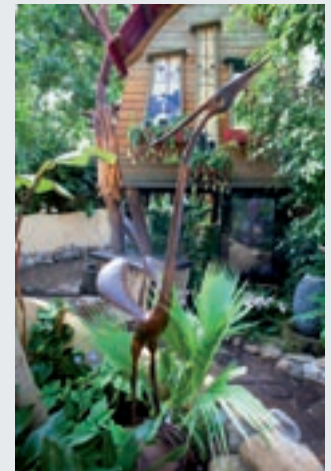
based on a specific regional development concept. The Horticultural Expo is only the beginning of a long-term business real estate development plan called Venlo Green Park. An obvious sign of this development plan is the Innovatoren or Innova Tower, a spectacular gate-tower hybrid designed by architect Jo Coenen, who hails from Heerlen, the third largest city in Limburg, and whose urban planning can be seen in The Hague, Amsterdam and Maastricht. The project is simultaneously an office tower and congress centre, rising above the canopies of forest running along the motorway. Venlo Green Park is laid out both as a large event space and with provisions for an office center and industrial park, where the brains of smart and sustainable new businesses can eventually develop.

## SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Many of the buildings are also 'green' in design, especially the sophisticated glass house Villa Flora by architect Jon Kristinsson, who could finally realise concepts here he has been developing since the 1970s, when only a few in the



**LEFT** An aerial view of the park shows, from left along the water's edge, the Beachclub restaurant, Rabo Earthwalk, Vriendenbos and World Show Stage. **BELOW** xxxxxx xxxxxx  
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building industry could be convinced about the limits of growth. The Netherlands had relatively few examples of sustainable buildings, with the exception of particular techniques such as capillary heat exchangers and 'breathing windows' developed by Kristinsson, who has been an energy-saving pioneer for many years.

However, although some single buildings show good craftsmanship and understanding of life cycle assessment, it is hard to ignore the thoughtlessly welded steel half-globes which – although placed on the best spots by the two main sponsors – are not particularly innovative in terms of architecture, sustainability or exhibition design.

The master plan by John Boon with the firms Arcadis and Copijn is a very successful park design. It is a good solid plan, functional in entertaining the crowds and providing enough spatial variety and axiality to give an impression of diversity without losing an overall sense of orientation and organisation. The master plan is based on elements found in an old farm, of which the barn is conceived as a pavilion surrounded by

nearby fields and ponds. Other designed spaces have been mostly carved out of the woods that gently encircle the space and provide varied depth and access to the horizon.

#### VIEW FROM ABOVE

In such exhibition park enterprises, the main task is to conserve a garden atmosphere in spite of all the horrific creations of competing sponsors and advertising agencies. With this in mind, one of the two main highlights of the Expo are the wildly popular Ski Cabin Lift, which gives a great overview of the park and the individual gardens. The other is the almost untouched forest sequences between the green fields, where the exhibitors are grouped in a set of five thematic spaces.

Not many gardens stand out as horticultural spectacles. However, my personal favourite pavilion was the tropical greenhouse – the passionate work of biologist and landscape architect Jean Henskens. Henskens is the experienced garden designer of a large holiday resort chain that usually fills lobbies and swimming pools with plants

#### "A highlight is the wildly popular Ski Cabin Lift, which gives a great overview of the park and gardens"

to give a tropical feeling. This 1,700 m<sup>2</sup> plant kingdom looked like the horticultural challenge of one man's lifetime. Carefully selected plants from all over the world, including Mexico and Thailand, were flown in and the excellent planting was the result of Henskens' considerable experience working with this type of indoor arrangement.

However intelligent the regional business case of the Venlo Green Park, it was the simpler moments of the exhibition, such as the classic hothouse, that pleased me most. **Perhaps it is not only smart politicians, economic representatives and designers in suits who do well to the economy of people [sub - unsure of meaning; rephrase?]** and potentially turn such an exhibition into a success. In the end, it may be the passion of gardeners like Henskens that show the wonders of the economy of nature, which make such exhibitions worth visiting.

[www.floriade.com](http://www.floriade.com)