

# BOOK

# REVIEWS

TO REVIEW A BOOK  
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## Natural swimming pools; plant evolu



Images taken from Michael Littlewood's *Natural swimming pools*.  
Right top: Natural swimming pools allow users to get close to nature.  
Right middle: An eighty-year-old pool in Lienz, Austria, benefits from a spectacular hilly backdrop.  
Right bottom: Water in natural swimming pools is cleaned by the planted 'regeneration zone'.

**Natural swimming pools**  
Michael Littlewood, Schiffer,  
£28, h/b, 232pp  
ISBN 0 7643 2183 8

Michael Littlewood is a landscape architect and environmental planner who specialises in the design and implementation of sustainable land use projects. The *raison d'être* for this book is guided by a desire to communicate the value of working with nature and *Natural swimming pools* is aimed at both the professional working in the landscape industry and the client who is considering the addition of such a feature to their garden.

The book is divided into four main sections. 'Inspirations' places the use of natural swimming pools into a historical context and describes how the modern constructions were developed in Europe and the USA as a response to people's desire for a swimming alternative which is less harmful to the environment and works more in harmony with nature. This section also addresses some concerns regarding health and safety issues and answers some frequently asked questions.

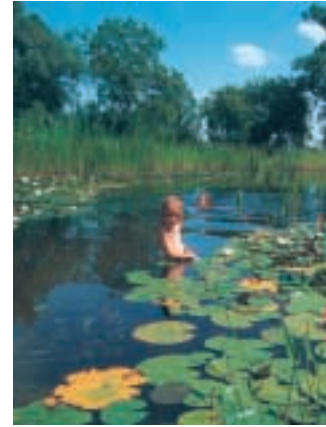
'Portfolio' is a short section devoted to images of natural swimming pools throughout Europe and the USA. The photos demonstrate a variety of different styles which have been used in the design of these pools, from naturalistic to formal and contemporary.

'Building' begins with helpful guidance for the planning requirements and considerations for a design proposal. This section also deals with all the

practical issues relating to the construction phase. In addition, the pool ecology is explained in some detail, both literally and illustratively, with references pertaining to the nutrient cycle and the nitrogen cycle included.

'Information' is a large resource section with zonal maps for both Europe and the USA, construction details and a plant guide. The plant guide, which is set out in tabular form, is particularly relevant and easy to read. A glossary is also included to explain any unfamiliar terms.

Michael Littlewood has been at the forefront of the development of this industry in Britain and has been instrumental in bringing professionals and expertise together through both his research of the natural



swimming pools and his direct influence as a design consultant.

The many photographs of natural swimming pools used throughout the book are displayed in a smaller format than that normally used for a straight coffee table book. This is an obvious compromise made in order to accommodate the need for both aesthetic and



## tion and ecology

practical information. Nevertheless, I think that the combination is a success and there is plenty here to inspire. By devoting much of the supporting data to a large resource section at the end, the layout remains uncluttered and easy to use.

*Peter Thomas, garden designer, Hertfordshire*

### **Demons in Eden: the paradox of plant diversity**

Jonathan Silvertown,  
University of Chicago Press,  
£17.50, h/b, 192pp  
ISBN 0 2267 5771 4

Pleasure in listening to Mozart's *Requiem* is heightened by the poignancy of its composition — written as a commission for another, in reality it became his own. We find this effect in so much of what we experience in life, be it simply when we make a drink using a favourite mug, or when we step into a classic car, knowing the heritage of its marque. This awareness should be so much more the case in our

work as garden designers, since it involves our time and passion so deeply; where the design involves plants, this book will help immeasurably.

Silvertown sets out to look at plant evolution, especially the reasons as to why there are so many plants (biodiversity) and why the most successful among them don't simply take over from the rest, as 'survival of the fittest' might imply. This is an area that might superficially appear to be sewn up — we all know about the balance of nature — but in practice has been very puzzling to plant evolutionary biologists. What we get is a fascinating journey with an affable host, taking in plant growth in environments around the world. The situations are mostly ones the author has dealt with first hand in a distinguished research career.

Is all this science really necessary for a designer? Consider a planting design book which states that a certain species 'does not flower'. Here we find

out about *Sasa nipponica*, a dwarf bamboo that might appear to fit into this category, but which, in reality, waits 30 years — before every last shoot in the forest flowers, sets seed, and dies. Saturated with potential food, mice and other creatures cannot help but leave some seeds to germinate and produce the next generation.

We will all be aware of the scourge of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), and might even see the profession admonished for using too many 'alien' plants. But curiously, we learn from Silvertown that this one only occurs naturally in a narrow range (2000-2500m altitude) in a part of the western Himalaya, and that the success of aliens is extremely hard to predict. The trick is that without having to be exhaustive in content, we get to the heart of so many issues relating to why plants are the way they are, and we are the richer for it.

*Jonathan Ingram, botanist and garden designer, Lancashire*

