



Vintage plant labels.



Piers shapes a tool in his workshop.

In a Nutshell

We couldn't live without: a morning cup of good coffee.
 When we have a free hour, we: go for walk, ideally every day.
 We're inspired by: the aesthetics of simple design.
 Our favourite find was: a florist's buttonhole display box.
 Our current stock highlight is: a boxed set of brass seed spoon measures by Blake & Mackenzie, circa 1895, used for measuring seeds into packets by small-scale producers. By 1935, they were chrome and there were far fewer spoons in the set. Nurseries still buy them from us to use because one person's 'pinch' of seed is very different to another's.



A selection of restored tools, ready to be used.

HOW I ANTIQUE

ANTIQUÉ GARDEN TOOL RESTORERS AND DEALERS LOUISE ALLEN AND PIERS NEWTH OF 'GARDEN AND WOOD' CHAT FLOWER PICKERS, SECATEURS, WATERING CANS AND THE JOY OF EPHEMERA

WORDS ELLIE TENNANT

Garden and Wood 2018 Show Dates

- RHS Chelsea Flower Show, 22nd – 26th May, rhs.org.uk
- Hex Festival of Rare Plants in Belgium, 8th – 10th June, hex.be/evenementen
- West Woodhay Gardeners' Fair, 22nd – 24th June, westwoodhayfair.co.uk
- RHS Wisley Flower Show, 4th – 9th September, rhs.org.uk
- Chelsea Physic Garden Christmas Fair, 24th and 25th November, chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/christmas-fair-2018

L: We live in a 17th century cottage. There are no overhead wires in our village – they were all buried in the 1970s – so it's like time has stood still here. The ceilings are so low, you can't wear heels.

P: In some ways, we exist in the gardening world more than the antiques world. It helps being horticulturists rather than antiques dealers because most people buying a tool want to talk about it and we can explain how they're used.

L: Our colleagues, friends and family all thought we were absolutely mad when we first told them about our business idea, but we don't like to do things unless we can do them well. Before, we were both working as curators in botanic gardens. I was at Oxford and Piers at Harcourt Arboretum.

P: In horticulture, you may be promoted to a position you're not interested in. I'm not an office person and more and more of my work was office-based.

L: We did Chelsea Flower Show in 2010 and handed in our notice at our then jobs the very next day.

P: When we find things, we mostly know what they are for, but we've bought a few items where we've thought: we don't know what this is, but we'll buy it anyway and it's turned out to have nothing to do with horticulture.

L: Once, we accidentally bought a carpet-fitting tool, for example. We only ever bought one of them!

P: You should never buy a new border fork. New ones are appalling by comparison to old ones. Spades, hoes, rakes, cultivators – pretty much everything is better old when it comes to gardening tools. Except secateurs. At Chelsea, we're often opposite Felco, a Swiss brand of secateurs. They're the best. Every gardener is given a pair of Felcos when they start a new job. So when people come up to me and they want an old pair of secateurs, I tell them to go to the Felco stand and spend £50 on a new pair.

L: Piers is very honest when he sells tools. I've never known anyone talk somebody out of buying secateurs so often!

P: Wooden tool handles rot and get woodworm, so they often need replacing. I restore the tools while Louise sources stock and looks after the website.

L: We often see that people have over-restored tools and made them shiny but we want ours to have a sense of history, so it's important to know when to stop.

P: You get one watering can with a rose to about 20 without. We always sell watering cans with a rose. We buy all the old roses we can find and spend hours matching them up.

L: But we stopped buying watering cans at early morning antiques fairs in the dark a long time ago. However much you shine a torch, you can't see properly to look for tiny holes. You learn from your mistakes.

P: We recently bought 500 flower pots from an old market garden in Southend-on-Sea. The place hadn't functioned in years so it was a dream but the pots were full of dead rats.



Louise sorting out stock.



Vintage seed packets in a pretty display.

L: The very best tool for planting bulbs is a 1910 Brades bulb planter. We've recently planted thousands of bulbs with it. There really isn't a modern-day equivalent.

P: The French invented the 'Dubois' Flower Picker (like a walking cane with a tiny pair of scissors on one end) so you could pick a flower without having to bend down or tread in the border. Sometimes there is a brush in the other end, so you can pollinate, too, but these often get lost over time so it's really rare to find one with the brush. They're always in beautiful condition. They never got used.

L: We prefer buying to selling. We love ephemera and we love tools with a label. We're a bit like magpies – attracted to colour.

P: Paper labels, as you can imagine, don't last five minutes outside.

L: I see life as a curation project. We don't have any clutter. **P:** If something doesn't have a use, Louise puts it on eBay. As long as I'm still useful, I'm safe!

See gardenandwood.co.uk or visit (by appointment only) Dreamers Cottage, Little Haseley, Oxfordshire OX44 7LH, 01844 279170.