

SUBURB ARTIST

featuring Rachel Dein

I was so pleased when Richard Wakefield gave me the tip off about the multi-talented Rachel Dein as it looks like 2014 is going to be a rather special year for her.

Coming up soon for Rachel (in March) is an interview with 'Gardens Illustrated' and then in May she will be exhibiting at the Chelsea Flower Show for the first time, all of this alongside her studio work on special commissions, creating decorative items to show at galleries and giving classes.

Rachel and her husband Alan moved to the Suburb in the autumn of 2007 with their three children Abraham who is 12, Natasha 9 and Rebecca 8. As Rachel says, "we hadn't planned to move here – we were living in a Victorian terraced house in Kentish Town and were looking for more space. We saw loads of houses around NW5 and N2 – but nothing seemed right. A friend then mentioned an arts and crafts style house on the Suburb – and it was just right!" Alan works as an oral historian (which is the recording of people's memories, experiences and opinions and is a radio presenter. Their two girls are at the Garden Suburb School where her son was also educated. When I asked her about juggling work with a young family she answered, "it's not easy but working from home means I don't waste time commuting, I just climb the ladder to the loft!"

Although I was the publishing director of 'House & Garden' magazine for seven years, during that time I never saw the type of work that Rachel produces, which is really stunning. She studied Fine Art at Middlesex University and then had a propmaking apprenticeship at the English National Opera. Since then she has worked as a propmaker for the Royal Opera House, The Globe, West End Theatres, the London Transport Museum and the Rothschild Villa in Corfu, amongst others. She has also exhibited at the Ben Uri Gallery, Raymond's Revue Bar and the Garden Suburb Gallery. To get a real feel of Rachel's work go to her website, www.tactilestudio.co.uk, as this illustrates her unique style better than words can. To quote Rachel: "I enjoy the magic of plaster casting to create fossils from everyday life – whether it's a shell found on holiday, your grandmother's treasured lace, a christening gown, or the flowers from your wedding." Her method of plaster casting captures everyday objects in a delicate and different way. She makes impressions in wet clay, and then pours plaster directly over it. The clay captures the most intricate details, subtly colouring the plaster as it sets. Each clay mould can only be used once, making every piece unique.

Casts are then finished and refined by hand, some of which are then painted. Rachel says, "when my youngest child started school, having turned our loft into a studio I began to make small tiles from home and established the Tactile Studio. The Suburb Free Church put out a call for creative people in the area to show their work. A gallery saw my work there and invited me to exhibit with them. That summer I had taken a stall at the Dandy Lion Market where I met a lady who bought a small tile. She commissioned me to make four large tiles using the favourite things that she and her husband and their children had chosen. Since then I've worked to various commissions and I've been making new pieces, experimenting with different compositions of plants and flowers and different combinations of plaster and concrete."

I asked Rachel about life on the Suburb. "The Garden Suburb School has been the centre of our time here so far, we have local friends at school and a fantastic cultural diversity from outside the Suburb too. It's a shame that the 'Royal Oak' pub closed – a far cry from where we were living before with a pub on every corner. I don't have enough time to enjoy the Suburb as I would like but my favourite walk is from Wild Hatch into the Heath Extension, down to the Vale of Health then over the bridge and into Kenwood." When I asked her about a memorial bench she replied, "I'd like to design a bench – it doesn't need to say anything and it can go wherever a bench is needed. I joined the Horticultural Society and it was great to have a buddy who gave me the confidence and inspiration to work on our garden." She is currently working on a centenary plaque for the Suburb School.

To finish, Rachel told me a Suburb story, "a few years ago, the oak tree in our crescent which all the houses had been built around was rotten and needed cutting down. David, our neighbour, took on board the job to salvage the wood and organise a farewell to the old oak. His children who'd grown up here and left home wrote poems about the tree and our son played the Last Post on his trumpet. Many of the neighbours gathered for this sad farewell. We later found out that the tree was over 250 years old and one of the tree millers handed us a nail that he had found towards the middle of the tree, which may have been part of a boundary marker dating pre-Suburb!" **S**



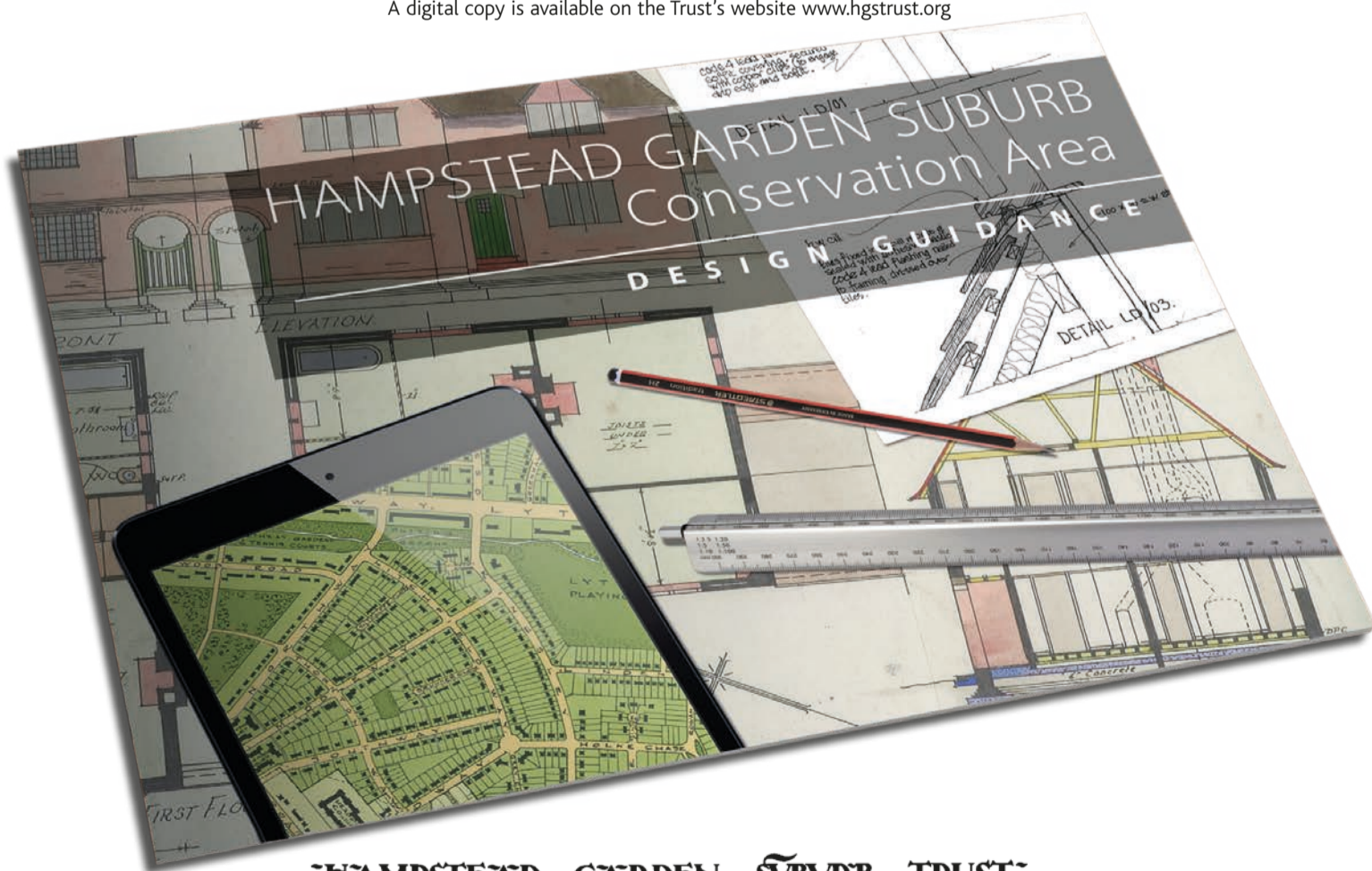
Garden Suburb Design Guidance

A fully illustrated Design Guidance for the Suburb has been produced by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust and Barnet Council.

This full-colour publication gives advice on repairs, alterations and extensions to properties and on works to trees and gardens.

Copies are available to collect from the Trust Office and Garden Suburb Library, or by sending a self-addressed A4 envelope stamped with £1.33 to:
Trust Education & Publications Assistant, 862 Finchley Road, London NW11 6AB

A digital copy is available on the Trust's website www.hgstrust.org



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