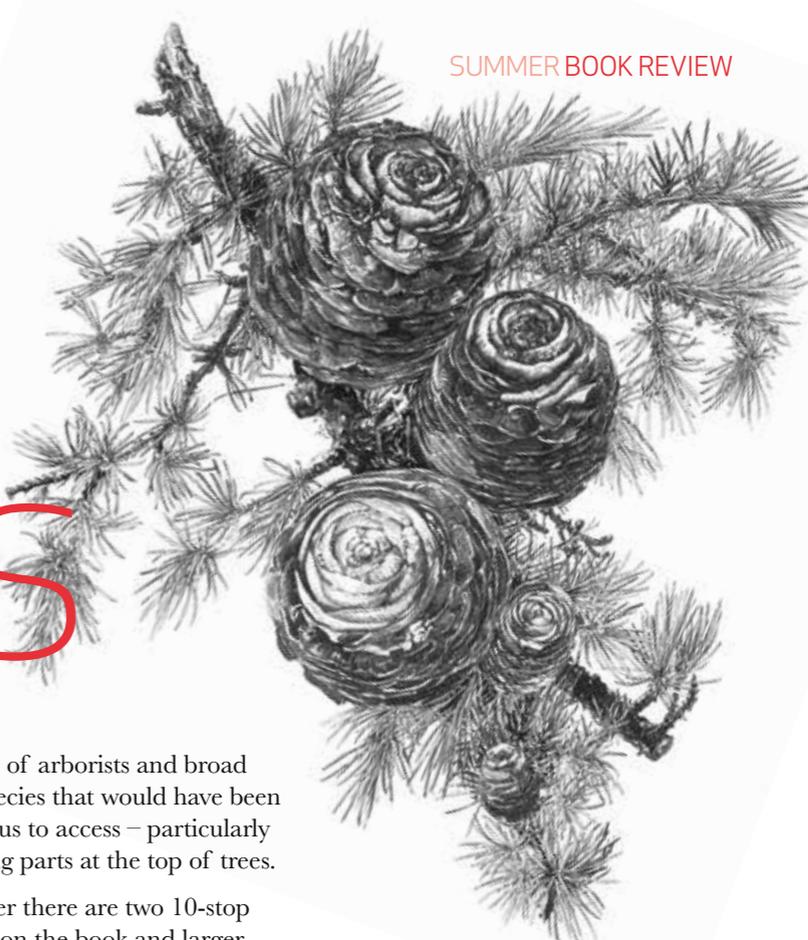




Sylva of success




Author insight: Interest in and sales of *The New Sylva* have been astonishing since its publication in April this year. Author **Gabriel Hemery** tells us more.

Interview by Louisa Lockwood.

The New Sylva by Gabriel Hemery and Sarah Simblet is a beautiful and purposeful guide to our tree species and forests today. It is a contemporary version of John Evelyn's groundbreaking *Sylva* published 350 years ago.

What inspired you to revisit John Evelyn's *Sylva*?

The journey started with the formation of the charity Sylva, five years ago. We were looking for a way to celebrate the heritage of Evelyn's work and for a platform to engage with the wider public.

Currently there are no books that offer a deeper understanding of forestry and foresters. The aim was to keep sight of how wonderful trees are but also to explain the complexity of forestry – this book is about our working relationship with forests. There is general, friendly information about trees – not folklore – and about technical aspects of forestry. *The New Sylva* is about how forestry could be fit for purpose in a modern society.

How does *The New Sylva* differ from *Sylva*?

Taxonomy! It was a lot of work to make sure we had the most recent names and usage. It was pretty confused in Evelyn's time so there was a lot to address.

The most obvious difference is that this book is fully illustrated. Sarah Simblet did over 200 pen and ink drawings that make the science more accessible. The original *Sylva* had none. It's a compellingly attractive book and Sarah's art makes reading it a lighter, more enjoyable experience.

Where Evelyn concentrated on oak, we have a broader spread with 44 species. The structure is somewhat similar though some content has been moved around. We have tried to celebrate and reflect his content in a modern context, even reflecting his beautiful language.

Was it time consuming?

[Laughs!] It took three and a half years from inception to publication. Broken into chunks, it took six months to come up with a proposal. Five publishers bid but only Bloomsbury really got it, from the notion of its heritage, no colour and no photos to the feel in the hand. This level of dedication and detail was carried through the whole project.

It took one year of writing, then another year to develop the detailed design of every page. Copy editing and proofing filled the last six months or so. I have to say, it was pretty intense!

What do you hope *The New Sylva* will achieve?

We hope it will help to rekindle a wood culture so that we view our forests as living resources for us to interact with in a meaningful way. As we say in the book, let's celebrate the sound of a chainsaw in a forest, rather than hearing it as death or destruction.

What are the links with Westonbirt?

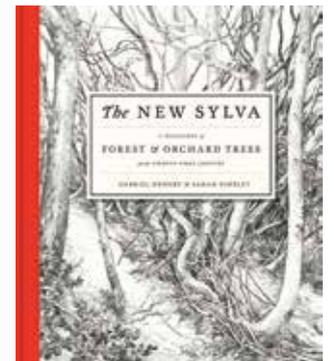
I had already been talking to Westonbirt staff about a trail so it was natural for Sarah and I to come to Westonbirt for material; you have a

skilled team of arborists and broad range of species that would have been difficult for us to access – particularly the flowering parts at the top of trees.

This summer there are two 10-stop trails based on the book and larger interpretation panels near the Great Oak Hall that will explain more about the book and Evelyn. We are so pleased to be collaborating with Westonbirt as we share the aim of connecting more people with trees. ■

For more information, visit www.sylva.org.uk

To help raise awareness of the importance of trees and wood, see Sylva's Facebook page, 'love trees love wood'.



The New Sylva by Gabriel Hemery & Sarah Simblet is published by Bloomsbury, April 2014. £50 hardback. 400 pages, 300x256x45mm.

To order a copy, see www.bloomsbury.com

Also available from www.amazon.co.uk and good bookshops.