

Home and garden

A surprise around every corner

There are plenty of new and interesting creations dotted around the twists and turns of Pride of the Valley Sculpture Park, as Rebecca Magill discovers.

THE Pride of the Valley Sculpture Park is full of surprises. Dotted around its twisting pathways are more than 250 unique sculptures.

They're not displayed in a formal garden setting. Instead, they are in the most surprising of places. Some are suspended from trees, others stick out of the ground and some are even submerged in the lake.

Everywhere you look, there is something new to see.

The creator, and curator, of the park is Eddie Powell, who got his first taste for sculpture

in 1975 after doing a course in the subject.

But it wasn't until 28 years later when the land opposite the pub he was running — the Pride of the Valley — came up for sale that he managed to realise his dream of opening a sculpture park.

When Eddie first got hold of the ten-acre site, it was all rough terrain. "It took about 18 months of hard work to get the park the way we wanted," said Eddie.

"We did a lot of planting, put a half-mile, all-weather foot-

path all around the site and dug several lakes and ponds," he added.

The way the ground has been landscaped certainly adds to the atmosphere of the park. It adjoins Frensham Country Park and has lawns, low-lying bog, coniferous and deciduous woodland, hillsides and valleys.

As you make your way round the park you are taken around twisting paths, over quaint bridges and up winding steps. Being this close to nature, combined with the modern sculptures, makes an atmospheric combination.

Imagine turning a corner and seeing a large metal exclamation mark standing right next to a 100-year-old tree — quite surreal.

Wherever you look there is a new piece, everything from traditional stone horse heads, a soaring eagle made of cork, four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, made of plastic dolls, and a large metal elephant balancing on a ball. Even the benches and bridges are works of art.

So how does Eddie pick which pieces to feature in the garden, which acts as a huge outdoor gallery for artists' work.

"The decision about a new sculpture is basically down to my personal taste, but we also want to keep a good balance in the collection," he said.

"I turn down about 95 per cent of pieces I get offered. We don't want to overcrowd the park, but we need to have enough to keep visitors interested," he added.

When Eddie started his collection he placed an advert in a specialist magazine and was soon inundated by work.

"It is amazing how much sculpture there is out there languishing in gardens and warehouses," he said. "We had quite a range to choose from."

He started filling the park

with pieces and now feels he's got the balance right.

"We have got to the stage now that we only bring in something new when something else gets sold. We now accept work on quality rather than quantity," he said.

But you don't have to have deep pockets to take home your own piece of art, as prices start from just £200.

The park is a vital exhibition space for the 150 local and international artists that Eddie works with. It gives them much needed publicity and commissions.

"A very small number of sculptors can make their living from the arts. We have works here that have been created by policemen, teachers and builders. They are all people who have to look elsewhere for a second income," he said.

However, money is definitely not Eddie's *raison d'être*. "This is more than a business to me," he said.

"It is an attempt to combine both my passion for sculpture and run a business at the same time."

When asked how he places the pieces, he said: "They just go where I think is best. I consult with no one."

The only other help he gets is from his gardener. Together they have built a park that enables Eddie to combine art with his other passion — wildlife.

"They interfere with nature as little as possible so as to encourage birds, insects and amphibians."

"We trim the plants away from the path and sculptures in order to keep nature at bay, but apart from that, we leave nature to itself," he said.

"We have done a lot to encourage wildlife. We have introduced shallower ponds for frogs and soon we will be working on the arboretum."

"We must have planted hundreds of plants and are still



going, aiming to improve all the time."

Three striking examples of art that can be found in the Pride of the Valley Sculpture Park



Eddie Powell with two of his own works of art.

