

## Hilary Alexander on the horticultural heritage left by the great explorer Henry Stanley

At first glance, there is nothing to connect the pleasant Dorset stone house, complete with rambling cottage garden, rosebeds, orchards and vegetable patch, to the wilds of Africa. But there are small clues. On the wall in the hallway hangs a native oil painting titled *Mtesa, King of Uganda, 1875*, of said king wearing a red fez and a green and gold tunic. And a swift cry of *Zali* – surely a word of African origin – brings the black labrador to heel.

Then the gardener, who is quietly pottering in the greenhouse, reveals that he is attempting to propagate cotton, jackfruit and custard apples from Zanzibar, as well as trying to grow cinnamon and cloves. It is very tempting to use the phrase, "William Stanley, I presume?"

The man I have come to see is none other than the great-grandson of Sir Henry Morton Stanley, the famous explorer who uttered the immortal words, "Dr Livingstone, I presume?" on November 10, 1871, when he finally tracked down the ailing Scottish missionary-explorer he had been despatched to find by the *New York Herald*, in a village on the island of Ujiji, near Lake Tanganyika.

William Stanley is immensely proud of his illustrious forebear, and has even become the house model for Cordings (020 7734 0830; [www.cordings.com](http://www.cordings.com)), the traditional British clothing firm, established in 1839, that kitted out Sir Henry for his African expeditions.

Earlier this year, William followed in Sir Henry's footsteps, climbing 16,763ft Mount Stanley, the highest mountain in the Ruwenzori Range, on the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. Here, on the top of the mountain named after, and discovered by, his great-grandfather, he proposed to his girlfriend, Rebecca, in Swahili. "I'd given her a Swahili phrasebook for Christmas so she would know what I was saying."

The climb made William the first relative of Henry Stanley to have reached the peak's summit. On an earlier visit, 19 years ago, the couple made an extended trip through 10 countries, from Uganda to South Africa. "I've always wanted to retrace his steps, but we did it in rather more comfort, in an overland truck. When Henry Stanley did it, he was walking with 500 bearers."

Although his dream is to return to Africa to make a television documentary of Stanley's explorations, William's passion lies in exploring, and creating, innovative jungles of colour and



Out of Africa: garden designer William Stanley with his fiancée Rebecca at his home in Dorset. He is the great-grandson of Henry Morton Stanley (right)

design in other people's gardens. He trained in horticulture and arboriculture at Merrist Wood Agricultural College, studying for a further year at the Oxford College of Garden Design, and then taking up a position at The Chelsea Gardener in south-west London.

William set up his own business, Stanley Landscapes, six years ago, and has worked on a wide range of projects, from country estates to small urban plots. He has built up an impressive roster of private

clients, including Eric Clapton – whose garden he designed and has now maintained for 10 years – as well as Sting and the Duchess of Buccleuch.

His best moments, he says, are designing a garden for a client that fits with their character, the history and architecture of the surroundings, and then seeing their excitement and happiness when the work is finished. His worst moment was falling off a ladder into a London basement while replanting a second-storey

window-box that subsequently fell on his head. One of his earliest gardening memories is tending a little vegetable plot at boarding school.

William particularly admires Gertrude Jekyll for her appreciation of beauty in both natural and formal styles, and because she "explained the importance of structure, proportion, colour, scent and texture in gardens of almost any scale".

Stourhead in Dorset is his

favourite garden, "for its amazing arboretum and autumn colour". And unsurprisingly for a man with African connections, he cites Cornwall's Trebah as his dream garden, as it evokes memories of the Ruwenzori mountains.

When asked for the secret of a successful garden, the answer could only have come from a Stanley: "An all-season garden which takes you on a journey."

Stanley Landscapes (01935 872137; [www.stanleylandscapesltd.com](http://www.stanleylandscapesltd.com))