Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew Alpine House
by WilkinsonEyre

When it formally opened in 2006, the Alpine House at Kew’s Royal Botanic Gardens was the first new glasshouse to be constructed at Kew for more than 20 years. For this signature project, WilkinsonEyre was tasked with creating a sustainable, energy-efficient growing environment for a world-renowned collection of alpine plants. The brief was for WilkinsonEyre to design a building in step with the innovative, high-quality glasshouses that are traditional to Kew, raise the profile of the alpine collection and create a new focal point for this part of the site.

Central to the project was the question of how a botanic garden should look in the 21st century. While developing as a tourist destination, Kew still needed to maintain its reputation and increase its public profile as a leading centre for scientific research.

Alpines require plenty of light and cool, constantly moving air, so WilkinsonEyre designed a glasshouse conceived as two back-to-back arches, which create a stack effect to draw warm air out of the building. Below ground level, air is pushed into a concrete labyrinth for cooling, and then re-circulated around the perimeter via a series of displacement pipes.