

STRAUB THURMAYR CSLA LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AND URBAN DESIGNERS



AWARDS

Rosa Barba International Landscape Prize 2014, Finalist.

#AZ Awards 14, People's Choice Award for Landscape and AZ Awards of Merit for 2014

2014 Prairie Design Award 2014, Award of Merit, Category Landscape Architecture

Manitoba Excellence in Sustainability Award 2013, Category Sustainable Community

Deutscher Landschaftsarchitektur Preis 2013: "Würdigung/Commendation"

CSLA Award of Excellence 2013, National Citation Award, Category New Directions

FOLLY FOREST

The Folly Forest project was the result of a collaborative effort between the designers, educators, parents and children at Strathcona School in Winnipeg. The children used their imagination and creativity to visually represent their dreams for a natural place to play. With the children's voices in our minds, we produced design concepts, details, images, text and several design portfolios for fundraising over two summers. The educators and families raised the money, supported the work and pitched in to help. This project would never have happened without the openness of the Engineering Manager and the Contract Administrator personal from the Winnipeg School Building Department, and their audacity to take a substantial risk and go beyond routines.

SILENT SIGNAL OF CHANGE

The construction of Folly Forest finished in fall 2012. Since then it has been undergoing rigorous tests under extreme climatic and social conditions. Two years after construction I would like to show some of the effects caused by the transformation of a 50 years old asphalt court into a dance floor for 100 trees. This humble project references Joseph Beuys and his 7000 Oaks Project which was an ecological intervention whose object was to change a living urban environment in an enduring way. Just 100 trees are planted in Winnipeg but to borrow Beuys's expression: Folly Forest could become a silent signal of change.

HUNTING FOR ATTENTION

There is sometimes the impression that projects in landscape architecture and in architecture are designed for the first photographic shots after the completion. The publication in glossy prints seems to be main reason. And of course we too as designers took many photos before, during and after the building process of Folly Forest. We have observed, we have talked, we have published, we have submitted and we have asked for feedback. We too have thrown Folly Forest into the 'glossy world'.

Folly Forest has received awards and has been published in books, journals, magazines and websites. Some awards honored the exceptional achievement in the design of a sustainable public space, while other awards explicitly highlighted the innovative and experimental nature of the design work, and listed the project in the category 'new directions or innovative ways'.

And very recently the American Society of Landscape Architects took notice of this project. Jared Green (2014) published on the The Dirt TM blog a well-researched and appealing article. "Browsing through the latest issue of Azure magazine, one can see socially

conscious design is making its way even into the far reaches of Winnipeg, Canada". We are delighted by this endorsement even if this sentence sounds like a surprise that 'they' are getting out of their igloos in the far north!

RESPONSE FROM EVERYDAY LIFE

We also have had an incredible response from individuals who live, work, and play at Folly Forest. Corine Anderson, a Nursery School Teacher from SPLASH Child Care Inc., for example wrote a wonderful letter about the everyday life and change initiated by Folly Forest (November 20, 2013):



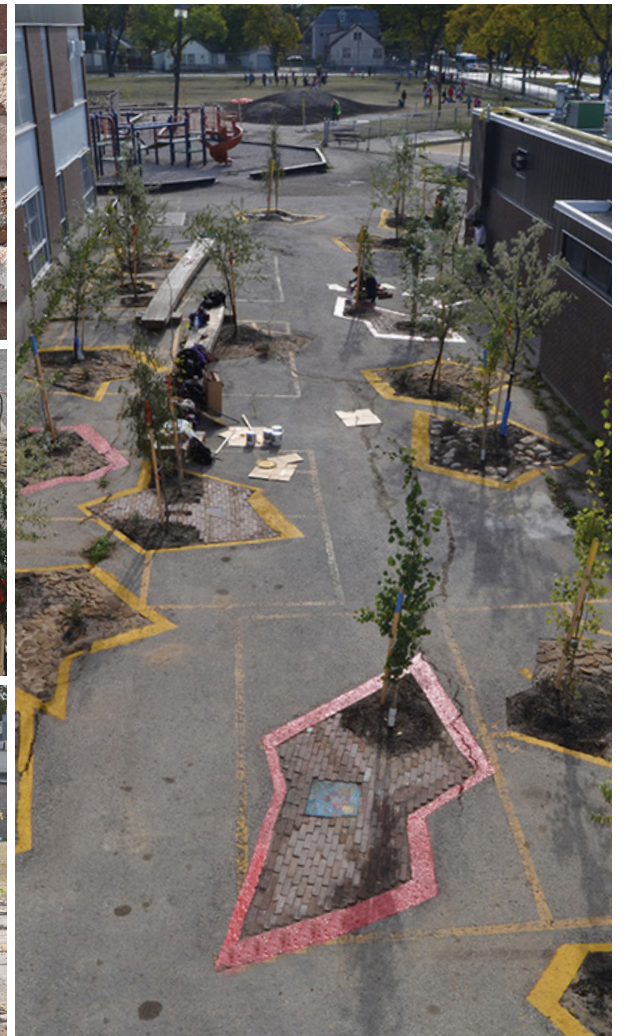
CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTATION



CRACKS, GAPS AND FUGUES



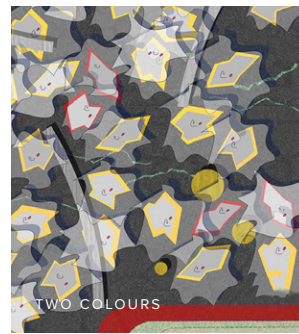
FOUR MATERIALS



PERFORATION



DANCE FLOOR FOR TREES



TWO COLOURS



ALMOST NOTHING



CREATING SHADE



LOOKOUT TOWERS FOR EARTHWORMS

“... After many years of working together we have seen a drastic decrease in vandalism of our shared green space and now with the creation of the Folly Forest the children of this neighborhood see themselves as stewards of the environment.”

“... We also see that the space is used for play before and after school and well into the evening. In short it could be argued that the Folly Forest has become an embodiment of Jane Jacob’s urban design philosophies. The act of learning how to care for the forest and participating in the creation of their community spaces has helped the children and their families to develop a sense of ownership. This sense of ownership has translated into an increase of community use which has, in turn created a safer space and more importantly the perception of a safer space”.

“... We have also noticed a marked increase in the frequency and quality of their pretend play. This is particularly exciting to us because of links between pretend/imaginative play, motor skills and literacy development”.

“... In the summer months we used to have to take the children on field trips in order to experience nature and green spaces. Now, with the creation of the Folly Forest we can spend more time in our own community. There are shady spaces to hang out when the weather is hot. The children have always been enthralled by catching insects and we have noticed an increase in the biodiversity of the yard”.

NOT YET REACHED THAT TARGET

Of course we have been very pleased that our sincere design intentions have enjoyed accolades and attention, but in fact the project has not quite reached its conclusion. Strathcona School received further funds taking advantage of the momentum and recognition! Asked what should be done with the extra money we advised the school to refrain from on-the-spot-decisions and from placing additional objects until Folly Forest has reached a satisfactory developmental stage. A portion of the money must be invested into upkeep and development of the forest. Watering, pruning and binding are indispensable preconditions for cultivating an urban forest particularly in its young age.

On a personal note, I learned a lot about tree care from my father. We used to prune trees on our orchards in spring in order to pick delicious fruits in fall. I learned in my childhood that fruit trees need light and air in order to sustain abundant blossoms and fruits. It was also natural for me to regularly replant trees in order to create a ‘family’ with many trees from different generations. In winter we went to the woods to obtain firewood. Working in a forest expanded my horizon of experience dealing with trees. Also during my vocational training as a landscape gardener I constantly stayed in contact with trees. As such my personal relationship to trees has been a decisive influence on my work as a landscape architect, designer and teacher.

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE

When people ask me what I think about a certain new project I always answer with the following recommendation: “Close your eyes and imagine this place in 10, 20 or even 100 years and you will know!” In my opinion good landscape architecture develops its full performance with increasing age. Dieter Kienast (2002) put it perfectly when he made the point: “The garden is the last luxury of our time, it requires what has become most precious in our society: time, attention and space”. Ironically awarding authorities often make it a condition that submitted work can’t be older than 5 years. Many recently awarded projects meet this demand for the first glossy shot based on rubber surfaces, decorative equipment and flashy light effects. But what at a first glance seems entertaining often has a short expiration date. Instead of developing a

distinctive patina these glossy projects start to rot after completion.

DESPERATELY OPTIMISTIC

Due to its design, Folly Forest will deploy its full qualities in the course of years and decades to come. It requires care, knowledge, and love to become even more adventurous and beautiful. It carries the hope of inducing multi-layered transformations that would ultimately culminate in a stimulating outdoor environment for children, but also in a vital public open space for the neighborhood. Perhaps I will take some more pictures of Folly Forest in 10 or 20 years, but I will not be around in 100 years even though that will be the best time for it. I am desperately optimistic that the school and the children will be guardians of the trees. We are on the right path but there is still a long road ahead.