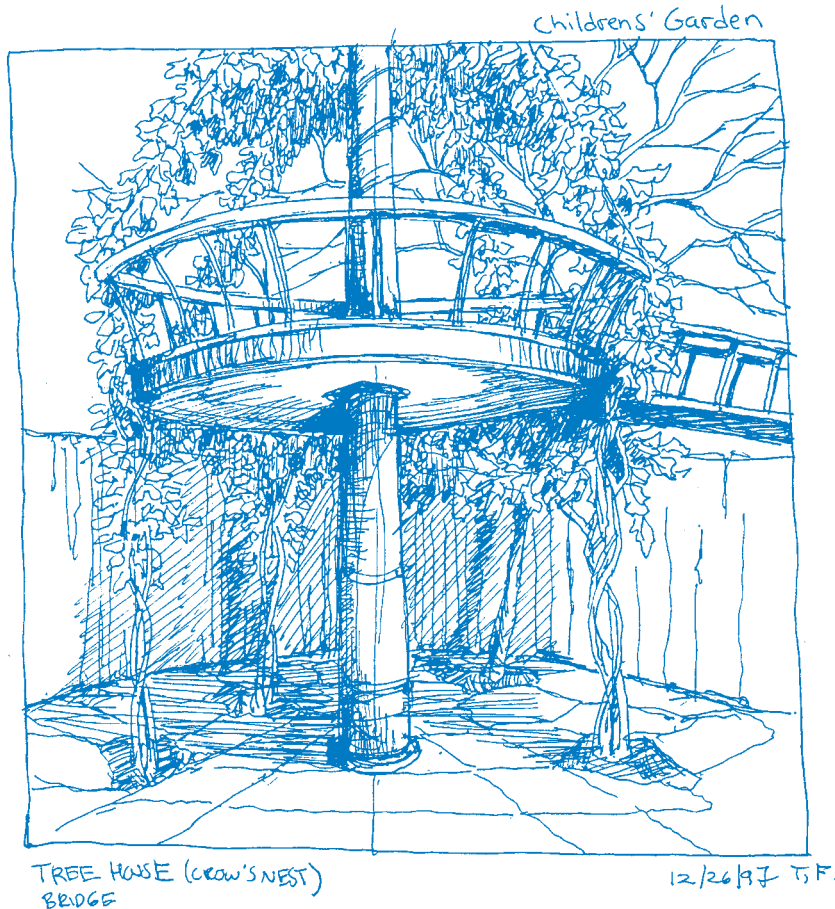


Visions protéiformes et Rêves plastiques : concevoir un jardin pour enfants

Visiones y sueños - diseñando un jardín para los niños

Protean Visions and Plastic Dreams: Designing A Garden for Children

Right: The new Children's Garden will excite kids about visiting and being in gardens



■ Summary

Longwood Gardens built one of the first public children's gardens in the United States. Staff are currently approaching the design of the new children's garden (anticipated to open in 2006) in an innovative manner. The design process is emphasizing the aesthetic, sensual, and engaging (mental and physical) aspects of spatial experiences.

Longwood wants children to learn the joy and relevance of plants and horticulture through fully being in a garden. Educational and interpretive goals are secondary. In short,

Longwood seeks to create a world-class garden based upon Longwood's unique identity and drawing upon the history of gardens in general.

Introduction

Longwood Gardens is an internationally acclaimed display garden combining horticulture, design, fountains (water effects), education, and the performing arts into an extraordinary experience. Longwood captivates the senses and imaginations of almost one million people per year who visit the Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, property. Families and children are crucial groups of visitors.

Staff are currently in the process of designing a new indoor Children's Garden anticipated to open in 2006. Longwood is developing the design, learning opportunities, and interpretation completely in-house. Staff have identified innovative themes for generating a compelling garden grounded in Longwood's unique identity and history but applicable to any institution.

Pierre Samuel du Pont (1870-1954) and Longwood Gardens

Pierre Samuel du Pont, industrialist, engineer, philanthropist, and amateur landscape gardener purchased the land on which to develop his horticultural vision in 1906. The following three decades witnessed the evolution of the estate – the creation of a neoclassical conservatory, glass growing houses, extensive fountains, and diverse garden spaces.

Pierre and his wife Alice Belin du Pont (1872-1944) used Longwood as a stage for social activity, continually offering their hospitality to family, friends, and business associates. Pierre and Alice had no children of their own but were particularly fond of their many nieces and nephews who found a magical and ever-changing world within the gardens.

A continuity of children's gardens

Longwood's Children's Gardens have built upon Mr. du Pont's example of welcoming children into a fantastical and stimulating realm of plants and water features. All have offered enticements 365 days of the year thanks to a glasshouse setting. Longwood built its first Children's

Garden in 1987. Staff intended the garden to be temporary, but popular response suggested that the garden become a permanent feature. Staff then designed the second Children's Garden in 1989. This garden delighted visitors from April 1990 until January of 2003 when the conservatory wing housing it and the adjacent East Conservatory closed for renovation.

Staff began the planning and design for the third children's garden in 1997. The new garden will encompass an entire conservatory wing, making it three times as large as the original. An in-house design team immediately began brainstorming and rethinking what a children's garden at Longwood – or anywhere – could and should be.

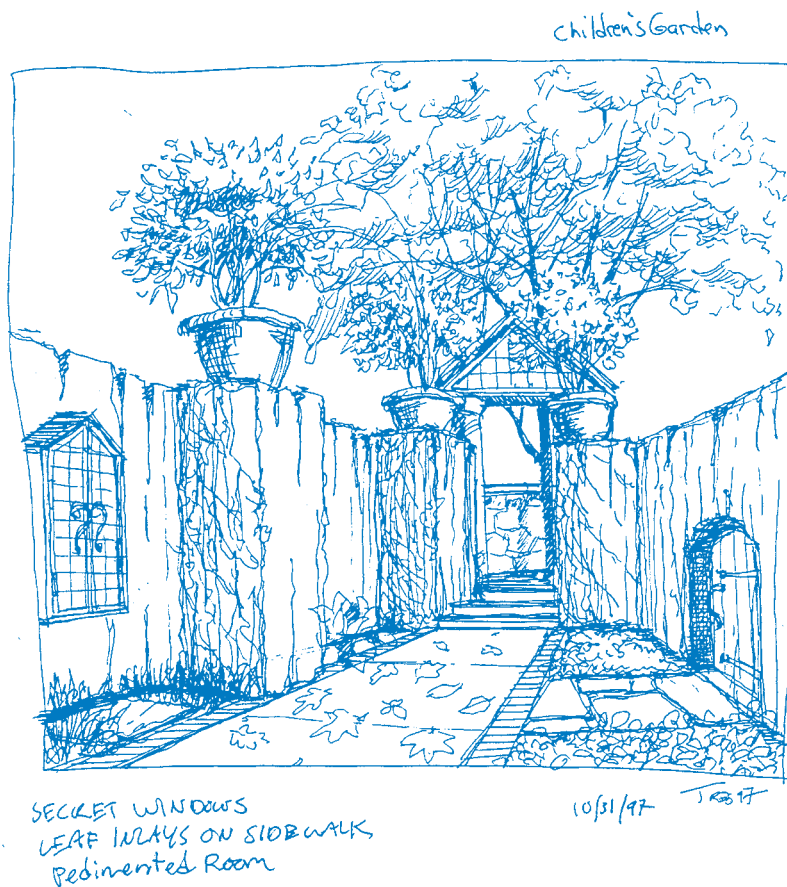
The team began by visiting children's gardens in the United States, attending the American Horticultural Society's annual Youth Gardening Symposium, speaking with colleagues, and holding focus/discussion groups.

A new garden, a renewed vision

The design team discovered a missing element in the children's gardens they explored and in the thinking of their colleagues. The idea of the garden was missing.

They noticed the seemingly obvious: the successful elements of a garden for children are the same elements contained in successful gardens (designed for adults) throughout history. Children's gardens differ in their scale. One should simply (but there is nothing simple about it) design a well-conceived, detailed, and constructed garden. The design team decided merely employing the trappings and adopting the symbols of a recollected idea of 'childhood' was not the answer for Longwood. Illustrating storybooks in topiary was a bit facile. Decorating exhibits on photosynthesis with plantings wanted for charisma. Replicating tried and true 'cookie cutter' elements monotonously appearing in most children's gardens lacked conviction.

The seductive challenge became how to create something appealing yet able to pioneer new directions. During the



Left: Engaging youngsters at the start of a life-long relationship with gardens is critical for the future of public gardens

design process and research the core design team articulated several principles to guide the new garden in all its parts. They continuously revised the concepts as both their thinking and the physical design evolved.

Offer aesthetics instead of academia

The design should create a world-class garden experience. Interpretation and blatant educational messages should be secondary to aesthetic concerns. The spaces, plants, and physical and mental delight of being in a garden environment should themselves be the message. Instead of an outdoor museum exhibit surrounded with plants, Longwood should create a true garden containing teachable moments as an integral part of its scheme.

Emphasize sensuousness over syllabi

The new Children's Garden should excite kids about visiting and being in gardens, particularly public gardens. Children should discover the ever-changing, richly-layered experiential, horticultural, social, aesthetic, and

imaginative offerings within a well-designed garden. Engaging youngsters in the beginning of a lifelong relationship with gardens is critical for public gardens' futures. Children are the future supporters and visitors of every horticultural institution.

Create spaces before decorations

The design should primarily offer compelling, sensuous, horticulturally exuberant, experientially rich spaces, in other words, gardens, for children. An excitingly choreographed series of spaces should be the garden's foundation.

Staff were interested in the types of spaces (not just garden spaces) children enjoyed and in what children did in the spaces (not just gardening activities). The linkages, sequences, and quality of spaces should engage kids physically and mentally. The aesthetics (how things looked), though important, should be almost a decorative overlay over the rooms, tunnels, caves, groves, etc. After all, kids are quite content to play in cardboard boxes if the boxes engage them.

Leave the story untold or suggest the briefest of outlines

Children should encounter no obvious pre-existing stories or themes (e.g. Mother Goose, Peter Rabbit). Such themes might limit the garden's appeal and legibility because not everyone might know (or have cultural access to) the stories. Staff designed so children could engage the garden by making up their own stories based on the possibilities contained within and suggested by the spaces.

Be true to the organization's identity, purpose, and history

Longwood's garden should combine Mr du Pont's two great passions, plants and water effects, with his devotion to children. Staff would thus base the garden solidly within Longwood's overall identity and mission. The design should also draw aesthetic inspiration from the sources Mr du Pont drew - classical garden imagery, spaces, and horticultural theatricality. The Children's Garden, in short, should be an intensification and condensation of the overall Longwood experience.

Rethink the entire institution as a children's garden

Education staff suggested that in addition to designing a specific garden for children, Longwood should also plan and design ways to open the entire institution to children. The Children's Garden should then provide a climax within an already intriguing and satisfying visit. Children should come to claim Longwood in its entirety as their own.

Longwood in no way intends these principles as a set of rules or methodology. The design team has followed them as a flexible, yet inspiring, framework. The true test of the concepts will occur once the garden opens in 2006. Longwood looks forward to sharing both the garden and future lessons learned with the public garden community.

▲ Resumen

Les jardins de Longwood ont mis en place un des premiers jardins publics pour enfants des Etats Unis. Les responsables ont une approche très innovante pour la conception du

nouveau jardin pour enfants (ouverture prévue en 2006). Le processus de conception englobe l'esthétique, le sensoriel et inclut les aspects physiques et mentaux de l'expérience spatiale.

Longwood veut que les enfants apprennent le plaisir et la pertinence des plantes et de l'horticulture en étant physiquement dans le jardin. Les buts éducatifs et d'interprétation sont secondaires. En résumé, Longwood cherche à créer un jardin de niveau international basé sur l'identité exceptionnelle de Longwood et traitant de l'histoire des jardins en général.

● Resumé

En los jardines de Longwood se construyó uno de los primeros jardines públicos para niños en los EEUU. El personal ahora está diseñando de manera novedosa el nuevo jardín de los niños (que se propone inaugurar en 2006). El proceso de diseño le da hincapié a los aspectos estéticos, sensoriales y atractivos mental y físicamente de las experiencias espaciales.

Longwood desea que los niños comprendan la alegría y la pertinencia de las plantas y la horticultura estando físicamente en un jardín. Los fines educacionales e interpretativos son secundarios. En resumen, Longwood intenta crear un jardín de prestigio mundial partiendo de su exclusiva identidad y utilizando la historia de los jardines en general.

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Tres Fromme is Planning and Design Specialist at Longwood Gardens. He can be contacted c/o Longwood Gardens, P.O. Box 501, Kennett Square, PA 19348-0501, USA. Tel: 610/388-1000 ext. 548. Email: tfromme@longwoodgardens.org www.longwoodgardens.org

Right: Rooms, tunnels, cages and groves will captivate kids physically and mentally

