

Core Sample



PROJECT DETAILS

TITLE Core Sample
LOCATION Grand-Métis, Québec, Canada
CLIENT Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens International Garden Festival, Les Amis des Jardins de Métis, in particular the Artistic and Technical Committee consisting of Alexander Reford, Lesley Johnstone, and Yvan Maltais
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE North Design Office
PRINCIPAL DESIGNERS Pete North and Alissa North
MAIN CONTRACTOR Yvan Maltais
CONSTRUCTION TEAM Jean-Paul Meunier, Gilbert Ouellet, Reginald Deschênes, Joël-Simon Dubé, Jérôme Fournier, Yannick Pouliot, Claude Tremblay, Claude St-Laurent

PROJECT TIME FRAME

DESIGN 7 months
CONSTRUCTION 5 months

PROJECT FACTS

SITE AREA 200 sq. metres
BUILT UP AREA n/a
BUDGET CAD\$20,000 (US\$17,900)
COST PER SQ. METRE CAD\$100 (US\$179)
STATUS Complete, 2006

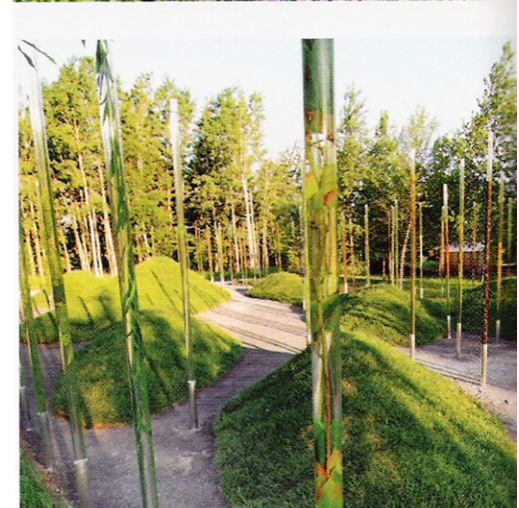
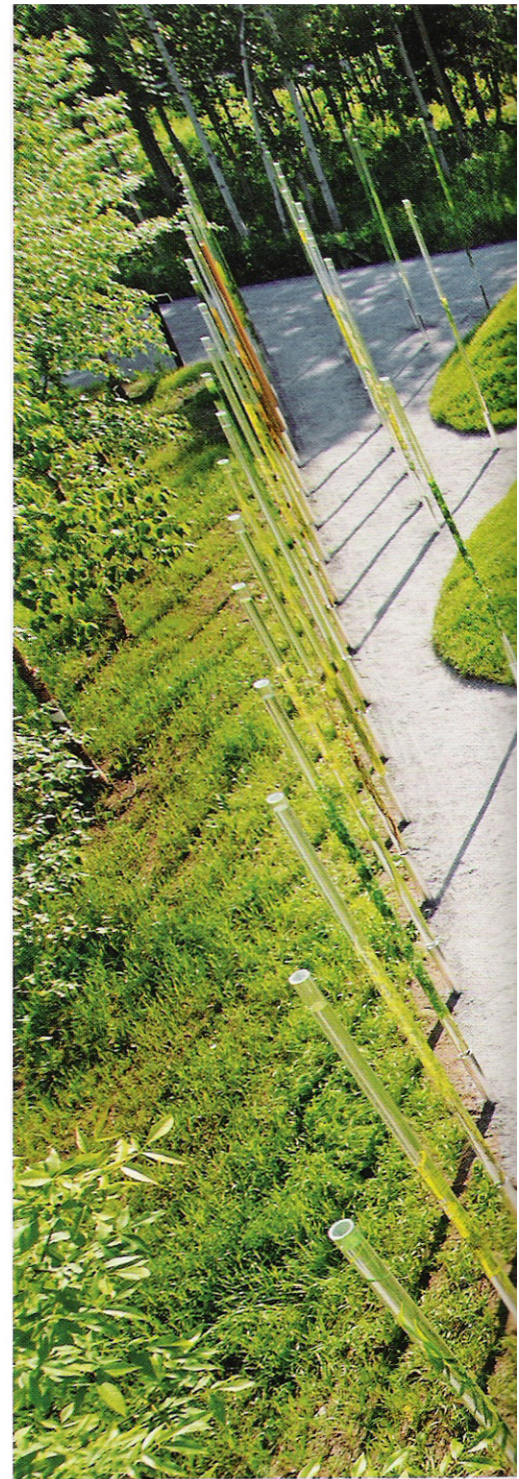
The act of collecting and sampling has long been the method through which we attempt to understand environments, landscapes, and territories. North Design Office's Core Sample garden for the 7th International Garden Festival of the Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens is inspired by these notions of collection and sampling, and the systematic exploration of land.

Restoration, innovation and conservation

Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens form part of the family estate once belonging to Elsie Reford. It is located in the small town of Grand-Métis in the Gaspé region of Québec, Canada. This lies on the south shore of the Saint Lawrence River, 300 kilometres east of Québec City and is populated by summer cottages and vacationers. The Gardens have been open to the public since 1962 and in 1995, Les Amis des Jardins de Métis assumed responsibility for them. Their key objectives were the restoration of the historic gardens (tradition), the exhibition of temporary gardens by leading contemporary designers (innovation), and the preservation of the shoreline along the St. Lawrence and Mitis rivers (conservation).

The Gardens enjoy summers with an average temperature of 24°C, but can experience temperatures of -33°C in the winter, with 60 centimetres of snow, which is why the festival runs between June and October. The actual Gardens are in a forested area, but the region is a combination of rolling to mountainous farmland and forest. Here the Saint Lawrence River meets the Atlantic Ocean and shores vary from sandy inlets to rocky outcrops. Summer nights receive cool ocean winds mixed with the fresh smell of Aspen trees.

As part of their objectives, in June 2000, the organisation Les Amis des Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens opened the first edition of the International Garden Festival, to transform an unused part of the property into a venue for the annual display of temporary gardens conceived by designers from Canada and abroad. >>



Call for designs

Earlier this year, North Design Office (NDO) were one of the many designers worldwide approached by the festival organiser to design a contemporary garden for the 7th International Garden Festival of the Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens to be held from June 24 to October 1, 2006. All of the designers were asked to submit a preliminary proposal that included a visual document illustrating the design concept for the garden, a written document explaining the concept and the materials to be used, and a preliminary cost estimate for the construction of the garden. Upon approval, communications of comments were provided to the designers by the Festival's artistic and technical committee: Lesley Johnstone, Yvan Maltais, and Alexander Reford. Over 100 submissions arrived from around the world, but only six new gardens were chosen for the 2006 festival. The short listed six entrants including NDO were then required to submit the final plans and specifications for the temporary gardens, along with a short text outlining possible strategies for developing the garden further should it be selected to remain for a second year.

The Festival site is essentially flat with swaths of forest to the east and west. North and south of the plot are green patches, consisting of groundcover and mixed tree species. This creates an alternating sequence of garden/trees along the main approach to the Festival. The actual plots for the new gardens are the same every year, with a standard size of 10 metres by 20 metres.

Continuous exploration

A primary means of acquiring vital geological information, a method closely tied to Quebec's strong mining history and unique geology, is through the use of the core sample - a methodical gathering of cylinder-shaped cores from the landscape. The cores reveal a cross section, exposing layers of material and time. On a macro scale, this sampling further assists in explaining current landscapes including agriculture, survey and settlement patterns, transportation routes to resource mining.

The garden is a metaphor of this sampling and resultant structure. Its macro scale is understood through its flowing topography that references the early exploration of Quebec's resources and the landscape of the Gaspé region. The landforms aim to appear boundless, shifting, and morphing. The grouped undulations, rise from the planar surface allowing visitors to stop and sit, recline, or simply enjoy the patterns created by the wind on their grass covered slopes. The planar surface of crushed stone, surrounding the mounds, represents the parent material and serves as the main walking surface or path to explore the garden.

The micro scale of the garden is revealed through the core samples, an organised collection of acrylic columns, arranged to recognise the uniqueness of the landscape environments. The core samples act as a metaphor for sampling and collecting, displaying layers of site history, native plants, ornamentals, garden ornaments, aggregate accumulations, historic remnants, common materials, and other garden surprises. The samples examine the relationships between the living, non-living, exhibited, and unseen objects that are employed to sustain a garden; which attempt to exceed the limits of hardiness zones, micro-climates, soil types, and precipitation, generating landscape distinctiveness.

The cores, placed on a grid, respect the site boundary to represent control and systematisation. They are reminiscent of a forest, survey stakes, or blades of grass and are footed in the planar surface. They provide a dynamic vertical scale; in their multiple readings, they transform the visitor to the garden from human scale, to an insect, to a giant, and back again, collecting each visitor as one more sampled object in the garden. The core samples mark the inclination to measure and organise the contents of a garden that references the history of the Reford Gardens and Elsie Reford's talents of gathering, sorting, propagating, and displaying.

Planting is limited to sod on the landforms. It was chosen such that it would be ready for the opening and so that people could enjoy walking and lying on the landforms. No lighting was developed as the gardens close before sunset and every effort was made to ensure materials are used sensitively with respect to the environment: materials are sourced locally; they can be broken down and recycled or they can be re-used in another site. The oil used in the tubes is biodegradable, and can be reused as can the tubes and footings. The Core Sample garden highlights items people collect in their gardens; "we wanted to ensure that the materials we used to display this concept relayed sensitivity to this notion," say the designers.

The garden celebrates notions of collecting, sampling, exploration and discovery. Its layers of meaning ground the project to the site and to the region while promoting the garden as a continual means for exploring and understanding the landscape. It is still early in the season, but visitors seem to be enjoying the Core Sample garden. They are interested in entering the garden space, instead of only observing it from the edges. There is interaction, curiosity, and engagement. The client is also happy. But for the designers "because this garden is not so typical, we were excited to see our vision realised, and were actually surprised at how consistent the outcome was with our initial vision." **Text and images: North Design Office. Edited: Architecture+**





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Artist/farmer Matthew Moore plants a critique of sprawling Phoenix. BY MIMI ZEIGER

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COVER AND ABOVE: *Camouflage View at the Reford Gardens' International Garden Festival in Grand-Métis, Québec, by Aranda/Lasch. Photographs by Louise Tanguay.*

