

Thanks to Collaborative Effort New Yo-Yo Ma Music Garden Opens to Public

by Rosalind Reed

Landscape design is my second career. I ran into a friend from my first career (commercial real estate) at the gym recently. A great thing about bumping into old friends is that there's no point in being shy. She got right to the point. "I can't believe you've been in landscape design business ten years. Is there anything you like better about this new career?" "The difference between commercial real estate and landscape design," said I, "is that every design job is a collaboration." "Way to go," she grinned.

An unexpected benefit of working in a collaborative industry is attending design conferences. At a recent conference of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD) in Toronto, Canada, we had the opportunity to see the Yo-Yo Ma Music Garden, a collaboration between Yo-Yo Ma, the cellist, and Julie Moir Messervy, a prominent Boston-based landscape architect. The garden was inspired by Bach's *First Suite for Unaccompanied Cello*.

Messervy explained how an unexpected letter from Yo-Yo Ma arrived one day in the dead of winter, that time of year when landscape designers wonder if they will ever work again. The letter was accompanied by a compact disk of Bach's suites. A discussion and plan ensued, and the garden was to be installed in Boston. At the last minute entitlement snares delayed the project. As it happened, a six-part video, detailing collabora-

tions between Mr. Ma and five other artists was an integral part of this project. The series was to be filmed by a Toronto-based film crew, who happened to be in Boston when the plans got de-railed.

The film crew suggested that they consider installing the garden in Toronto, where Yo-Yo Ma was scheduled to perform the next day. They all flew to Toronto and met the mayor, who just happened to have a waterfront site located minutes from downtown that stood ready to become a park. In the patron's room before the concert, a volunteer stepped forward to head the fund-raising effort. Many extraordinary people contributed their talents to this garden, and, this summer, one year after its installation, we were all together at a tour led by Julie Messervy.

The garden is extraordinary, and you can wander while listening to Bach on handheld audio sets. Swirling patios, stonework, an open-air pavilion and native plants evoke the movements of the suite.

Butterflies abound, and in one part of the video, a butterfly lands and spends quite a bit of time on Mr. Ma's cello while he plays a concert in the garden.

While touring, we asked about maintenance. Many buildings adjacent to the park have been converted to condominiums and local businesses and condo associations are volunteering to maintain specific parts of the garden. The project has truly become a community collaboration.

This beautiful site reinforced my conviction that the best work comes from collaboration between a talented team encouraged and inspired by the vision of the project, and a practical, can-do attitude about getting things done.



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