

The Daily Gleaner

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By Valerie Hillier

Where Art and Nature Meet

In the summer of 2009, the Charlotte Street Arts Centre embarked on a new project to transform the property at the back of the building – the old schoolyard – into a new Culture Garden. The vision for the project was to create a space for cultural engagement and creativity, which in its evolution would allow for a performance area and interaction by children, paying homage to the old schoolyard. That year José Luis Torres was commissioned to create, build and install the first piece of artwork – an interactive wooden sculpture.

This summer a new extension of the Culture Garden took shape - essentially the “garden” of the Culture Garden. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Executive Director of the Charlotte Street Arts Centre, well-known local artist, WhiteFeather, along with Amanda Jardine and the Kara Doucet. Kara is a local businesswoman, Backyard Betty of Backyard Betty Design. She specializes in designing sustainable, cost-efficient and easy-to-maintain garden spaces. Through education, Backyard Betty passes along knowledge leaving clients with the confidence they need to do it themselves, saving thousands in labour costs and materials without sacrificing professional quality. As Kara puts it, she likes to design a space that is “pretty and practical”. As a gardener myself, I truly appreciate this approach!

Backyard Betty Design favours native species in their garden designs and creating sustainable spaces that can be maintained organically. This couldn't be truer in the development of the garden for the Arts Centre where Kara started by using some of the native species that were already growing in the schoolyard. Re-purposed gravel was used to build pathways, other donated plants were added and the earth was enriched with new topsoil from Envirem. Envirem is Fredericton's compost and topsoil manufacturing facility, which has been in operation since 1997 processing approximately 75,000 tons of forestry residues annually. In the true spirit of environmental consciousness, Kara and the Arts Centre enlisted the help of volunteers to move and spread 10 dump truck loads of soil by hand rather than use heavy machinery. Speaking with these three inspiring woman, I could feel the passion and dedication that went into the project. I was told they might have shed some blood and sweat and a tear.

The Culture Garden has evolved yet again with the addition of a beautiful new Pawakan sculpture by Ned Bear. The spirit guide was formed from a recovered wooden beam used during the construction of the Charlotte Street School in 1884, and will remain in the Culture Garden as a permanent fixture. In speaking with WhiteFeather, she mentioned that the source of inspiration for many artists comes from their “place”; and that “place” for many artists is nature and the natural outdoor environment. The goal for outdoor installation art is to create a piece of art in response to that space. The Culture Garden is a genuine example of this in so many ways.

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As part of the upcoming Culture Days events in Fredericton, The Charlotte Street Arts Centre is holding an Open House. On Sunday, October 2 from 12 – 4pm all resident artists and businesses will open their doors to the public, and be present in their studios to talk, demonstrate, offer free workshops, perform and/or display their work. This will be a great opportunity to visit the Arts Centre and enjoy the beautiful space of the Culture Garden – a true example of where art and nature meet in an urban environment!

Valerie Hillier is a Frederictonian who lives with the environment in mind. If you would like to contact the Green Matters team email greenmatters@fredericton.ca. For more information about Backyard Betty Design check out their website at www.backyardbettydesign.com or visit them on facebook.
