

Palmstead Nurseries Soft Landscape Workshop – Strictly Sustainable
Wednesday 16th September 2015 - Ashford International Hotel
Delegate registration via www.palmstead.co.uk click on events

Welcome to the fourth instalment of our pre-workshop newsletters. In this edition we speak to Brita von Schoenaich on the topic of 'big trees' and sustainable planting ahead of our workshop on the 16th September.



Strictly Sustainable: Big Trees **Advanced thinking an Interview with Brita von Schoenaich**

Sustainable planting is a topic that has enlivened the design community over the past few years, and the topic of big trees is central to the future ecological balance of our cities. They are needed for: shade, temperature moderation, rainfall mitigation, air pollution filtering of particulates and their oxygen production.



Brita von Schoenaich is the standard bearer for those in the design community who espouse ecological authenticity, reduced maintenance, striking visual design and big trees. As a speaker at the recent Big Tree Debate at the Garden Museum in June she warned that in 100 years' time there would no longer be any big old trees in London as we are 'no longer replanting them.' She told the assembled audience that most of the 100,000 trees being planted as part of the Mayor's tree planting campaign are not forest type trees like limes, ash or planes but small short lived trees with narrow crowns.

Schoenaich says: "The loss of large trees will change London forever. We enjoy what the Victorians planted for us but what are we doing for future generations? We have so much knowledge about urban heat islands, air pollution and drainage problems, all effects can be mitigated by trees with a substantial foliage area and much biomass. The average life expectancy of a newly planted street tree was under 25 years, only a few years ago."

With Christopher Bradley-Hole, Brita von Schoenaich formed a significant garden design practice called Bradley-Hole-Schoenaich Landscape. Together they have focused on the “dynamic vegetation concepts often set within an architectural framework.”

Brita von Schoenaich has been invited to speak at Palmstead Nurseries forthcoming soft landscape workshop on the topic of ‘sustainability’ and the use of ‘big trees’. The event annually attracts 300 professionals from the landscape industry keen to debate the issues of the day.

Schoenaich says: “The issue is that for us as Landscape Architects it is becoming increasingly difficult to find spaces for forest-type trees. We are aware of climate change, urban heat island and air pollution and in that context we need leaf biomass and volume of trees. A fastigate tree so popular with current street tree plantings (photo right) can never, even on maturity, replace a plane or a lime. Furthermore much current street tree plantings are of shorter, not longer lived trees.



Large *Platanus* in Kings Cross Square Photo: Hufton & Crow

Her practice was recently involved in a scheme at Kings Cross Square (pictured above) in London with Stanton Williams Architects. Schoenaich says: “it was difficult getting agreement to plant any big trees on this square and confirmed my fears for the long term future of our cities. Even English Heritage did not want any trees because they would obscure the listed station building. Imagine the National History Museum without the plane trees!”

Schoenaich who is famed for her sustainable planting, lays some of the blame for the death of big trees at the feet of the bureaucracy of teams of engineers from Highways Departments, Network Rail and Transport for London who see the trees as a headache in terms of engineering, cost and long term liabilities.

She says: “Each of them will find reasons for not big allowing trees on ‘their’ land. Private developers are doubtful too about loss of views, cost and long term maintenance. I am hoping to contribute to something that may end up as a tree planning guide, let’s say one big chap like a lime, oak or plane for every 50 car parking spaces. Or maybe a Boris Law: so that only trees of a stem size so Boris can hide behind them when he is 100 years old can be planted in London’s Streets’.

Brita Von Schoenaich will be speaking at Palmstead Nurseries Soft Landscape Workshop on Wednesday 16th September at the Ashford International hotel. Other speakers include Tim O’Hare, Mary Reynolds, Dusty Gedge, Ken Trew and Noel Farrer plus speakers from the RHS. To register visit www.palmstead.co.uk and click on Events.