

Palmstead Nurseries Soft Landscape Workshop – Strictly Sustainable
Wednesday 16th September 2015 - Ashford International Hotel
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Strictly Sustainable: The Designer's Perspective



A stellar line-up of speakers have been booked to debate the topic of 'sustainability' at this year's Palmstead Soft Landscape Workshop.



Mary Reynolds

In this newsletter we feature an interview with Mary Reynolds the first Irish designer to win gold at Chelsea (2002) with 'A Celtic Sanctuary' inspired by the Wicklow countryside and her love for Irish mythology.

Mary is passionate about the topic of sustainability and will provide an interesting and illuminating view-point at this year's Palmstead Soft Landscape Workshop.

The story of Mary's Chelsea garden has been immortalised on film in 'Dare to be Wild' by Irish director Vivienne de Courcey. Permaculture and working with nature is key to Mary's designs. She appears in a number of 'Top Landscape Designer's you should know lists'. Mary is also about to publish her design bible "Garden Awakening - Designs to Nurture Our Land & Ourselves". As a result of her Chelsea victory in 2002, the British Government commissioned Mary to design a garden for the world-famous Botanical Gardens at Kew in London. The garden is based on the imagery and atmosphere of the poem "The Stolen Child" by Irish poet W.B. Yeats.

What does sustainability mean to you?

Sustainability isn't an element of what I do - it's what I do without even thinking - it's inevitable.

Why do people in the industry seem unengaged with the topic?

It's almost like there's a fear that if we go back to living in harmony with nature then we are going back to hardship. We have advanced in so many ways as a society (and an industry) but have regressed in so many other ways. If you take the best of both worlds you can create a beautiful and harmonious life within a garden. I come at it from a parenting point of view - I treat land as a vulnerable child; at present we are telling the child that they will only be loved if they are dressed in a certain way and that if it looks exactly how we want it to look then we'll love it. Essentially we are fighting against nature (all garden maintenance is that) increasing the void between ourselves and nature.

So what is the solution?

As designers we are given a brief and we can mold this brief to do the right thing for the land. We aren't talking about leaving a space to go wild - no client wants a mess. If a client says they want 100% sustainable garden then the simple option is to treat the space as you would a child - nurture the space, raise it, give it boundaries, you wouldn't leave a child to grow wild it would be a disaster. The aim is to raise the land to be independent of you, to be independently mature. We don't always know how to do this and it has taken me a book to explain it! My book goes back to the old ways of working with the land and to working with the patterns within nature then allowing the natural flow of energy to flow back into the garden.

How did you reach this point?

Even though all my gardens were very beautiful on some level, and people thought they were successful and gave me a gold medal to prove it at Chelsea; I knew they were failures on one essential level - they didn't want to stay the way I had designed them. That's where my journey to figure out the solution began. I knew I needed to find out how to embrace what people wanted while also working out what the land wanted - those two things are intrinsically tied.

How do you achieve this successful relationship in practical terms?

Most of the land we live on wants to become woodland. If you work with the land and allow it to become a woodland then you're fast tracking nature's natural succession. This form of 'forest gardening' is something we have been working on and trailing. You can take any space and turn it into a woodland, even a small back garden with just one tree. Break it down into layers so that the land is happy, diverse and with an eco-system that works.

Getting people to grow their own food again and doing it in a way that will allow the land to become what it wants while growing your own food (sounds like a conundrum but isn't!) is

another way forward. To understand that if we create spaces with a particular intention, then we have an amazing opportunity to connect into the universal energy of creation, through the land beneath our feet, and the food we grow. The land is a conscious being - you start a relationship with the land in your garden, just like you would with your child, and it's a missed opportunity not to take it and run with it. The worst thing you can do to a piece of land or a child is to ignore it - the life force retreats and that's what happens to a lot of gardens these days.

How do you get clients to engage in the idea?

You write a book about it and get them to do it too! I worked out that I was running out of time - I could work on a garden here, and a space there, but the amount of land that's covered by so-called gardens and lawn is phenomenal. Eventually I realised that I had to figure out a way of getting people to do what I was doing but for themselves. Weirdly nature has found a refuge in the places we have designed and maintained but it's not a safe refuge - we have to bring it back to life and in doing so, we bring ourselves back to life. There is such a disconnection and a sense of pain in being disconnected from the land. If we look at art, prior to the industrial revolution art expressed the harmony we felt within nature, post industrial revolution most art has expressed the pain of man's disconnection.

Palmstead Nurseries has a stellar line-up for this year's event which will be held at the Ashford International Hotel in Kent on 16th September. Dusty Gedge, Noel Farrer, Sue Biggs, Mary Reynolds, Tim O'Hare, Ken Trew and Brita von Schoenaich

**Strictly Sustainable, Wednesday 16th September,
Ashford International Hotel**

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Workshop Wednesday 16th September 2015 via Website
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Brita von schoenaich

Noel Farrer

Tim O'Hare

Sue Biggs

Dusty Gedge