

Earthen Sculpture and Waste Management Project

Summer 2006



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The success of last year's project

Last year, Georgie Donais – an artist in the neighborhood – engaged the local community in sculpting a clay/straw/sand (“cob”) courtyard/ food preparation area beside the playground at Dufferin Grove Park.

Rarely has any park project raised so much enthusiasm. In early June, volunteers dug the foundation trench, and a few days later the sculpting began. The whole courtyard area turned into a hive of activity that became a magnet in the park. By the end of the summer, Donais had counted 500 participants. Who would have thought that such a flowing form could come from so many strangers working together? Or that the mosaics that covered the west face and the counters could be so stunning?

Donais' artistic obsession with sculptural building translated into a community obsession for making a useful park structure double as a work of art. The courtyard includes sinks for the park's food cart and a diaper-changing counter, a fireplace for cooking, and a garden area. It's used all the time, even in the winter.

Description of the project

Integrating inventiveness, community participation, and function, this project would engage the Dufferin Grove Park community in a unique and exciting art project this summer.

The creation of earthen sculpture is a task involving feet and hands in the mixing and shaping of the material. This type of sculpting is easy to learn, and its hands-on nature entices passersby to come join in. Volunteers provide both labour and creativity, and the project provides opportunities for conversation and contribution. People who give their time and effort in this way can find themselves profoundly moved by the work, and they often develop a hunger to continue their involvement in this and other kinds of art-making.

Donais has suggested the possibility of integrating a composting toilet unit as a functional centerpiece to a cluster of shapely sculptures. The sculptures would curve and wind their way along the south end of the park. Their abstract, colourful shapes, when viewed from a distance, may be designed to take on the appearance of a creature, an element or some other common theme.

Benches, planters and niches would be incorporated into their organic, curving shapes. Colourful mosaics would cover the sculptures' exteriors. As creative collaboration is one of the touchstones of this project, the exact shape, size and number of the sculptures will be determined with the help of workshop participants.

Dufferin Grove Park's supervisors enthusiastically embraced last year's project. We consider this another great opportunity for collaboration with the city for the benefit of the park.

Need for the project

Toilet facilities: The south end of the park is home to a children's playground, a wading pool, an adventure playground for older kids, a volleyball court, and an outdoor kitchen/summer café. With the height traffic in this area from spring through fall, it is the perfect spot to provide additional toilet facilities in the park.

Learning opportunities: The toilet would function as a site to learn about environmentally-friendly waste management alternatives. And like last year's creation, this project will invite neighbours and friends of the park to become directly involved in the construction, and to learn about natural building techniques.

Resource management: This building method takes materials out of the waste stream and uses them to create structures. Examples include clay subsoil, surplus straw from farming, and concrete chunks from ripped-up sidewalks.

Community-building: Building the cob courtyard last year opened many people's eyes to the power of using their own labour to create something beautiful. Many are anxious to have another opportunity and this project will allow them to do so.



Who will benefit?

Park users:

- Will have access to convenient and accessible toilet facilities;
- Will have more permanent art in the park to enjoy;
- Will have the opportunity to contribute to the project according to their interests and abilities.

The environment:

- Will benefit from the ecologically sensitive and proven technology of the composting toilet.

Measures of success/outcome expected

We expect that, by project's end:

- there will be a new toilet facility at the south end of the park;
- the project will have added to the body of permanent art installations in the park;
- the project will have engaged the participation of hundreds of volunteers.

Name and qualifications of project leader

Georgie Donais

This multi-dimensional artist, who also works in the mediums of dance, music and design, continues to investigate sculpture with this latest endeavour. She has an interest in multi-functional form, as well as a deep desire to share the possibilities of earthen sculpture with others. Incorporating a composting toilet into this venture increases the complexity of the creation, and with it the potential to learn much more about her art form.

Timeline for completion

May

- planning and design

June

- approvals in place
- fundraising
- information sessions
- develop volunteer base
- consult with community
- amass materials
- line surveys
- ground breaking

July/August

- workshops with community and park users
- installation of toilet facility
- building commenced

September

- plastering and finishing work
- community celebration



Appendix 1
Dufferin Grove Park, summer 2005







OUTDOOR

SPACES



VERY SMALL BUILDINGS



Appendix 3

Cob in the Park website
www.cobinthepark.ca

Appendix 4

Resources

Cascadia Cob Slideshow (ON): www.davidsheen.com/cascadiacob2005/
• extensive image gallery of benches, walls and buildings in the United States

City Farmer (BC): www.cityfarmer.org/cob.html
• oven and garden shed in Vancouver; the roof is now in full bloom!

Cob Cottage Company (US): www.cobcottage.com
• the people who started the cob revival, based in Oregon

Cobworks (BC): www.cobworks.com
• images of their various projects in Canada and around the world

Down to Earth Building Bee (BC): www.alternatives.com/cob-building
• builds small structures in Vancouver

Earthed World (UK): www.earthedworld.co.uk
• extensive photo gallery of buildings, benches and ovens

Groundworks (US): www.cpros.com/~sequoia/lois.html
• story of a woman who is building her own home

Outta the Box (US): www.outtathebox.org
• photo gallery of the courtyard wall they built last summer in Madison, Wisconsin

