A fresh look at landscapes
SECRET GARDENS Unlocking the hidden meanings is key to enjoying International Garden Festival

DONNA NEBENZAHL SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The Fleur de Sel at the Garden Design Festival in Metis is made entirely of salt.

from below, another made of windows with a view of the majestic St Lawrence. Or a garden made of books. The signature garden of this year’s theme of secret gardens is recycling them into the garden to illustrate that the book is a kind of sacred object. “This is not secret in the sense of hidden, but of what is undiscovered or what is hidden beneath. We’re working with secret in a metaphorical and not a literal sense.”

The secrets of these gardens are in their ability to open our syna to the interplay of nature and design. Where would you find a garden made of salt, another made of algae, one floating above green space, another made of salt, another made of paper, so it, in effect, was to deal with issues of the book in electronic form—although not everyone reacted positively to that. For some the book is a kind of sacred object.”

The designers were some what gratified by the reaction. “This is a material you don’t expect in a garden,” said LaTourelle, who works with Folkerts in Berlin, “so you couldn’t help but have an emotional reaction.” The books they used, explained, were going to be recycled, so there was little waste. “The book is protected as an object, as a cultural piece, so when you see them in a garden, something is wrong, it’s very astonishing and fascinating for most people.”

Folkerts agreed. “We want ed this reaction. And while some people became angry about books being destroyed, others thought it was a way to material back to nature.”

The main point of the ex hibition, LaTourelle explained, was to deal with issues of nature and culture, to overlap both composition and decomposition. Betz believes this garden “illuminates the historic moment of the book in printed form being sup pressed or supplanted by the
In this garden, the design- ers used the books as low walls, benches and carpets. “The books aren’t piled up in a compost heap,” La Tourelle explained. “They’re organized and you have to respond to them. You’re im- mersed in the space, we used a very volumetric pattern.”

They also made sure that people could walk on the landscape, so it feels like being inside a garden. Then the visitor gets a close- up view of the transformation of the book into a surface. Amended by the organ- isation of the written text and the concrete undergradu- ers on some of the books: “Mush- rooms eat cellulose; they eat books. This year, more mush- rooms will be added, and we’re very excited to see how it looks when the snow melts.”

A Canada-Italy-Switzer- land collaboration, shown for the first time at the festi- val, is also likely to turn some heads, even though it is using a material that is as com- mon to a Montreal winter as snow, making their way down city streets. Concrete, as it turns out in Ontario, is the material used in Fleur de Sel, a new project of salt designed by the trio Urbanisms – architecture landscape-scape designer Marco Auti, artist-designer Fiamma Bharata and architect-en- gineer Matteo Muggianu – to attract more than 800,000 visitors. It takes place from June 25 to Oct. 2. The Fleur de Sel opening (not including the festival) is on June 4. Cost for adults is $17; children under 13 are free. The Gardens are on route 132 in Grand-Maliba, at the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, midway between Baie St.-Paul and Malbaie. Check www.saltgarden.ca for more information.

Launched in 2000, the inter- national Garden Festival has presented more than 100 gardens by more than 200 design- ers from 11 countries and has attracted more than 800,000 visitors. It takes place from June 25 to Oct. 2. The Fleur de Sel opening (not including the festival) is on June 4. Cost for adults is $17; children under 13 are free. The Gardens are on route 132 in Grand-Maliba, at the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, midway between Baie St.-Paul and Malbaie. Check www.saltgarden.ca for more information.

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“Visitors will be able to walk across the blindingly white surface and touch it, feel it unfeathered. We will be raking it on a regular basis, to keep it all white and ankle deep, and we will also have the quality of a Zen garden – though the designers hope it will be modified by the people walking on it.”

White and granular, lar- ger than table salt – much like the texture of the Fleur de Sel salt in gourmet shops – this installation might ap- pear pretty and simple, but it be-ings many challenges since the tooth-rouge must be conditioned before it bar- rows the near-by vegetation. “When it rains, the water will percolate through the salt, so we’re planning to col- lect the water when it rains in a pond and dry it so we can recycle the salt,” Belford says. “We don’t want the salt to have an effect on the sur- rounding plants.”

Fleur de Sel is a project of artist-designer T.R.A.M.S, a research and design firm for the art of modern nature. It brings particular challenges since the toxic run-off must be contained and will show, through a series of plastic sleeve cur- tains, the incredible colours and alternative uses of salt. “There’s huge interest in the salt and pharmaceutical and medi- cal properties of salt,” Reford says, “and some may contain phosphorus — which means the algae will react to the phosphorus — which means the algae will react to the natural light, plants and insects at eye level.”

For Belford, this garden of- fers the experience of ‘walk- ing into the root system of perennial plants that will be growing overhead and then, like a spade or gardeners’ spade, poking your head through a hole in this garden and look- ing at the miraculous world above.”

The visitor is able to travel from this dark, secret place under-neath and then a moment of revelation and light when your head bursts through and you see the plants.

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