

# LANDSCAPE

## outlook



**MIFGS 2010**

**TRADITIONAL KOREAN GARDENS**

**SHOWY NATIVE TREES**

**THE HUNTINGTON COLLECTION**

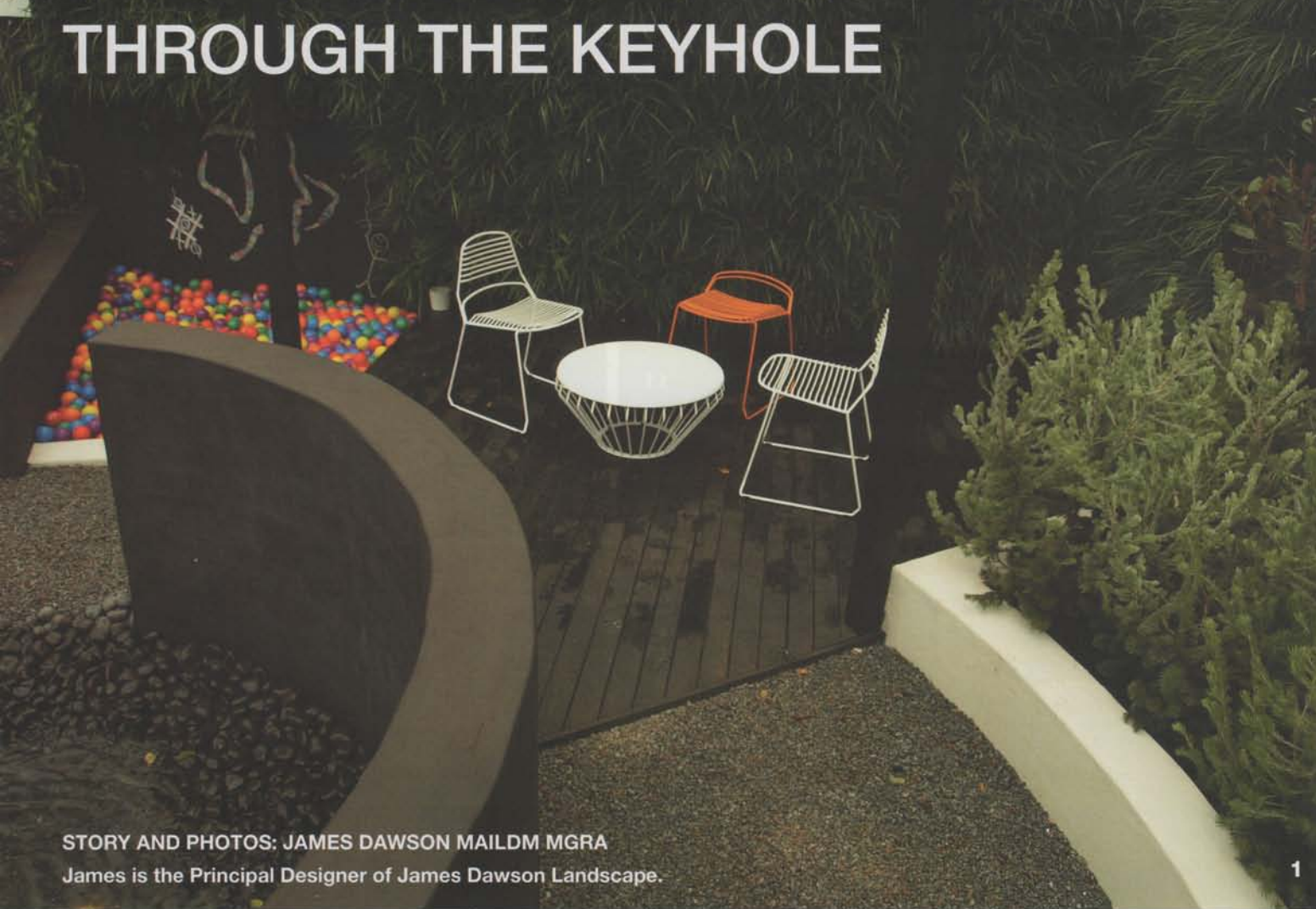
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# THROUGH THE KEYHOLE



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## WHY BUILD A SHOW GARDEN?

"Why do you build a garden at the Show?" my family and friends ask when we catch up around Show time – probably concerned that I look a little worse for wear. The answer is simple, to be part of the largest event in the Australian landscape calendar - media exposure, professional networking and public liaising. Exhibiting at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show is part of my business plan.

The Show attracts 100,000 visitors and over 500 exhibitors. It is Australia's biggest flower and garden show and is located at the world heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens. This Show is also designated by Tourism Victoria as a 'Hallmark Event', sharing this status with other world-class events such as the Australian Open Tennis Championship, the Melbourne Comedy Festival, the Victorian Spring Racing Carnival and the Australian Formula One Grand Prix. Media exposure is huge with coverage in local and interstate print media, TV via its partnership with Channel 7, and radio with an on-site shared broadcast van.

## HOW DO YOU DO IT?

The first step after the decision to "be in the Show" is to present to the organisers - what you want to create and how you will be resourced and supported. Once they are convinced you claim

a piece of turf in the Gardens and the real fun begins. It's time to turn to your professional connections, family and friends for assistance. Call in favours owed or ask for a few of your own. Most of your help comes from suppliers who need compelling arguments as to why they should help. They will expect continuing patronage and in some cases exposure at the Show.

Begging and borrowing are good but you are also going to need money. In my experience the single greatest cost item has been construction labour. A good relationship with a construction company is important.

With this done, off we go and build the garden. You get 9 days on site prior to the Show opening to build, 5 days of Showtime and then 4 days to get out.

Regardless of how good a project manager you are, there will always be unknowns to contend with. Building a show garden is a highly dynamic process during those first 9 days. In 2008 I had to build a viewing platform after we realised (on site) that people were not going to see the garden the way we intended. This year, it was not enough plants and the water chandelier - which became our garden's biggest draw card – but had never been tested until installed - 3 days before the Show opened!

## THE THEME!

This year I worked with Guide Dogs Victoria to create 'Through the Keyhole' - a sensory garden highlighting how vision-impaired people interact with the outdoors. From fragrant blooms, tactile foliage, the soothing sound of water and interesting surfaces underfoot, a sensory garden is a way for anyone to appreciate the great outdoors.

This is the first 'sensory garden' I have designed. I began by visiting a well known sensory garden at Royal Talbot Rehabilitation centre where I met with its creator Steven Wells. Steven was a great help and what I gleaned from him was that, in reality, 'all gardens are sensory'. As a sighted person I could develop the design for the sighted audience but what about those with limited or no sight? I spoke with visually impaired people to hear how they interact with a garden, and how to keep it safe. Their opinions were wide and varied, so I adopted a best fit approach. It seemed I needed strong visual contrasts for those who have some sight. Black and white seemed obvious.

For Guide Dogs Victoria, the key message was to demonstrate to those 'viewing' the display what a garden means to someone with limited or no vision. To do this I chose to strip down the idea of a sensory garden to a simple form by breaking the garden into areas to visually represent each non-visual sense.

**Touch** - felt through 15sqm of giant liriop, planted out as a vertical garden that wraps the deck.

**Sound** - provided by the water chandelier created by combining the Hedgehog Lights with an IP rated light fitting.

**Taste** - experienced via the fruit and vegetable garden with strawberries, sweet corn, broad bean, chillies and capsicum.

**Smell** - achieved through a herb garden - employing thyme, rosemary, mint, sage and the curry plant.

Adding to the sensory experience, further plantings included magnolia, woollybush and lemon myrtle.

To meet my goals, the garden needed to be 'real' - something the public would relate to - that they could have as their own. A play area with chalk board and outdoor covered seating area helped create this - a garden a young family would play and interact in.

Follow the line of the white walls and see a keyhole shape. Look through the keyhole and unlock those senses that are too often stifled by the dominant sense of sight.

## CONCLUSION

Guide Dogs Victoria were happy, the public seemed to enjoy it, and after 4 radio slots, 3 TV interviews, 3 print media articles (so far) I think the media liked it. As for me, if they all appreciated it, it was worth the effort, but I'm still too tired to think about it! **LD**

1. Through the Keyhole garden for Guide Dogs Victoria.
2. Water chandelier - became the garden's biggest drawcard.
3. Taste garden with fruit and vegetables - other non-visual sensory spaces offered touch, sound and smell experiences.
4. Water chandelier centrepiece with curved wall.

