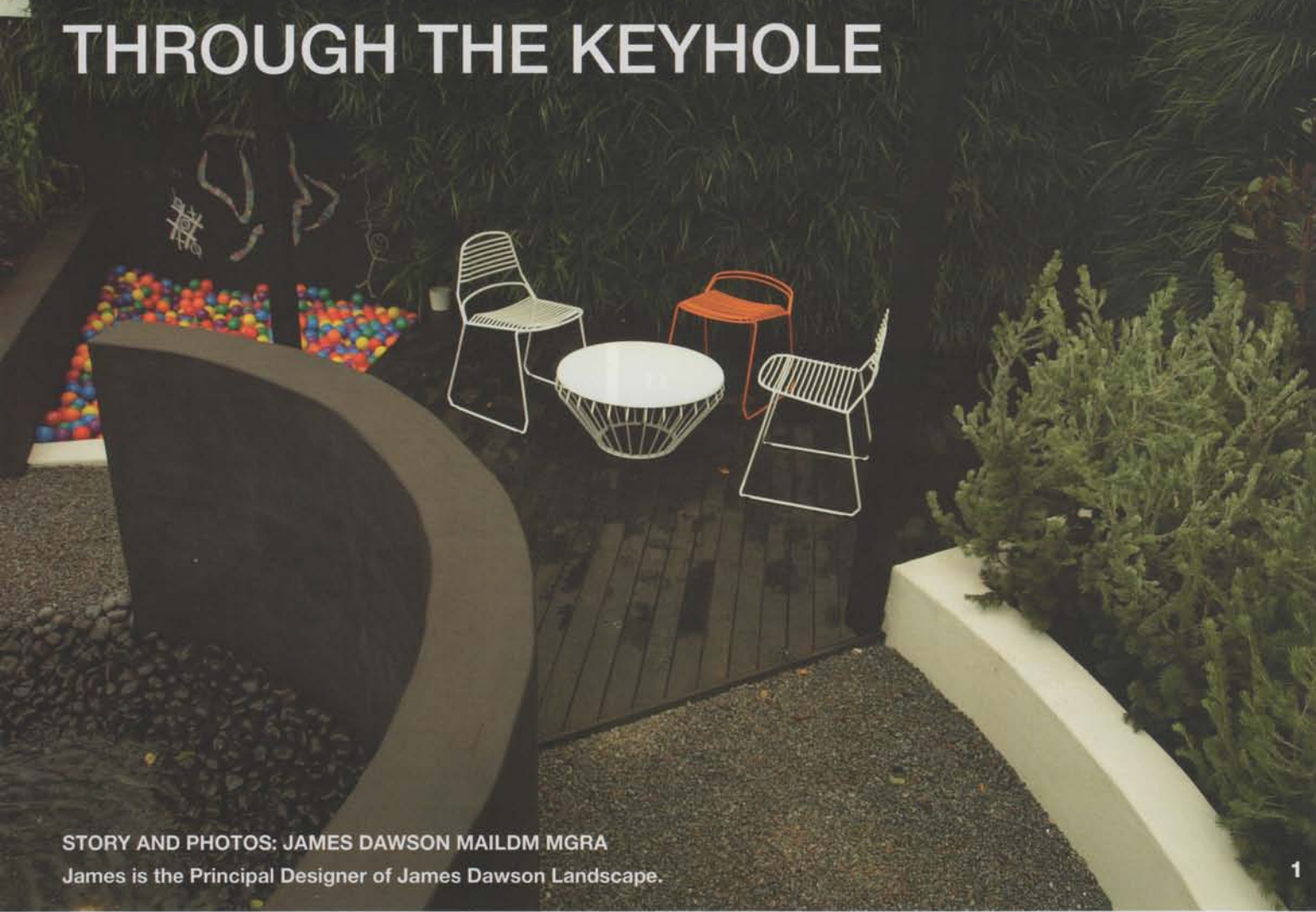


THROUGH THE KEYHOLE



STORY AND PHOTOS: JAMES DAWSON MAILDM MGRA
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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!