

Dynamic Planting For Public and Garden Spaces

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Sarah Price is currently working with LDA Design in partnership with Hargreaves Associates on the 2012 Olympic Park. A former gardener at Hampton Court Palace, Price now finds herself at the core of the team responsible for the largest new urban park in the capital since the nineteenth century. As well as LDA and Hargreaves, Price works with Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough of Sheffield University on the '2012 Gardens' which will be the centre piece of the Olympic Park, running half a mile along the banks of the River Lea.



Price is the holder of two Chelsea Silver Medals, a Hampton Court Gold and is currently working on public schemes in Battersea Park for the gardening charity 'Thrive' and in Victoria Park with LDA Design. Past and present private commissions include working on Hadspen Gardens in Somerset, designing a temporary garden for the National Trust's Tattershall Castle, and creating wildlife gardens in primary schools in Tattershall, Lincolnshire.



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Q&A

What's it like working with LDA, Hargreaves and Sheffield University?

"It's been a great opportunity to work alongside and learn from so many world class professionals. I've been working alongside big architectural firms, and the Olympic Delivery Authority itself, as well as having some cross-over into the world of academia. I'm also working closely with ecologists and top nurseries like Palmstead".

How would you describe the Olympic project?

"The gardens will provide a journey tracing the discovery and development of cultivated plants over the past 500 years. They will contrast the arrangement of plants in their wild habitats with more formalised 'gardenesque' elements such as clipped hedging and linear strips of structural grasses".

What did you learn from your time as a gardener at Hampton Court Palace Gardens?

"It was great working at Hampton Court, I learned about maintenance, gained an understanding of a working garden through the seasons and was able to see people's response to the gardens on a daily basis. It taught me how attached the public become to the sense of a place. The public seemed always to respond to colour – not necessarily just to bedding, but to colour within more informal planting schemes".

As an artist, is colour more important to you than your choice of plant combinations?

"The overall structure of the planting is more important than the qualities of the plants individually – I like to use matrices of grasses with emerging forms of other plants woven through. I often layer plants, selecting plants with relatively naked emergent stems; I find subtle contrasts of form incredibly satisfying. A vertical spire verses the branched accent of an umbel". Adding;

"For me, it's about putting the plants together in a composition".

What excites you and informs your designs?

"I find spontaneously occurring plant combinations incredibly inspiring; I'm drawn to their unpredictability and to the subtle patterns of repetition that occur naturally. I grew up in the outer edge of suburbia – on the edge of the green belt, beyond Kingston, but lots of trips to Wales, and to the countryside meant that I was always exposed to the wildness of landscape. I know that some people find wilderness a cause of 'anxiety', but I've found that as long as there's colour people will be drawn into the space and if the area is given a framework or an emotional anchor point then people tend to feel more comfortable within the space".

What urban projects would you like to work on?

"I'd like to have a go at the roundabout at Elephant! And since I've started getting around by bicycle I've discovered lots of green spaces which inspire me on my doorstep; it's a shame there's no connecting 'green chain' that links the spaces together, I'd love to try and create more permeability between these important urban green spaces – green strips that link other spaces up".

What plans do you have for the future?

"I'd like to keep collaborating with different practices on public spaces but I'd also like to start initiatives close to where I live."

And there's no reason to doubt that with her entrepreneurial spirit she can win gold with the Olympic mega-project and success with the smaller, unexpected urban pocket gardens she dreams of.



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Sarah Price will be speaking at Palmstead Nurseries' 2010 Soft Landscaping Workshop on 22 September at the Ashford International Hotel.

Registration is now underway for the workshop at www.palmstead.co.uk

