



LEARNING FROM ARTFUL RAINWATER DESIGN

Landscape architects can reach out directly to visitors or nudge them down a path of discovery.

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IN THESE ENVIRONMENTALLY conscious times, the following statements are practically axioms for landscape architectural design:

Rainwater must be considered a resource, not a waste product.

Stormwater is most effectively managed on site at the source.

Taken together, these two ideas suggest an inspiring approach to stormwater management: on-site treatment where

rain is celebrated as a resource—not just managed, but thoughtfully treated as a landscape amenity providing a rich experience for users. We call this approach “artful rainwater design.”

In an earlier article (see “Art for Rain’s Sake,” *Landscape Architecture*, September 2006) we proposed that study of award-winning projects can provide helpful information for landscape architects interested in undertaking artful rainwater design (ARD). Since 2005, we have engaged in case studies of 20 projects across the United States that vary in size, type, and design strategy. This study has helped us identify a range of “amenity goals” achievable through ARD.

An on-site stormwater manage-

A series of elegantly planted sunken stormwater “biopaddies” provide seating while collecting and filtering stormwater at Portland State University’s Stephen Epler Hall.

ment system can be an engaging opportunity to educate people about rainwater issues from promoting awareness of stormwater best management practices strategies to the site’s historical water condition. Many people don’t understand the hydrological cycle, the usefulness of wetlands, the role of plants in cleaning water, and the desirability of infiltration. Through ARD landscape architects also have the opportunity to help the public realize the value of nontraditional landscape designs that effectively address rainwater quantity and quality—for example, native plants in naturalized bioswale designs.

In the case studies we have discovered that education can be addressed through two basic strategies: The designer can encourage the visitor to discover something about rainwater through a puzzling or thought-provoking design, or the designer can pose a straightforward didactic lesson in the landscape, offering specific information about a rainwater issue. Stephen Epler Hall at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon, takes the first approach, while the Pierce County Environmental Services Facility in