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HEALING GARDENS BY VIRGINIA BURT DESIGNS

Peter Drennan

Virginia Burt is a passionate believer in the healing power of nature. This Burlington, Ontario- based landscape architect does not advocate alternative medicine but she is an ardent believer in the therapeutic power of healing gardens.

“Any garden can be considered a healing garden,” Burt says. “Regardless of how extensive the garden is, it has the potential to decrease our blood pressure, reduce stress and bring about a feeling of relaxation.”

Healing gardens, she says, engage the mind, body, spirit and emotions for a deep connection to nature.

While many of the gardens Burt creates are for healthcare institutions, almost 60 percent of her work is for private homes. In her 29 years as a landscape architect, she has created more than 300 inspiring gardens across North America, from balcony boxes to 500-acre properties.

Burt is passionate about creating meaningful spaces “where architecture comes together with the natural environment. Where those two things intersect, you have an opportunity to create something intrinsic and not available anywhere else in the world at that time. It creates the opportunity to take a breath, to relax us. So many elements of the modern urban environment do not.”

In search of a life with more spiritual meaning, Burt launched her firm – now called Virginia Burt Designs – in 1996, allowing her to meld her personal journey with her career to create healing gardens and sacred spaces.

Her clients are at the center of every design. Her job, she says, is to translate their dreams into reality, within the context of location, natural environment and present and future uses.

“One of the things I strive to do is to create a connection between interior and exterior spaces. It’s so important that it’s an invitation, whether that is a visual invitation, a journey with the mind, or a physical invitation to take a stroll through the garden.”

Good plant selection is just one of many factors. Burt says it’s just as important how we experience and move through a healing garden. It’s also about creating journey and mystery, the way a garden opens to a magical view, creating social spaces, enclosures and gateways. She highlights water, touch, light, scent, and even taste as key factors.

While the demand for healing gardens is growing, Burt believes we have been slow to recognize the healing power of nature. She is determined to change that, one garden at a time.

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