

Rose by Rose, Cobble by Cobble: A Garden Renovation

Michael S. Dosmann and Stephen Schneider

It was January of 2007, Michael's first week as Curator of Living Collections, when former Arboretum Director Bob Cook presented three immediate curatorial priorities: reenvision the Arboretum's Living Collections Policy, implement environmental monitoring systems (including GIS), and "do something about the rose garden." Despite several decades of care and attention since its intentional design in the early 1980s, the Bradley Rosaceous Collection (BRC) had become overgrown and lost its focus. Both the addition *and* subtraction of plant material had been limited. From a curatorial perspective, the dense plantings were a nightmare to label and keep authentic. It was time to make things right for a family with deep ties to the Arboretum by holding ourselves accountable to high levels of care and curation.

In crafting a new vision for the BRC, we wanted to celebrate plant diversity writ large: not just botanical diversity provided by wild-collected woody species, but also cultivated diversity so richly illustrated by old and new cultivars. Accessions in the BRC, like those elsewhere in the Arboretum, would be valued based upon their full documentation and provenance, not simply a hierarchy of wild over cultivated origin. The attention to cultivated diversity would also solve a problem for us: come mid-summer, few things in the garden bloomed. By adding new cultivars of roses (and other species), we could increase the garden's display potential.

Around this time, we were dramatically rethinking how we deployed resources for horticulture. Under the leadership of former Deputy Director Richard Schulhof, the Arboretum launched an initial Landscape Management Plan (LMP) in 2007. The LMP prescribed expectations for arboricultural and horticultural care throughout the collections, including the BRC. Simultaneously, we undertook a curatorial review of all plants in the BRC to determine which lineages to preserve. The garden was packed, and the last thing we wanted was to renovate again in ten years.

Even so, we still lacked the perspective that only a garden designer could provide. We needed innovative ways to organize plants that would maximize display potential (including for "BIO" plants that possess "botanical interest only"). We also needed to improve the visitor experience. Without a formal entrance, the garden lacked a sense of arrival. Circulation also demanded attention. While the existing bed configuration (full of tall, dense shrub masses) created intimate garden rooms, it also inhibited visitor exploration due to fear of the unknown or even concerns for safety. In Julie Moir Messervy Design Studio, we found technical expertise to help us tackle these and other problems. Erica and Julie provided both creative genius and sensitivity to the project (and its idiosyncratic client). Although we didn't intend to completely redo the five-acre site, we were seeking a major renovation.

Shortly after the project launched in 2008, the Great Recession hit, forcing us to adjust the initial timeline that had called for a single season of renovation using contracted labor. The budget also caused us to rethink aspirations for formal paths and benches, at least initially. Instead, we used our in-house team of horticulturists and interns for the renovation, extending the bulk of the project from one year to three. With JMMDS's new plans in hand, we completely deconstructed some beds, while others were reshaped or constructed anew. This involved handling some 10,000 double cobbles, and a parade of pallets formed along Forest Hills Road.



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Shifting stones. Double cobbles were installed around a new bed in September 2010, while exposed soil remained visible in the footprint of an old bed (at right).

The new plans identified plants to remove, as well as plants that could shift to new locations in the BRC. In some cases, the move could occur instantly, but because of the renovation's phased approach, other plants were transplanted to a temporary location near the Dana Greenhouse and Nursery's south nursery until new beds could be created. This intricate dance kept staff on their toes as they ensured plants were labelled and documented at all times. The greenhouse and nursery staff maintained these, while reproping important accessions from the BRC and beyond.

Before we knew it, old beds morphed into turf and new beds appeared. Fresh rose cultivars extended the bloom season in the Rose Roundabout as well as other spaces in the garden. The Prunus Promenade materialized as trees were planted out (including additional cultivars). By the spring of 2011, most of the work was completed, including the installation of Peter Andruchow's beautiful arbor in the Roundabout. This destination for climbing roses was dedicated to Elizabeth Cabot Sluder (daughter of Eleanor Cabot Bradley) during an event with family and staff on June 18.

We continue to implement elements of the JMMDS plan for the Bradley Rosaceous Collection. The orchard, comprising a diversity of harder-to-acquire germplasm, has taken some time to fill in, but as of this spring, we are about three-quarters of the way there. In 2013, we hired Peter to construct a second arbor, identical to the one in the Roundabout, which serves as an entry portal between two new beds along Meadow Road. We have also installed granite seating—akin to the bench Julie helped design above the BRC years before—as part of the Arboretum's new Commemorative Bench Program. Gardens, ever changing and dynamic, evolve and grow. The nearly 150-year history of this location, near the Forest Hills Gate, is a perfect example.

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