

Ronan Watson - Introduction and Update

09/30/2012

Although I originally hail from the small village of Cromarty in the depths of the Scottish Highlands, I have spent the last few years living in Edinburgh. Between 2009-2011 I studied for a degree in landscape architecture, run jointly between Edinburgh College of Art and Edinburgh University. It was during this time that I began to foster an interest in horticulture, while undertaking courses at the cities world renowned botanical gardens.

Upon graduation, after winning a national design competition, I was awarded the opportunity to work at the Eden Project (www.edenproject.com). A truly unique entrepreneurial charity, which is now a leading light in European botanical education. While there, I developed a keen interest in exploring the role of education in outdoor environments. Focusing particularly on improving environmental awareness in young children.

Through a colleague at the Eden Project, I was made aware of the GCA/RHS Interchange Fellowship. I was truly honoured to be accepted as the British recipient of this prestigious scholarship for 2012/13.

After much research I chose to attend North Carolina State University, to focus my studies in Landscape Architecture. The university is home to the Natural Learning Initiative, a world leader in designing outdoor educational environments for children. The cross disciplinary study and research opportunities offered between a variety of departments (landscape and horticultural in particular) was also a significant influence in choosing NCSU.

Since my arrival, I have been given the unique opportunity to co-lead a research and design project that will potentially span 4 different university departments (landscape, veterinary, horticulture and architecture). The projects primary focus is to develop a Zoological Animal Teaching Unit (ZTAU) in the veterinary campus grounds. This project is the first of its kind in the United States and will require a diverse cross disciplinary approach in order to be successful. We have just applied for a \$15000 grant from the university in order to carry out the initial research proposal. The project will draw on skills developed at the Eden Project and my previous experience in both landscape architecture and horticulture. If successful it has the potential to become a leading precedence for similar collaborative design projects worldwide.

Next semester I will be hoping take a number of horticultural modules, that will hopefully inform the ongoing research project with the vet school. Primarily I will be hoping to cross examine plant species to be proposed for the ZTAU, and assess their compatibility with the complex array of animal species required by the veterinary college.

The GCA/RHS Interchange Fellowship has been nothing but a wonderfully engaging experience so far, and I can only express my upmost gratitude to all those responsible for making it possible.

Thank you kindly,

Ronan Watson

