



Architectural Signs

BY EDDIE WIEBER

All About Kids

Signage helps interpret and teach at the Camden Children's Garden.

Client: Camden City Garden Club; Cooper's Ferry Development Association, Camden, N.J.

Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates Inc., Philadelphia

Sign Design: Thinkframe (formerly Cloud and Gehshan Associates), Philadelphia

Sign Design Director: Virginia Gehshan

Sign Designer: Ken Olschewski

Exhibit Development and Design: Alice Dommert, Dommert Phillips, Philadelphia

Landscape Architect: Rodney Robinson Landscape Architects

Illustration: Stacey Lewis and Chris Reed

Fabrication: Steven Moore and Kurt Bonk, Moore Design Inc., Philadelphia

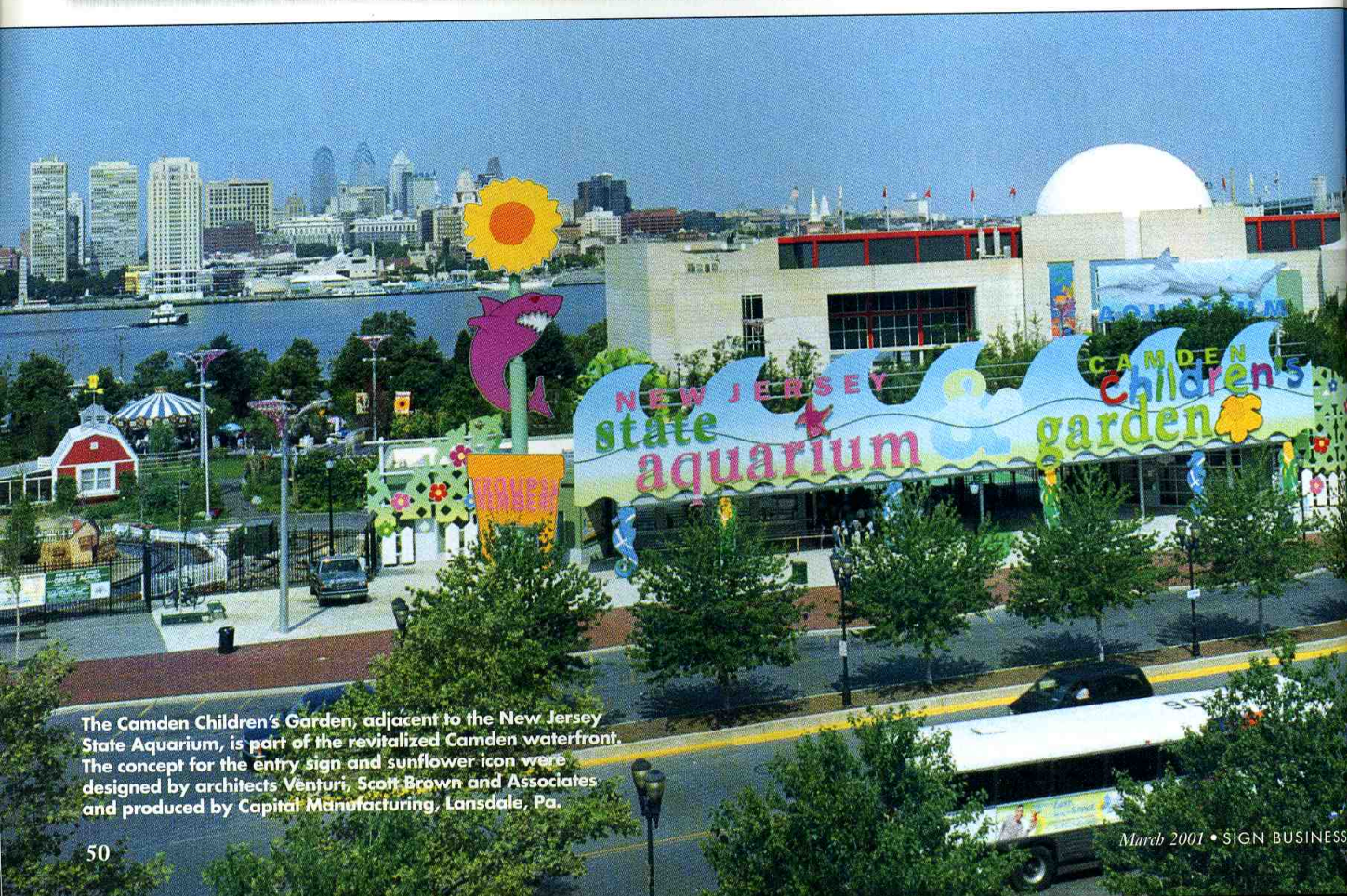
Digital Graphics Provider: Visual Impressions Inc., Charlotte, N.C.

DID YOU KNOW that the *Hadrosaurus foulkii*, a plant-eating dinosaur, was found in Haddonfield, N.J. in October of 1858 and is now officially New Jersey's State Dinosaur?

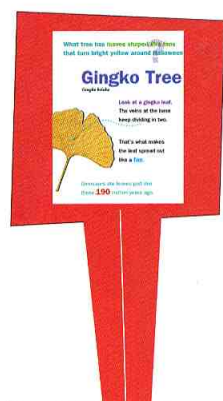
Did you know that over 500 animals can live in just one tree?

Did you know that the Cabbage White butterfly is attracted to the sweet smell of the bee balm flower, or that fiddleheads are the young curled-up leaves of an ostrich fern?

Visitors of all ages find out these things and lots of other down-to-earth facts as they explore the Camden Children's Garden, a four-acre park located along Camden's revitalized waterfront, just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia.



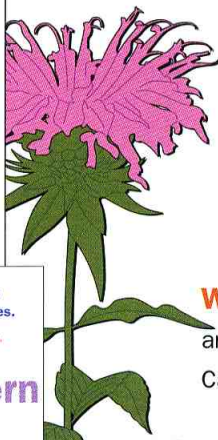
The Camden Children's Garden, adjacent to the New Jersey State Aquarium, is part of the revitalized Camden waterfront. The concept for the entry sign and sunflower icon were designed by architects Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates and produced by Capital Manufacturing, Lansdale, Pa.



Can you name a New Jersey wildflower that attracts bees ?

Bee Balm

Monarda didyma

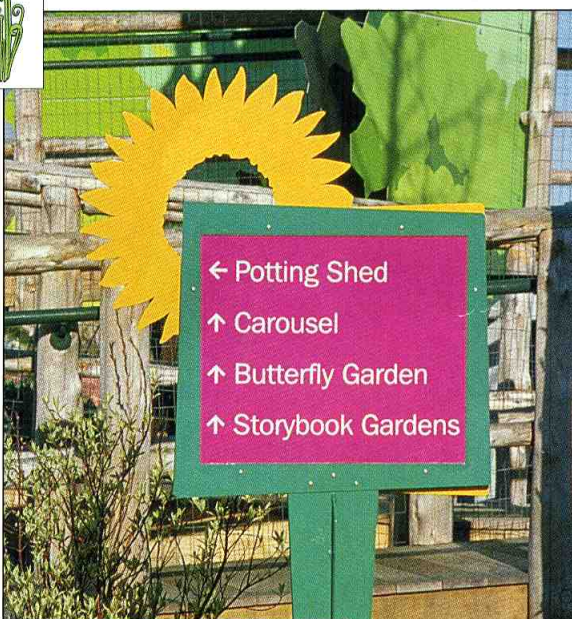


In summer, the flower's **sweet smell** attracts people and animals.

Watch for bees, hummingbirds, and a white butterfly called the Cabbage White among the flowers.



Interpretive copy is carefully chosen to be understandable to children, while providing adults with stimulating tools that help demonstrate the concepts.



Directional signs provide more continuity, not only within the different sections of the Children's Garden, but also with the adjacent New Jersey State Aquarium.



Intricate designs were cut into the steel with a laser; other cutting was done with a metal shear or with a plasma cutter.



Tom Crane Photography Inc.

Signs shapes are reminiscent of a stick holding a seed packet, placed slightly askew. Fasteners are placed spontaneously, as if a kid put them together.

straightforward, except that instead of true rectangles, most of the sign shapes were trapezoids. "It was as if you gave a kid a pair of scissors and said, 'Here, cut this out,'" Moore says.

The outer portions were sheared and the inner portions were cut with a plasma cutter. The more decorative and intricate designs were laser cut. Each piece was then smoothed, primed and painted with two coats of automotive catalyzed acrylic enamel and clearcoated. Each sign is double-sided, sandwiching adhesive-backed graphic layers with a core of brightly-colored PVC board.

Visual Impressions Inc., Charlotte, N.C., printed the graphics on 3M vinyl using an HP 3500 and outdoor pigmented inks. The weatherproof graphics are removable, providing flexibility for ongoing changes. The entire assembly is held together with tamper-proof fasteners that can be easily changed by the staff.

Installation was also simple. During construction, six-inch PVC tubes were pre-set in concrete footers at each location. The completed signs, with tapered bottoms, were then dropped into the sleeves as far as the taper would allow, and additional concrete was placed around them.

The Camden Children's Garden is a great example of a collaborative effort, resulting in a special environment for the community and its visitors. A part of that effort is the design and construction of the sign system, which will help interpret and educate for many years to come.

Tom Crane Photography Inc.

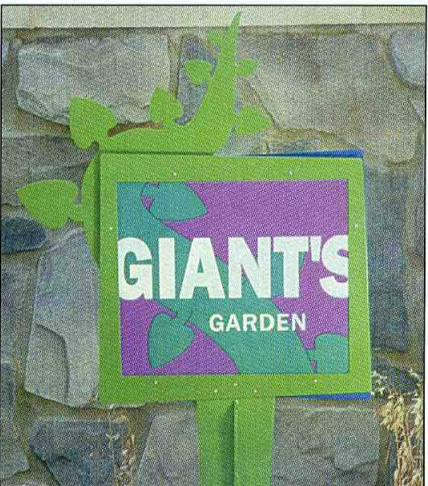
Tom Crane Photography Inc.



Graphics panels are easily changed to allow for special events and changing seasons.



A special section of the garden is devoted to the *Hadrosaurus foulkii*, a plant-eating dinosaur originally discovered in Haddonfield, N.J.



Different garden sections are identified by shape and color, providing continuity in the way information is delivered. Sans serif Franklin Gothic type style was chosen for its simplicity.



TALKING THEIR LANGUAGE

Sign design director Virginia Gehshan says their task was to design the sign system for children.

"When you're trying to look childlike, sometimes you do things that are different and possibly more complicated than if you were doing something for adults," she says. "For instance, the bolts going through the signs are in unusual locations. You don't have one in the upper left, upper right, lower left, lower right as you might for very subdued elegant adult signs, if you had anything showing at all. These are supposed to look a little more spontaneous and more whimsical, so we have the fasteners in funny places, as if a kid put this thing together with a hammer and nails."

To help achieve an innocent and whimsical quality, their design inspiration offered ideas suggesting childlike spontaneity, such as signs resembling a Popsicle stick holding a seed packet, placed slightly askew.

Non-verbal expression was also a factor in designing sign shapes and layouts.

"We wanted them to see the shape of the sign frame as well as very simple titles so even very young children could see that it was a dinosaur's garden, for instance, or the picnic garden with the ants," says Gehshan.

The type style used is a sans serif Franklin Gothic, reminiscent of a *Dick and Jane* layout, with simple bright colors.

"Always," says Gehshan, "things that are simple — or appear simple — take more work."

PLANTING SIGNS

Designing this type of signage for children also includes making the signs strong enough to withstand the abuse kids dish out.

Not content to just quietly read and contemplate the lessons, kids have to climb, kick, and jump around on these signs. Aside from the simple designs requiring simple installation procedures, all 76 of the interpretive and directional signs are literally *bullet proof* monuments, fabricated from 1/8" steel.

Steven Moore, of Moore Design Inc., Philadelphia, says production was fairly

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The gardens are designed to be an interactive educational playground, providing additional opportunities for hands-on learning.



Many of the signs introduce children to a new idea, then encourage them to experiment at home.



What's a picnic without ants? While whimsical, this section of the garden teaches a lesson about the diversity of life.

playground, full of plants that people see often and can easily grow themselves.

According to Alice Dommert, of Philadelphia-based Dommert Phillips, the exhibit designer, the way the Camden Children's Garden *engages* children is what really sets it apart from other gardens and other playgrounds.

"This is very much about kids interacting and recognizing plants," she says. "The first thing is to engage children in a fun activity that's in a garden setting. The big message, she says, is that "gardening has a lot of enjoyable qualities about it."

Dommert says that while many of the gardens were selected for a "base kid appeal, how do you make something relevant to kids in New Jersey?"

She says they were trying to make

some close "at-home" connections. "During exhibit development you think about how to make the exhibit content and experience relevant to your audience."

One of the relevant things they found — and one with powerful kid appeal — was an exhibit based around an eagle scout's re-discovery of the 19th Century Hadrosaurus discovery, which happened less than 10 miles away.

The obligation is to provide an experience that is appropriate for the audience. Dommert thinks about half of that experience is the physical setting — the actual gardens, with sculptures, special places and lots of plants. The other half is interpretation, which is done through a series of educational programs and through interpretive signage.

Another mandate that she says is equally important is to stimulate the adults. "One of the problems with a lot of kids places is that the poor parent is tortured. Kids have a great time, but the parent is completely not stimulated in any way."

It was an important consideration in deciding on content. The solution was to provide content that appeals to adults and children, giving the adults ideas to discuss with their children. In this way, they could interact with each other, making both of their experiences more valuable. For example, a component in each garden is a "try this at home" suggestion, such as how to build a "bean teepee" like the one growing in the *Giant's Garden*.

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PLANTING SEEDS

The Children's Garden is one of the activities of the Camden City Garden Club, a non-profit organization whose mission also includes helping area schools develop educational programs, and helping promote participation in community garden projects.

This children's garden is a departure from other garden projects. It's not a flashy place with rare specimens; nor is it a boring grade-school science exhibit that happens to be outside. It's a playground.

But it's not like a normal playground with swings and see-saws; it's a garden

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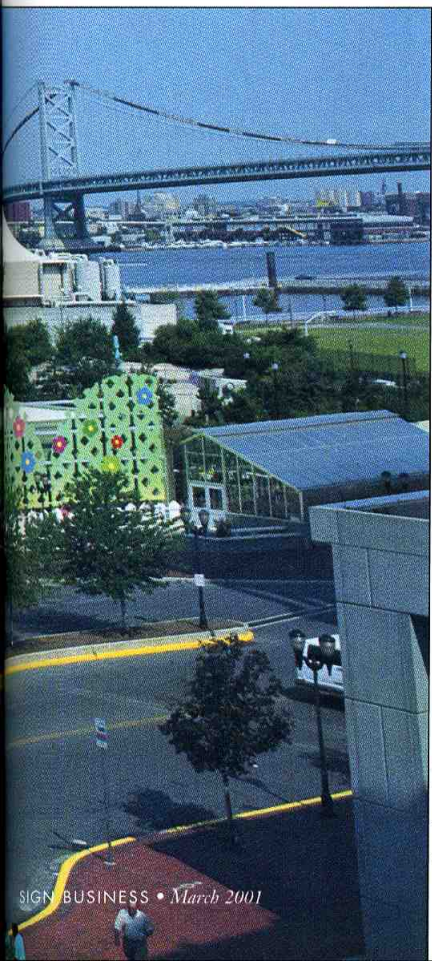


Photo by Julie Marquart; courtesy Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates