

# Flushed with Pride Longwood Gardens Opens New East Conservatory Plaza

By Carla Lucas

On October 9 Longwood Gardens opened its new East Conservatory Plaza. Guests experiencing the new renovation found:

1. The most direct and fastest entrance to the East Conservatory from the Visitors' Center;
2. A new 13,800 sq. ft. lawn terrace to be used as an informal outdoor gathering/performance place;
3. The new plaza surrounded by a woodland setting with 278 new trees and shrubs;
4. The largest living wall in North America; and
5. The opportunity to use one of the 17 individual lavatories along the living wall.

At a special gathering of staff, volunteers, and guests, Paul Redman, Longwood Gardens' Director, said "We've faced challenges with this project as wide as the ocean. There have been volcanoes, monsoon rains, and blizzards. We've persevered to be here today with this new facility for Longwood Gardens."

Redman explained the process began four years ago when Longwood Gardens asked noted environmental designer Kim Wilkie, of Kim Wilkie Associates, Richmond Upon Thames, UK, to present his vision on the highly desired entrance renovation. With a sweep of color on a scrap paper over dinner, the concept was established. Construction began in the fall of 2009.

"Kim Wilkie's unprecedented design for the East Conservatory Plaza is deeply rooted in tradition, while also embracing innovative landscape design, which captures the very essence of Longwood

Gardens," said Redman. "The plaza – both as a place of quiet contemplation and a site for creative programming – will engage our guests in new and exciting ways, advancing our mission to expand upon what a public garden is and what it offers to the public."

"This space is about duality," said Wilkie on the new plaza. "Mr. Dupont loved nature and he loved to party." He said the space serves as a fulcrum between the worlds of glass (the conservatory) and trees.

According to Wilkie the project incorporated three issues:

1. How to integrate the land and buildings.
2. How you combine water use with sustainability.
3. How to create a sculpture and performance space.

"It's been a joy working with Longwood," Wilkie said. "They take their time to decide what they want but once they decide, they do it perfectly. They turned my madcap ideas into reality."

Guests walking to the Conservatory first see the new lawn terrace. It is composed of five tiers of perfectly manicured turf. The turf is a special formulation—two varieties of Kentucky bluegrass and three varieties of tall fescue—made specifically for Longwood Garden at Tackahoe Turf Farm in New Jersey. The area is closed to foot traffic this fall. Once the turf is well established (probably next spring) Longwood's staff expects thousands of feet to tramp over it each day.

Woodlands, some newly planted and some existing surround the lawn terrace serving as a transition to Longwood's natural landscapes as well as masking some of the

service areas.

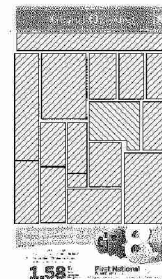
Also noticeable in the new plaza is a curving glass roof. This is actually the spine for the domed, naturally-lit roof in the new lavatories, which are built into the landform. Inside, the lavatory corridor is lined with plants. Guests using the facilities are hard-pressed to know they are entering an area under the ground.

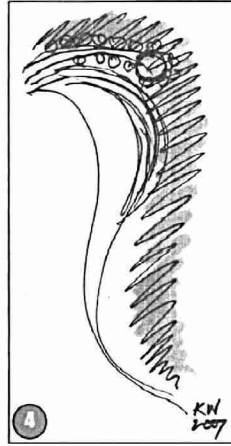
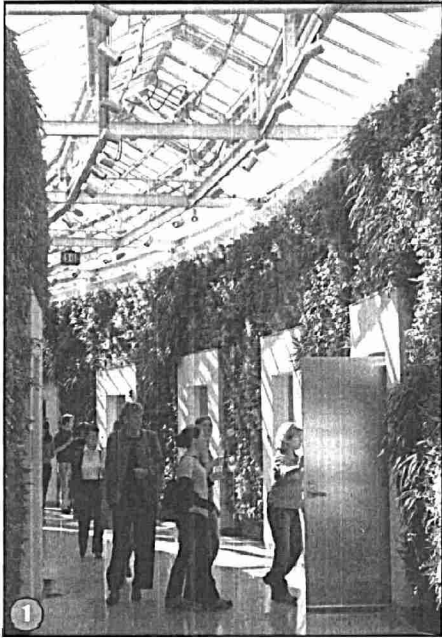
The curving, plant-lined Living (or Green) Wall, includes over 47,000 plants with a surface area of 4,072 square feet. It is filled with 25 species of plants, mostly ferns and placed in intricate designs. Installed by Ambius, of Buffalo Grove, Illinois, it is 70 percent larger than any other living wall in North America.

Michaelis Boyd, of London, UK, was the architect for this project. Wells Appel, of Philadelphia was landscape architect firm and Baneroft Construction Company, of Wilmington, Delaware was the construction manager for the project.

"The history of Longwood Gardens, from Pierre du Pont's founding vision to the Garden's commitment to environmental stewardship, education and the arts, very much informed and inspired the design for the East Conservatory Plaza," said Wilkie. "I wanted to create a gentle environment of light and shade that would be transformed by the changing hours of the day, a place where people could relax in the morning sunshine, enjoy views out onto the rest of the Gardens, take in a special event, or perhaps even attend a sparkling party at night."

Next for Longwood

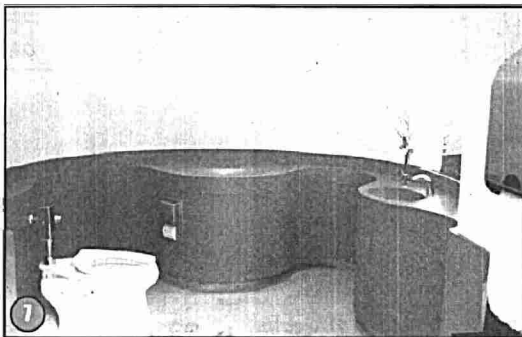




All photos by Carla Lucas unless otherwise noted  
 Clockwise from top left:  
 1- Guests get a first look at the new living wall and restroom facilities.  
 2- Paul Redman (new lawn terrace in background) welcomes guests to the East Plaza's opening celebration.  
 3- Kim Wilkie speaks on his design and working with Longwood Gardens.  
 Courtesy photo  
 4- Kim Wilkie's simple sketch that started the East Conservatory Plaza.  
 5- Close-up of the Living or Green wall.  
 6- The new East Plaza includes the closest entrance from the Visitor's Center and the five-tiered terraced lawn.  
 7- The individual lavatories are actually underground and lit with natural light from above.  
 8- Students from the Curtis Institute of Music perform along the Living Wall during the opening celebration.



Gardens is the completion of the Longwood organ restoration. The organ will be rededicated on February 4, 2011 and once again be able to fill the ballroom with music.



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