

Sculpting with sticks and string

*Curious collection rises with volunteer help
at University of Pennsylvania's Morris Arboretum*

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Patrick Dougherty's stick sculptures look so natural, it's almost as if they simply sprouted out of the ground, sculpted by a stiff wind and maybe help from a fairy.

Actually, the sculptures take weeks of work, the vision of an artist and the labor of dozens of volunteers (including me). Dougherty spent three weeks in March building a yet-to-be named sculpture at Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania. The sculpture was recently unveiled and, weather-permitting, visitors will have about two years to explore and find the words to describe the piece.

Paul Meyer, executive director of the Arboretum in Philadelphia's Chestnut Hill neighborhood, described it as a giant basket.

"When I see it, it looks very castle-like," he added.

Dougherty's no stranger to Pennsylvania. In 2000, he created "Tea Time," a tea pot and three cups on the grounds of Lancaster Museum of Art as well as works at Swarthmore College and in Pittsburgh and Allentown. In 2009, he made "Summer Palace," a sculpture resembling a wind-swept stick hobbit house at the Morris Arboretum. During its two-year residency, the sculpture was a big hit with



PAUL MEYER PHOTO

visitors of all ages, especially children, Meyer said. Arboretum staff saw a new sculpture as an opportunity to get more kids to connect with nature.

"If we want the younger generation to grow up and appreciate nature and want to conserve nature, they have to be connected with it," he said.

So, they invited the North Carolina artist back.

To prepare, the arboretum thinned out some young trees — zelkovas, from the elm family — to make supports. A flatbed trailer delivered the rest: lots of willow branches from upstate New York.

Morris staff also had to recruit and schedule scores of volunteers over three weeks. They started in March to

GRAND UNVEILING

• Patrick Dougherty's sculpture was recently unveiled at the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania.

The sculpture's expected to remain there for about two years.

For more information about the arboretum, visit upenn.edu and search "arboretum."

For more information about Dougherty's art, visit stickwork.net.



TEA TIME IN LANCASTER

• Dougherty made "Tea Time," a tea pot and three cups on the grounds of Lancaster Museum of Art in 2000 at Mutter Park. The sculpture was formed from a variety of sticks collected near the Holtwood dam: sassafras, cherry and maple. The tea pot remained there for more than a year and boosted attendance at the museum.

"It seems to be the center of attention, and is an object that has created some very positive activity," Cindy Morrison, former museum executive director said at the time, according to newspaper records. "For us, it's been better than a neon sign, and a great promotion for art overall."

It met a sudden end after it was damaged by climbing children and teens. City workers chopped up the sculpture with chain saws and turned it into mulch.

The finished sculpture, which doesn't yet have a name, opened to the public recently.



ERIN NEGLEY/STAFF PHOTOS
The doors of each structure at Patrick Dougherty's sculpture at Morris Arboretum, top, were framed by zelkova branches, which needed to be covered with curved willow branches. Volunteers like Linda Thomson, center, wove the willow branches into the exterior walls, concealing the larger branches, bottom.

WATCH THE VIDEO
Visit the story at lancasteronline.com

MORE ONLINE

• A photo gallery of the sculpture's construction and the end result can be found at LancasterOnline.