

# DESIGN LIFE NOW

NATIONAL DESIGN TRIENNIAL 2006

## Podcast Transcript: Tom Leader

My name's Tom Leader and I'm a landscape architect. We did a project in Sonoma, California, called Breakout, which was at the Cornerstone's Garden Festival. It was up for two years and it was to occupy a 30 by 30 square space. It was composed of a wall of hay about 4 or 5-feet thick and 7-feet tall. Inside this wall of hay were 35 screen doors mounted on posts and also within this enclosure was a compost bin and a recording of distorted fragments of Johnny Cash singing *Ring of Fire* and *Folsom Prison Blues*.

And it was kind of a remembrance, recollection, nostalgia or the rural roots of this area and also throughout the nation. You know, screen doors and porches and that kind of permeability and those things, sounds and smells and moving through, and people appearing and disappearing within all these doors. Finally, as you make your way through this maze of doors there was a black refrigerator at the other end which was stocked with food for Johnny Cash's afterlife.

Another project, kind of evolved from that, was done as a proposal for at the Fresno Museum, Fresno, California. I was brought in as the landscape architect on the permanent project, but also to come up with an interim scheme, you know, a temporary landscape. We came up with a system of scaffolding to create a large cube, which was anchored by a series of shipping containers. So all these materials that we would use would be either rented or donated and at the end of the project all these things would be returned or recycled.

And the portion of the park that you see also within that is created out of eight architectural lines of hay bales, which create divisions and smaller rooms for sunflower cultivation and for a few lawns. And the big cube creates space next to the existing museum which is being hugely expanded in the future. But in the interim there's a new plaza with this reflected sky plan, which is done by painting a pixelized version of clouds onto the pavement using high school art students.

The last project is a very large urban park in Birmingham, Alabama. We designed a large sound within an amphitheater structure. Kids need a place to go as usual and they need to be able to run around and enjoy this amphitheater when it's not really in use. And so, part of the cooling of the amphitheater as well as the creation of the room is using this very large rain curtain which drops about 45 feet out of the canopy overhead. The installation is just a wall of welded wire-mesh gabions, which is a wire basket that is used in roadside erosion control. It's kind of a bioengineering product and normally these are filled with rocks and they're stacked up. We wanted to use it to create basically a matrix for the project and decided to fill them with plastic fruits and vegetables.

Design is merging functional needs that are being presented to you by somebody or something with your own personal impulses and predilections, and combine the two into something that works well for people.

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