

## A CONTINUUM OF PROGRESS

Denver firm breaks new ground,  
sets new trends in landscape architecture

By MAUREEN HREHOICK, Associate Editor

It is 6 a.m. on a clear Denver morning and Randall Boyd Fitzgerald is already at her desk at home working on a recreation proposal for an upcoming meeting. Many of this landscape architect's days start out the same way—a little breathing time in the morning before the onslaught of the day's responsibilities at the office.

Fitzgerald, at 35, is somewhat of a maverick in the field of landscape architecture and readily admits it. Co founder of the Denver firm, the Continuum, she is breaking new ground in what is considered a rather conservative profession. Authoritatively and articulately her conversations are punctuated with words like "balance," "leading edge," and "quality."

The Continuum was founded in April 1982 by Fitzgerald and William Johnson of William Johnson Associates of Ann Arbor, MI, after three years of careful planning. Johnson was recently Dean of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan and

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founding principle of Johnson, Johnson and Roy of Ann Arbor. The theory behind the company is the formation of an inter-disciplinary network of professionals in planning and landscape architecture, law, economics, conflict management and public participation and research. Through this forum, the founders envision being better able to serve the complete needs of their clients. There are currently about 15 organizations and individuals participating in the Continuum. They include Paul Wehr of

Colorado University; BBC of Denver, an economics firm; Synergy, a land planning and landscape architecture firm (of which Fitzgerald's husband is a partner); and a Denver law firm specializing in environmental law. The Midwest contingent of the company includes Jim Olsen of Olsen Associates, a legal firm; Elan, a computer programming company; and William Johnson Associates.

This "new breed of cat" as Fitzgerald refers to the Continuum, samples the best of all worlds (or strives to) in meeting a client's needs by keeping the "leading edge."

"The company is very much into trend analysis," she says. "This industry, because of rapid changes, doesn't always exchange information enough or use resources as well as possible. The Continuum is trying to correct this."

As an example, Fitzgerald points to the fact that the company is currently pursuing research grants. Instead of only one company benefitting from the research, through the Continuum, it will be passed on to member organizations. In time, both Fitzgerald and Johnson hope to expand that network.

Fitzgerald knows of no other firm in the country like the Continuum.

"This is exciting because it's new enough to be evolving, but we're careful enough to be treading slowly in its development," she says. "We're really into mixed use work and large planning and design, such as facilities incorporating commercial, office and residential uses."

The philosophy of the organization is simple: it is structured to deal with changing trends within the industry as successfully and efficiently as possible.

The premise is not new.

During September of 1980 and



Randall Boyd Fitzgerald

September of 1982, the American Society of Landscape Architects held the Gwinn Conference in Cleveland. It was designed to look at the future of the profession.

"What it said is what we really are trying to do here," Fitzgerald points out. "As landscape architecture grows, its diversity and role in development landscaping and environmental management develops and grows."

Why, then, with such findings, aren't more firms throwing away the traditional trappings of landscape architecture and trying the new approach?

"Because it's totally unproven ground," Fitzgerald says simply. "Landscape architects are often very conservative. A maverick? Well, yes, maybe I am, but the concept certainly isn't new."

Fitzgerald lists some of the changing trends today's landscape architect must contend with.

"Landscape architects are having to deal with trends that weren't present 10 years ago such as the changing use of people's leisure time. The diversity and types of activities have changed. People are, for the most part, staying closer to home. More people are also involved with computer technology and that high technology has to be balanced with human interaction.

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There's also the constant preoccupation with fitness. There has to be a regard for the total integration of how people live, work and play. Communities want and need an identity of their own. We have to deal with the increasing number of choices people have."

With these considerations in mind, The Continuum continues to attract interest as well as clients.

Fitzgerald is currently working with synergy on a 3600-acre ranch in northern Douglas County (Colorado), totally revising the master plan.

"This project has tremendous potential," she enthuses, the interest in her voice noticeably rising. "We want to make it the gateway to Denver from the South. We also want to give it an urban focus—the Town Center contrasting to the suburban quality of Greater Denver. We are trying to create a focus or identity for the southeast corner of the Denver area."

The Continuum has been working on the project since last April. The number of projects Fitzgerald works on at once varies, and she says she isn't working on as many as she'd like. However, the challenges and the potential are still there.

Fitzgerald graduated from the University of Michigan in 1970 and practiced in England for two years. In 1972 after returning from England, she settled in Denver and has been there ever since. While in England, she worked for the Greater London Council on a project that still remains one of her most satisfying. It was called New Town at Bletchley. Situated on the River Thames, Fitzgerald says the greatest challenge of the project was the balance of physical design with the social and economic circumstances.

"The English have a very different set of ideas about what they want, such as their gardens, and definitely no high rises," she explained, "but it's achieving this balance between the confines of the job and what the client wants that is the fun part of this profession for me."



**Bell Ranch** is a camp and conference center where Fitzgerald had to incorporate the natural diversity of the land with educational and recreational uses.

After returning to the U.S. from England, Fitzgerald worked for four months with the Olympic Committee in Denver which tried to organize a massive statewide recreational event. It never really got off the ground, but she said the experience of working with them and all of the contingencies such as transportation and housing a project like this would entail, made it worthwhile.

A smaller project Fitzgerald is particularly pleased with is the Bell Ranch Camp and Conference Center in Evergreen, CO.

"Its elevation is at 8000 feet and we had to deal with the ecosystems of both the Montane and Upper Montane forests and balance the recreation and educational components of the site. The resource was the diversity of the land itself. We were involved from the comprehensive planning stages to site design.

Prior to co-funding the Continuum, Fitzgerald worked for the THK Associates of Denver.

In the diversity of projects she's worked on, Fitzgerald has found one constant and that is the need for the landscape architect to be as involved in the initial planning stages of any project as early on as possible.

"It's not that we want control over the project, it's just easier to offer opinions and options at an



early stage instead of being handed a *fait accompli*."

Fitzgerald says she enjoys most a client who is interested in creating a positive development that will have quality environmentally as well as being economically feasible.

"Some clients don't understand economic benefits of quality, and it can be a tough road to bridge," she says.

One of the things Fitzgerald enjoys most about her work is the diversity.

"There will always be traditionally organized landscape architect firms," she said, "and that's fine, but we all must get more involved in effecting decision-making as early on in a project as possible. We must learn to balance the high

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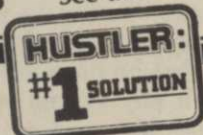
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tech with the traditional. This way, we can get away from reinventing the wheel and get that all-important leading edge."

Working in the Denver area, Fitzgerald says she and her associates incorporate and work with native plant material quite extensively and is very concerned with water and energy conservation.

"We found that the smaller plant materials seem to establish themselves better, anyway," she explains.

She does not oversee maintenance once a project is completed. Her husband Terry's firm, Synergy, is more in the land planning and detailed site design side of the business. He is in partnership with Jack Gilcrest. Synergy is also a member of the Continuum.

In her over 10 years in the

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business, Fitzgerald has found few problems in the following areas: varieties of plant materials produced, reliability of contractors doing the installation ("I guess I've been very fortunate," she says), the supply of future landscape architects, the quality of graduates, and the amount of renovation work being done in the field.

She also rates the following as highly significant trends in the industry: use of low-maintenance native plant material, drip irrigation, interior landscaping, greater involvement by the landscape architect in maintenance programming and the emergence of design-build firms.

Meanwhile, The Continuum continues to delve into some of these new trends.

"Is the Continuum ahead of its time?" "It needs to be given some time to prove itself," Fitzgerald says. "The really exciting thing about it is that I know I have the right people working with me. It's an interdisciplinary team effort."

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