



CAROL SHIELDS MEMORIAL LABYRINTH

INCLUSIVITY IN LABYRINTH DESIGN

Located in historic King's Park, the Carol Shields Memorial Labyrinth honours the legacy of a Manitoba's first and only Pulitzer Prize-winning author in an environment designed for meditation, healing and reflection. The motivation behind the Carol Shields Memorial Labyrinth project transpired through the convergence of three distinct ambitions for the space: a built labyrinth, a meditative garden, and a memorial tribute. This project is about an ordinary community, working together, building a unique space that meanders through native perennials, ornamental shrubs, engraved bricks and boulders. Features include a gathering area with interpretive signage, an engraved quote wall, a healing/meditation garden and paved pathways. Combined, they create a unique, accessible memorial that evokes the author's past while inspiring the walker's future.

LABYRINTH GARDENS

The Manitoba Labyrinth Network, a registered Canadian charitable organization, chose to honour writer Carol Shields by creating a memorial labyrinth. Shields' 1997 novel *Larry's Party* is about an ordinary man, a fumbler, who loves garden mazes and learns how to build them. The Manitoba Labyrinth Network organized a committee to work on the project. In May 2009, the Carol Shields Memorial Labyrinth officially opened in King's Park, a City of Winnipeg park in the south end of the city.

Labyrinth gardens are meant as a place for personal contemplation and renewal. Labyrinths have existed for centuries and may be best known from Greek mythology, which includes the tale of the architect Daedalus creating a labyrinth as a way to keep a monster—the Minotaur—from eating the children of Athens.

Labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools. Today, labyrinths have experienced a resurgence of interest. Researchers at Harvard Medical School have found that walking a labyrinth can lower the breathing rate, blood pressure, and chronic pain as well as reduce stress levels and anxiety.

THE PATH TAKEN

From the onset of the process, the design committee believed in thinking big and the client was prepared to raise funds as necessary to realize the dream. As a result, the project was built in phases from 2008 to the fall of 2009, and individual design elements were built and added as financial resources became available.

The labyrinth's interior features were built first, laying the foundation of the space. Next, a gathering area for physical and emotional preparation for the labyrinth experience was built. And lastly the engraved quote walls arose, evoking the writer's work and underscoring the meaning of story in all our lives through select quotes. The interpretive signage was also erected at this time, highlighting Shields' career and acknowledging the groundswell of public support that spurred the project to completion.

CAROL'S STORY

The labyrinth in King's Park has been designed to reflect Carol's life, who was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1935 to Inez and Robert Warner. She married Saskatchewan native Don Sheilds in 1957 after meeting him in Scotland, after which she moved to Canada and became a citizen. Her connection to Manitoba was established after she and her husband settled in Winnipeg in 1980 when Don was hired by the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Engineering. Carol later taught at the University of Manitoba as an Assistant Professor of English and was named Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg in 1996.

It was here in the Prairies that Carol wrote her better-known books such as *Larry's Party* that serves as an inspiration for the project. The novel's protagonist, Larry Weller, has a unique talent of creating labyrinths. The Labyrinth incorporates many of the hedges and flowers Larry used in his mazes. The daisies, crocuses, sweet William, bleeding heart, campanula, poppies, dahlias, and spirea included in the garden are flowers Carol mentioned in her books.

The juxtaposition of stone and flowers in the design echo the theme and cover of *The Stone Diaries*, a fictional biography of a character named Daisy Goodwill Flett, which won The Pulitzer Prize in 1995. The heroine of this novel passes through her life without ever fully occupying it—an absence that this beautiful and haunting book attempts to redeem.

The Meditation/Healing Garden near the entrance was inspired by Carol's grace and dignity in facing breast cancer. It contains indigenous herbs that provide benefits of colour and aroma therapy.



THE ROLE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

The labyrinth has experienced a certain revival in modern times as a 'healing walk.' Beyond its placement in healing gardens, there are currently labyrinths in prisons, drug rehabilitation centers, medical facilities, and numerous backyards and landscapes across this country. Modern life has alienated many from that which centers us, and the labyrinth has emerged as a form that can help humans find their internal center and place of emotional stability. Landscape Architecture is a profession that can take away the principles of the labyrinth experience and apply them to the design of outdoor environments beyond the usual cosmetic response.

Designers question our motives and passions in the intentional placement of objects in the landscape. Within landscape architecture, we have the ability to construct spaces that reflect the theoretical aspects of the 'labyrinth' as that which relies on 'the senses' and experience. These types of environments are seen as positive for human users. The object of the labyrinth reflects this positivism in the form of a meditative and healing experience for users. The labyrinth is a way of making space distinct. Space is seen as 'real', as it affects our senses long before our reason. Seen in this way, the labyrinth is challenging the pyramid in its quest for absolutes and rational ways of knowing and seeing, relying on its experience to affect the perception of space. As a symbol it has this inherent power

While derivations of the labyrinth do exist, it is inherently a unicursal (one way) path, with the only choice being that of to enter the object itself. Once inside the labyrinth, space takes on new meaning as the user is exposed to the many twists and turns of the path on the search for the center. There is a conscious connection of the mind and body in this movement. There is a 'fluid tension' of human movement with that of the 'labyrinth' as a material construct. Thus the human user organizes these internal and external factors of mind, body, and the material object (labyrinth) to engage experience. This experience defined by the labyrinth is the search for center. In this organization of sensory perception, we become aware of the space we are occupying.

INCLUSIVITY IS AN ASSET

As we step into the future of labyrinth design, installation, and use, we need to consider how to create experiences for people from all walks of life. From the beginning, one of the primary goals of the design group was to design and develop a labyrinth that was accessible. The design follows standards from The City of Winnipeg's Accessibility Design Standards document, alongside all other provincial and national building codes.

Facts to know about disability in Manitoba:

- Nearly 175,000 people in Manitoba have a disability.* That's almost one in six people. Over the next 20 years as people grow older, the number will rise to one in five Manitobans.
- Although widespread, disabilities are a particularly important issue for both First Nations and Metis communities – their members are at least twice as likely as Non-Aboriginal people to have a disability.
- A significant percentage of people with disabilities live disproportionately in poverty and thus lack financial resources to support their own advocacy groups.
- The Accessibility for Manitobans Act has standards to help individuals confronting barriers such as The Built Environment accessibility standard, which deals with access to those areas outside the jurisdiction of The Manitoba Building Code, such as sidewalks, pathways, parks and other aspects of the environment that we design and construct.

Universal accessibility in architecture refers to the capacity that all people have to access and inhabit a space regardless of their cognitive and physical capacities, and it is a subject that cannot be dismissed. Although little modifications can make a difference, it is ideal for the spaces to be thought out according to universal design guidelines from the beginning.

The Carol Shields labyrinth pathway system is 5ft wide to allow two wheelchairs to pass each other. Further, the pathways are crushed red shale gravel similar to the ones in Assiniboine Park which are suitable for wheelchairs and the contrasting colors provide aid to the visually impaired. The labyrinth is gently sloping down to the centre so that visitors will always have a view of their end destination.

Everyone navigates the built environment differently, with abilities changing across a person's lifespan. The sizeable global population of people with physical, auditory, or visual disabilities, autism or neurodevelopmental and/or intellectual disabilities, or neuro-cognitive disorders will face greater challenges if we don't begin to more widely apply universal design principles.

* Manitoba have a disability, whether visible, non-visible, permanent or one that occurs only at certain times

RESOURCES

- <https://www.carolshieldslabyrinth.ca/>
- <https://www.asla.org/universaldesign.aspx>
- <https://accessibilitymb.ca/accessibility-standards.html>
- https://winnipeg.ca/ppd/universal_design.stm





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