



Landscape Architect Finds Her Creativity Work In A Small Space

Posted By **Bill Motchan** on May 29, 2013



Juli Ordower (left) and collaborator Joanne Greene (right) working on a South Loop project

Like most architects, Juli Ordower can look at a space and visualize a design in her mind. Ordower also must consider how the completed work will change and grow over months and years.

Ordower is a landscape architect. Her firm specializes in working with small spaces, so the compact urban lots common to Chicago bungalows don't deter her creativity at all.

"It allows me to be more creative than working on a large commercial space," Ordower said. "I can work on a space as small as a couple of containers or a parkway. It's just about choosing the right plants for the space. And, I get to pick out every single plant.

"I can do smaller jobs that big firms wouldn't take, and these are the ones I like to work on."

Ordower knows quite well how different it is working on a small space. Before forming **Juli Ordower Landscape Architecture**, she spent nearly a decade as a project manager at Site Design Group handling much bigger design projects.

The 41-year-old Chicago native initially didn't have any idea what kind of work suited her, so in 1997 she moved to Colorado to be a ski bum. That didn't seem to have the makings of a long-term career, but she did grow fond of the natural beauty of the state, and the wildflowers.

That eventually led to a master's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Colorado at Denver in 2002. It was the right decision, she said, because she fell in love with combining her practical pragmatic side with the creative side of her brain.

"I love working with clients and learning their vision so I get to execute their vision," she said.

When I met Ordower, she was working on a typically small space — a 137-square-foot outdoor space in the back of a South Loop condo. She carefully mapped out exactly where each plant would go to take full advantage of the postage stamp-sized yard. The design was inspired by the warmth of a southern colonial garden.

In addition to residential clients, Ordower also takes on small commercial spaces. In either case, she tries to blend nature into the design. One of her more whimsical works is the playground at the Akiba Schechter Jewish Day School in Hyde Park. The playground includes a tree house, a log tunnel, and mushroom-shaped seats. The school's logo is a tree, so she incorporated a tree design into the rubber surface.

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Schechter Day School



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Bill Motchan lives in the West Loop and is the author of the West Loop Wanderings blog, published in the now defunct Chicago Journal.

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Malcolm Barnett

MAY 29, 2013

Wish she were in St.Louis! Glad you're back at it. I missed your postings.

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Juli Ordower

MAY 30, 2013

Malcolm-

I can work with you remotely! I have family in St. Louis and I designed a garden for them using pictures they sent. Shoot me an email through my website and we can discuss.

Juli Ordower