



Andy Sturgeon's garden in Suncheon, South Jeolla (right) is similar to the garden he designed for the 2010 RHS Chelsea Flower Show (left). Due to the weather, the photo of his finished garden in Suncheon was unavailable at the time of this article's publication. Provided by Andy Sturgeon

Sowed in Britain, gardener's career grows global

By Kim Hyung-eun

British garden and landscape designer Andy Sturgeon is a firm believer that through gardens and landscapes, we can make the world a better place and help people lead more pleasant lives.

Sturgeon, who was raised just outside southwest London and now lives in Brighton, England, grew up helping his parents with gardening as they were amateur gardeners.

With a resolute, yet vague liking toward nature and outdoors, he studied tropical plants and indoor landscaping at the Welsh College of Horticulture. And today, he is one of the world's leading garden and landscape designers, with over 30 international awards to his name.

Sturgeon was in Korea in March to create a unique English-style garden for the Suncheon Bay Garden Expo that will kick off its six-month run Saturday in Suncheon, South Jeolla. The expo is Korea's first garden expo.

"It's a good idea to get designers from around the world," he said when asked to give advice to Suncheon officials so that the expo will be a success. Suncheon officials have invited international designers from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the U.S. and Japan.

The 47-year-old says he gets most of his inspirations from his interest in people, just the way that the world fits together, as well as current affairs.

The 300-square-meter (3229-square-foot) show garden he created in Suncheon is also based on his life experiences.

The designer says while he tends to emphasize hard landscaping, structures and architecture in his gardens, he always tries to make gardens that are "timeless," thereby opting for natural materials such as stone and wood, instead of "new materials" that are shiny, metallic, glass and plastic.

Over the last 20 years, Sturgeon has created many works around the world — small and large, public and private. Yet, when asked if

there was still a project he'd like to do, he said he envisions to create "a large park that will change people's lives."

He added that he finds the most satisfaction when he creates "something" where there was nothing initially — making it a new place, a place where people go to meet each other and share an experience.

The Korea JoongAng Daily sat down last month with Sturgeon — who is also an author, freelance journalist and broadcaster, to talk about his work in Suncheon and much more.

Q. First, what can you tell us about your work at the Suncheon Bay Garden Expo?

A. It's a metaphor for life. The idea is when you come into the garden, you have a number of choices. Once you've committed to one of those choices, you have to follow it all the way through. And as you journey through the garden you can look through and see the other path and what you might have experienced had you taken that route. But you can't get through to it.

The journeys are slightly different depending on which way you go. But the idea isn't that one way is better than the other way. It's just that life is different and it presents different opportunities to you. In fact, all paths lead to the same destination. At the end of the garden there is the courtyard with water. And it's something like a sanctuary. So it's a reward for what you've experienced in life.

Where did you get your inspiration for such an idea?

I suppose it's an accumulation of ideas and things that have happened to me in my life. When I left school, I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I became a gardener almost by accident. I didn't make a very active choice. It wasn't until I was in my late 20s that I started to realize that I could make choices and I could control my life.

In the last few years, I traveled all over the world to do garden design and the fact that I can do that as a gardener I find amazing. So it's the result of all these choices. If I hadn't started to take those decisions, then I wouldn't be doing this. I'd be looking after a garden amongst the grass back in England. So it's really about that. I consider myself very lucky. So it's also about the recognition of that.

You said "you became a gardener almost by accident." Tell us more about how you became a gardener in the first place.

When I was at school, I was very interested in nature — mostly animals, to be honest — but it was also being outdoors. I was very active, doing lots of outdoor sports — climbing, walking and kayaking. So I was in the countryside a lot, in touch with nature. And I was interested in design. But I didn't really know what to do.

My brother was a landscape gardener, so he was making gardens. And that's how I accidentally got a job working with him. And I very soon realized that I really like doing it. It was a combination of everything I liked. It was about being outside, it was doing something being fit and very active, it was to do with nature and I was making something. It was very satisfying and I could stand back and look at what I've done at the end of the day.

The British people are known for their particular love for gardens and landscaping. What do you think makes British gardens and landscaping so special?

There are a few things. One of them is our climate. We are very lucky because we can grow a huge range of plants. It's because our winters aren't as cold as they are here and our summers aren't too hot. So it means we can grow just a really big range of plants — I think bigger than anywhere else.

And our heritage is such that we've collected plants from all around the world. In the 18th and 19th centuries everybody traveled in Europe, so our gardens are a combination of lots of other people's ideas — not just from England, but from Italy, France and so on. We brought all these ideas back and we picked the best's best.

And the third thing is that the English are obsessed with gardens so they spend so much time and money on that, which other countries, don't. [Why so obsessed?] I don't know — something in our DNA. We are obsessed with the physical act of gardening, growing things.

It must be a challenge when working overseas as you have to work with a local planting palette. What are some of your most memorable overseas projects?

The show garden I did in Japan in 2010. Usually [when you work overseas], you don't know what to expect with the people who are making the garden, the contractors, the quality of the plants, and all that sort of things. The contractors were excellent. The plants were excellent. And everything just fit in the place.

The theme of the show was world peace. So I made a garden that was demonstrating several things: I had pairs of walls which had these metal "arms" reaching out toward each other. And where they met, it was a tree — which is the symbol of hope and peace.

So it was about warring nations, or two people arguing or whatever it might be meeting and embracing. And the journey through the garden was also up and down and left and right — it was a difficult route. And the water was swirling around, like the turmoil, unrest and unhappiness around the world.

It's a very interesting thing for me to go overseas because the things that people like aren't what I'd expected them to like, trying to understand why that is and what makes people tick — that's part of the excitement for me, what



Andy Sturgeon believes gardens can make the world a better place. By Park Sang-moon

makes people different. The thing with the world now is that a lot of places you go, it's the same. You can travel a long way and see things you know — McDonald's, Starbucks. But in this part of the world [gardening culture], people do think differently. It's refreshing.

Lastly, what do you think gardens mean to mankind?

Often it's subconscious, but I think it's just about connecting people with nature — which is something that we all have inside us. But I think we lose that connection, especially if you live in the city where you are not so aware of the seasons and wildlife. I think gardening just puts you back in touch with it. And I think that's important to your soul.

Part of the joy of gardening that most people find is the idea of sowing some seeds and watching them grow. It's almost like an explanation of what life is about — the cycle of life. Something grows, it makes some seeds and it dies — that kind of circle. I think it's something that we need to be reminded of.

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(From top) A garden in the Netherlands is one of those featured at the Suncheon Bay Garden Expo; various landscaping and installation works; the Suncheon Bay International Wetland Center. The six-month garden expo, the first of its kind in Korea, kicks off Saturday and includes gardens by several international designers. Provided by the organizers

Expo has bevy of ticket, transport options

By Kim Hyung-eun

Tickets

A one-day pass costs 16,000 won (\$14.35) for adults; 12,000 won for older children (aged between 13 and 18); and 8,000 won for younger children (aged between four and 12). Prices are cheaper for groups — a group of over 30 Koreans and a group of over 10 foreigners. It is 13,000 won for adults; 10,000 for older children; and 6,000 for younger children.

There is also a two-day pass, which costs 24,000 won for adults, as well as a six-month pass that allows entrance any time throughout the expo's six-month run, which costs 60,000 won for adults. In addition, during the summer months — June to August — there is a nighttime pass that allows entrance after 5 p.m., which costs 8,000 won for adults.

Those with any type of pass can also enjoy other tourist attractions for free. They include Naganeupseong, Suncheon Bay, drama filming locations, Deep Rooted Tree Museum and Suncheon Forest Lodge. They can also enter some temples at a 50-percent discounted price.

For more information about tickets, contact the organizing committee either at www.2013expo.or.kr or 1577-2013.

Accommodations

It is a chronic problem of Korean festivals held outside Seoul to suffer from a shortage of accommodations. Officials of the organizing committee say that they have secured 471 accommodation facilities in Suncheon — including five hotels, which amount to 6,860 rooms. They say it means 6,000 visitors can spend a night in Suncheon.

They also argue that they have transformed motels — which are often deemed a cheap alternative mostly for lovers — into pleasant accommodations for families. In addition, they say they are offering unique experiences such

as *hanok* (traditional Korean houses) stay, temple stay and auto camping.

In case there's still a shortage, Suncheon is seeking help from accommodations in nearby cities such as Yeosu, Gwangyang, Gurye, Gohyeung and Boseong — all of which are a 20- to 30-minute drive away. All of this information can be found on the expo's Web site, www.2013expo.or.kr. In addition, the Suncheon government has asked people to limit the usage of cars in an attempt to alleviate traffic congestion for visitors.

Food

It's true that the food of South Jeolla — where Suncheon is located in — is well-known compared to food from other regions. Known by the nickname of Namdo Food (with "Namdo" referring to South Jeolla), it's known for its strong yet tasty sauces and fresh and various seafood and vegetables.

Suncheon is also known for its wide range of seafood dishes. They include cockles, which are known to be rich in protein and low in fat. A dish of cockle sashimi is a delicacy in Suncheon. There are also mudskippers, the fish that inhabit clean mudflats, which are a popular ingredient for various stews. Webfoot octo-

pus — now in season — is also a good option.

Suncheon officials also recommend a vegetable dish called "*godeulbbaegi*," a type of Korean lettuce. The young leaves and roots of the *godeulbbaegi* are edible, according to officials, and thus, they are used in many different foods. In Suncheon, it's mainly used for making a type of kimchi, a fermented Korean cabbage dish.

Transportation

The venue is accessible by planes, buses or trains. It is a 20-minute drive from the Yeosu Airport for those traveling by plane; a 10-minute drive from the Express Bus Terminal for those opting for a bus; and also a 10-minute drive from the Suncheon Station for those choosing to visit by train.

Those driving from northeastern Seoul are advised to take Gyeongbu Highway, Cheonan Highway, Iksan-Wanju Highway and Wanju-Suncheon Highway; from northwestern Seoul it is desirable to take Gyeongbu, Cheonan, Wanju-Suncheon; and from southwestern Seoul, one can take Seohaean Highway, Pyeongtaek-Jacheon Highway, Gyeongbu Highway, Cheonan Highway, Iksan-Wanju Highway and Wanju-Suncheon Highway.

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(From left) A hanok accommodation in Yeosu called O Dong Jae; *godeulbbaegi*, a type of Korean lettuce that is popular in Suncheon. The expo offers several ticketing options and is accessible by planes, buses and trains. [JoongAng Ilbo]