

MEMBER FOCUS – ST CANICE ROOFTOP

PEPO BOTANIC DESIGN



HELPING HANDS

A huge turnout rolled up their sleeves and dug in for the planting day at the St Canice Rooftop Garden. Raised planters were primarily used, and there was a no-dig garden bed demonstration as well.



The back story:

The project started when Rob Caslick contacted the Sydney City Farm Community Group (SCFCG) about the possibility of a City Farm in the King's Cross area of Sydney. Rob runs the Inside Out Organic Soup Kitchen at St Canice Catholic Church, and thought it would be great to grow their own ingredients. Initial ideas included creating a garden where the car park is, and putting the car park underground. The cost for this was way over the budget, so they moved to plan B which was to make use of the rooftop over the kitchen.

Getting off the ground:

Rob has seemingly endless energy and so got to work with organising funds and people to make the garden. He did some crowd funding and got support from the City of Sydney. Despite not knowing much about gardening, he managed to gather together a group of enthusiastic volunteers, as well as get businesses on board. There was a lot of good will and contributions from firms such as Pepo Botanic Design, Built and Alpine Nurseries.

Pepo was involved from the beginning through Nicola Cameron's connection with SCFCG. They took it on as a pro bono job, doing the design and detailed drawings for the rooftop layout and planters. Even if some of the details had to be dropped due to budget constraints, the planned layout is still there!

PLANTING DAY

Nicola (right) and Eve of Pepo Botanic Design; Craig Rich, of Alpine Nurseries, with his band of happy helpers.

Construction:

The rooftop garden was built over a month or so. Refugees, from nearby accommodation linked to the church, got involved and some were able to register with Green Staff and be paid. Although the initial idea was for recycled materials to be used, this wasn't viable in the end. Pavers were from Surface Gallery and the raised supports for the tiles were from Elmich Australia. The construction team was a combination and collaboration of people who Rob and Pepo pulled together, and Built allocated some of their staff and Hills Bark Blowers contributed the soil. It was a huge effort of donations and support to get it all happening.

Planting day:

There was a massive planting day on 18 October 2014, when about 25-30 people were expected to turn up but it ended up being more like 70! Alpine Nurseries supplied the plants free of charge, Pepo tagged the plants for the different areas, Botanic Gardens staff did no-dig garden demos, and everyone got planting.

The plants are all productive in the three distinct areas (herb, vegie and native), the idea being the crops will be used in the soup kitchen. Others involved in the ongoing plant selection range from the Botanic Gardens staff, to restaurateur Kylie Kwong, to an agronomist refugee from Africa who prepared a long list of plants to be used which he will be involved in planting and showing people how to use them.

Success and evolution:

There is a huge interest in the garden, from professionals to refugees to the homeless, to be involved in watering, weeding and programs being established such as evening poets in the garden, cooking, story sharing and recitals. The garden itself is being used to develop horticultural therapy programs in conjunction with St Vincents Hospital. It's an evolving thing and certainly something that's not finished, not for a long time. Rob is the "champion" every good idea needs to make it a reality. He had no idea about gardening, but was able to get the necessary people on board. Nicola is committed to ongoing involvement, and enjoys seeing the rewards as it develops – hearing a St Vincents' nurse describe how a patient reacted so positively after spending time at the garden watering and connecting with plants, or helping in the soup kitchen using as much as can be used from the garden – tomatoes, zucchini, eggplants and more.

Future:

A huge composting system is being set up, to recycle from the garden and local residents. The garden will continue to develop as a venue for programs and events. This is a community project that's had a large design input rather

ROOFTOP DESIGN

Different height planters, seating and floating pavers create a streamlined, easy to use rooftop garden.



than a random bit-by-bit process. The balance of planted boxes, open space and defined areas within the confined rooftop makes it a very useable garden and people seem to be drawn to it. Many go there because they just want to be in the garden. It's different from a private garden and it has something unique that is important to them. Now that's something to be a part of!

DETAILS:

✦ Rooftop Garden, St Canice Catholic Church, Roslyn Street, Elizabeth Bay, Sydney [L](#)



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