

Watershed

Artist: Peter Richards

April 2014

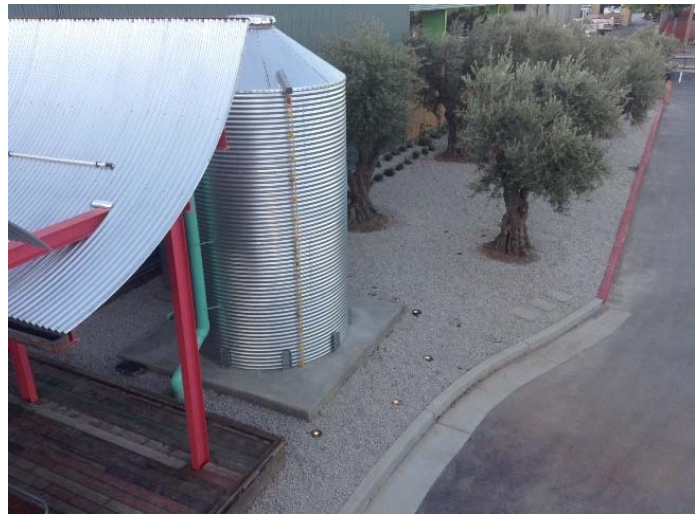
San José Environmental Innovation Center, 1608 Las Plumas Ave, San José, CA 95133 / Council District 3

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Watershed, created by Oakland artist Peter Richards, is an environmental artwork integrating its conceptual and philosophical underpinnings with its functional role at the San José Environmental Innovation Center.

The San José-Environmental Innovation Center (SJEIC) offers three much-needed services with economic and environmental benefits that extend countywide: *Prospect Silicon Valley*, which supports emerging transportation, building, and energy technologies; *Habitat for Humanity ReStore*, a retail and donation center for home improvement goods; and a Santa Clara

County *Household Hazardous Waste Facility* (HHW). With the help of the federal New Markets Tax Credit program, the City of San José rehabilitated an outdated and underutilized facility into a showcase of energy- and water-efficient practices. The City’s Environmental Services Department is the property owner and tenant coordinator. More about the SJEIC can be found here: www.sjenvironment.org/eic



Above: View of *Watershed*, rainwater storage and old growth olives



Above: Overhead view of *Watershed*

The artwork is a sculptural assemblage installed adjacent to the HHW, and is composed of integrated elements that relate to a fundamental of human existence: gathering and storing energy. The location of the artwork next to a facility that manages waste that requires special handling was inspirational to the artist in his consideration of human relations to earth, water, and food. With emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of food – through the incorporation of beautiful historic olive trees, and water – with the creation of the water feature based on an historic “flip-flop flume”, these elements are employed as metaphors for basic needs. These elements include historical and current references to technologies and methodologies. In this context, they become suggestive of the fundamental aspects of human existence weighed against the continuing stream of materials that moves through our lives at various levels of expense and consequence, i.e., what we need versus what we want and no longer want and must dispose of.

The 6,600 gallon water storage tank collects and stores rainwater captured from the EIC roof. This water is used to irrigate a grove of 100-year-old olive trees. The adjacent “watershed” is constructed of materials salvaged from the demolition of a former onsite building and materials no longer used in the main building. This structure houses a metering device for distributing water between two basins constructed from oblong stock tanks. This tableau of a beautiful and romantic garden system offset by the mechanical workings of the watershed also includes a viewing window into the HHW Building revealing the workings of a receiving plant, which processes, packages and ships household hazardous wastes.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Peter Richards is Senior Artist Emeritus at the Exploratorium (an innovative science museum in San Francisco, California) where he led establishment of its celebrated program that embeds artists into the development of exhibits at the museum. Peter shares his enthusiasm for nature and the elements through his work. His engaging outdoor public sculptures and immersive landscaped environments bring such phenomena as wind and tidal movement into a larger cultural context. Peter’s local works include *Wave Organ* at waters edge in San Francisco, *Philosophers Walk* at McClaren Park in San Francisco, and *Byxbee Landfill Park – Pole Field* in Palo Alto. He holds an MFA from the Rinehart School of Sculpture in Baltimore, Maryland and a BA in Art from Colorado College. More about his work can be found at <http://www.peterrichardsart.com/>

Collaborators: SWA Group, Mary Soulis

Fabricators: Gizmo Art Production Inc, MPM Concrete Construction

From the Artist’s website:

I have an interest in creating physical places that give people a heightened awareness of their surroundings. I am interested in the contextual components that give meaning to a place and I like creating situations where people have a feeling of being in the moment, and a sense of being some where special. I work to create places that encourage people to ask questions, to create their own stories, and draw their own conclusions

My working process follows an interactive model of gathering and exchanging information and ideas. I particularly enjoy working with community groups and engaging people in dialogue about their visions for improving the places where they live and work. I believe this awareness leads to better decisions about these places and better stewardship.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC ART PROJECT

The City of San José Public Art Program seeks to build community identity through artworks and exhibitions that enhance the civic landscape. Through active community engagement, public art strives to reflect the city’s diversity, historic richness, and envision its present and future.

The Public Art Program is part of the City’s Office of Cultural Affairs, a division of the Office of Economic Development. The Public Art Program was established by a 1984 municipal ordinance that provides public art through funding from City capital improvement projects.

For further information and photos, please contact the San José Public Art Program.

