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COYLE & CARON, 781-545-0570,
rampantlycreative.com



SOLID DESIGN Sally Coyle and Quentin Caron (top) try to think like the animals that will inhabit their exhibits. To make a realistic fallen ficus tree and other flora at the Franklin Park Zoo's new gorilla exhibit, the pair worked with concrete and fine tools, then used a palette of earthy paints.

In their latest project, landscape designers Sally Coyle and Quentin Caron set out to stimulate the senses of the residents. So they created a tantalizing centerpiece: a fallen ficus tree made from concrete, pocked with imitation lichen, that begs to be traversed. They also carved crannies perfect for hiding things like snacks, and they installed big eye hooks to hold vines and ropes for swinging and climbing.

If early feedback is any indication, the husband-and-wife team got the details just right in their latest commission – helping to create the new \$2.3 million gorilla habitat at Boston's Franklin Park Zoo.

After the alarming escape three years ago of Little Joe, an adolescent male gorilla, zoo officials set out to create more secure and more interesting living quarters for the animals. Coyle and Caron are used to trying to think like the animals that will inhabit space they design. The couple, who live and work in Scituate, met in 1991 on a project for the New Jersey State Aquarium. They recently finished the Asia Trail exhibit, home to red pandas, sloth bears, and other creatures, for the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

"Designing living exhibits means that there's always some area we can learn from," Caron says. Their firm also does residential landscape design.

For the Franklin Park Zoo exhibit, which took six months to build, the couple designed the trees to withstand the pounding of the gorillas. They had engineers create massive internal steel supports around which Caron and Coyle designed a steel skeletal framework that gives shape to trunks, branches, and roots. Caron wielded a pump that spewed concrete onto the structure, and then he and a team of artists formed the wet compound with trowels and fine tools, including dental instruments, into delicately arched roots and branches. To create the "lichens" clinging to the trees, Caron threw handfuls of concrete against the trunks. The final step – painting trees, rocks, and posts – transformed the gray landscape into a lush jungle.

Last month, Caron and Coyle watched from the other side of the triple-layered glass that separates viewers from the exhibit as Little Joe, who's now 14, returned to public view for the first time since his escape. He joined the zoo's six other gorillas in taking up residence in the new habitat. "To see them charge out into the habitat and claim it was wonderful," Caron says.

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HOME AGAIN Little Jon, who escaped from his old digs three years ago, is on view again in the zoo's new and improved \$2.3 million gorilla habitat.

