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Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival buds creativity in local resident

One woman, her hedge, and a haiku

by Francesca Bianco on April 20th, 2017 at 10:09 AM



Point Grey resident Lesley Donaldson stands in front of her Haiku Hedge on Collingwood Street.

FRANCESCA BIANCO

Lesley Donaldson has always loved her cherry trees. She's lived in her Point Grey home since 1980, but every year when the blossoms announce spring's arrival, it feels like the first time.

"I always go a little crazy when my cherry trees come out and I've got all of the blossoms," she says, in an interview with the *Straight*. "There are so many aspects about them that I like."

But what she likes best is writing poems about them. For the past five years Donaldson has transformed her tall green hedges into an open haiku anthology. Walk down Collingwood Street to Point Grey Road and you will find her laminated haiku in pastel colours strung all along the property's edge.

For some, the address may ring a bell. It is also home to Brazilian artist João Loureiro's 2014 Vancouver Biennale installation. *Vancouver Novel* is an LED screen that displays a series of personal status updates. The piece is a meditation on society's social-media voyeurism, asking where the boundary of our public and private lives rest.

"The biennale artwork changed the feeling of my home," Donaldson says. "People stop and ask about it and we have a laugh if they don't like it. Art brings people together."

João Loureiro's 2014 Vancouver Biennale installation entitled, *Vancouver Novel* at home by Donaldson's hedge.

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Donaldson's passion for haiku began when she entered the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival's [Haiku Invitational](#).

"I teach writing for children and thought it would be really fun. It all evolved from there," she says. For Donaldson, the Haiku Hedge is a celebration of the local cherry blossom festival and a reminder of life's ephemerality.

"Haiku lends itself to writing around the seasons," Donaldson says. "You have an everyday image that hints at something so much deeper. And often in spring with the cherry trees it's the sense of time passing."

Even if it's not immediately clear, Donaldson says, there will be something there that relates to your own life.



Donaldson moved to Canada from her home country of New Zealand in 1979.

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The traditional haiku form is an exercise in the power of minimalism. The brief poem contains 17 syllables, in lines that alternate in a 5-7-5 pattern. A juxtaposition of two contrasting images is vital for a haiku to tug at heartstrings.

But haiku does not always have to be emotionally stirring. Donaldson says she purposefully tries to put up new poems every year that are light and humorous. "I'm a little irreverent. That is always coming out."



Donaldson's take on the freedom theme for this year's Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival

FRANCESCA BIANCO

On the [Haiku Hedge](#) are Donaldson's own poems intermingled with her students' and ones from famous Japanese haiku masters like Matsuo Bashō and Kobayashi Issa.

In the affluent Point Grey neighbourhood, often seen as isolated, the Haiku Hedge is another way for Donaldson to reach out to the greater Vancouver community.

"Whenever I leave the house there is somebody either commenting on the haiku or photographing them," she says. "There was one man who stood there for a long time. He must have read a haiku that resonated with him and he just stood there. For me that was quite special."

The Haiku Hedge will be on show on the corner of Collingwood and Point Grey Road for as long as the cherry trees are in bloom.

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