

## Tears came to my eyes when she spoke

The Playhouse was packed, people coming from all over to attend a lecture by the charismatic Zeta Cobb. I'm using the word charismatic advisedly. At points during the lecture tears came to my eyes. During the Question and Answer section, one woman said that if she had tried to ask a question during the lecture, she couldn't have because she would have begun to cry. My friend Gwen Martin wrote me, "One of the few times I feel I've been in the presence of a kind of genius. If I were 30 years younger I would go and work for free at her place and worship at her feet."

Having made a lot of money in fiber optics, Cobb decided to go back home to Fogo Island, "an island off an island", to help keep the place going. When she was a child, 6000 people populated it, but now there are only 2500. She spent 10 million dollars of her own money and aided by the governments of Newfoundland and Canada built a remarkable inn. The inn is owned by the people of the island under the Shorefast Foundation. The profits go back to them. Some islanders staff the inn, others give tours, guide walks, run bed and breakfasts and restaurants.

A film about Cobb's project, "Strange and Familiar: Architecture on Fogo Island," began the evening. The site of the inn is a spectacular rocky outcrop; the building--by architect Todd Saunders--is startling; the interiors are charming, with artifacts created by the islanders themselves. Some of the chairs are inspired by antiques and some by the way boats were built from the roots of trees, but they were re-designed by hip young artists from away. The women of the island created over 200 quilts in the time-honored method but using new designs. Cobb had interesting views on how to meld the old with the new: Fogo Island had to have broadband internet because a community couldn't function without it. The inn and four artist studios are dazzlingly new but built using old methods. Artists are invited to have residencies in the studios.

Her lecture was peppered with analogies and metaphors: "weaving", "design of life". She used the word sacred several times. A sacred space. Home is a sacred place. "People are made from the place they're from." Architecture is "a lovely dance between constraints and possibilities." She quoted E.F. Schumacher, "Nature and culture are the two great garments of human life, and business and technology are the two great tools that can and should serve them." She quoted a Chinese philosopher, "We need to create a global network of intensely local places."

Several times Cobb cited the importance of the three C's: culture, crafts and community. Our province has those in abundance too. What is more, we have an advantage over Fogo—we are closer to the global village but still far enough away to have retained our identity.

She talked about the handmade furniture in the inn, chairs and tables which can also be bought. "This is the revolution that needs to happen, and it will happen: Just as we have

nutritional labelling on food, every single object we buy needs to have a label that tells us where the money went. Geographically, exactly. And too many industries still have a very archaic business model, which is, our job is to simply maximise return on capital...by underpaying people”.

Cobb bemoaned “reductionism,” the nihilism of today. I agreed with her so wholeheartedly that I wanted to jump up and cry “amen.”

One of the inspirations for the project was *Tilting*, about one of the island villages. The blurb for the book reads, “Through photographs, firsthand historical anecdotes, and delicate pencil drawings, author Robert Mellin presents a personal account of Tilting's houses, outbuildings, furniture, tools, fences, and docks...” Shorefast Foundation’s website has a reading list, and since it includes some of my favorite books, it suggests others for me to hunt down.

Newfoundlander Jean Dohaney writes me, “On stormy days in Pt. Verde when school was closed and we children would be ‘carrying on’, my mother would put both hands up to her befuddled head and say, ‘I wish the good Lord would transport me over to the Funks or Fogo Island.”

Architects attended in abundance. I sat next to Pierre Gallant from Moncton. Many architects rose to ask a question, several from Saint John. Art critic Edward Leger introduced me to Carol Wilson, an architect from Portland, Maine. I had attended her lecture and wrote about it. She reads the Salon! The idea that architecture could improve our world would appeal to them. Many artists were there too: Brigitte Clavette, Karen Ruet, Carol Collicutt, Thaddeus Holownia, Julie Scriver, Katherine Hunter.

The Architects’ Association of New Brunswick organized the lecture series, Salon’s John Leroux the driving force. The Telegraph-Journal is one of the sponsors.