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Retired landscape architect traces birth of English gardens in Western Canada

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Clive Justice caught his first glimpse of the English countryside while serving in the Canadian army overseas in the 1940s. He decided then that "this was what the world should look like." Over the next six decades, he created striking English gardens and landscapes throughout Vancouver and around the world. Fittingly, the retired landscape architect has just completed a PhD at SFU that is rooted in his passion for garden flora. He graduates on Oct. 3. Under a special arrangement with SFU's department of history, Justice, who is 76, did a comparative study of the development and re-creation of the English garden in two distinctive Canadian climates, the West Coast and the Prairies. "While the choice of plants was almost unlimited for southwestern B.C., suitable ornamental garden trees, shrubs and flowers had to be invented - found and developed - in order to produce a permanent garden landscape in the Prairies," says Justice. His thesis documents the efforts of both amateur and trained horticulturists in the creation of Prairie gardens. He also traces the story of his own grandparents and great grandparents, who grew gardens in both environments.

Justice studied to become a landscape architect in California and returned to Vancouver to found the city's first landscape architectural firm, Justice, Webb and Vincent Landscape Architects. The firm was responsible for creating several showcase parks and grounds throughout the city and beyond, including the botanical gardens at UBC and campus gardens at the University of Saskatchewan.

When he retired, Justice became a volunteer with the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO) and served as a consultant and advisor for parks, gardens and other landscape restoration projects in Malaysia, India, the Ukraine and the Philippines.

Justice's interest in the rhododendron led him to study the origins of the plant and to trek into the Himalayas and China, where many originated. He considers gardens to be true art forms. "They are works in progress," says Justice, who plans to write about the history of key landscape projects around the city.