



Local Project Goes International in Puento Alto, Santiago, Chile

by Gwyn Kaitis

Approached by the local Mapuche community in 2011 to create a mosaic at the railway station, the original concept by Chilean artist Isidora Paz Lopez was simple. The idea was to create a small, beautiful wall for the local railway station in the Santiago community of Puento Alto through the use of mosaic art depicting the area's natural history and traditions.

Indigenous Art

The Mapuche is a group of indigenous inhabitants of south central Chile and southwestern Argentina. Today they make up 80 percent of the indigenous peoples in Chile, or about 9 percent of the total Chilean population. The Mapuche were traditionally an agricultural society also known for its textiles and silverwork.

Little did Lopez realize that one day over 4,000 meters of drab concrete columns and walls would be adorned with mosaics. The columns, all 84 of them, took an entire community to create. And many of those community members volunteering on the project got the mosaic bug, taking leftover pieces of tile to create their own mosaics at home. But the mosaic art didn't stop there.

The columns and railway station walls were so well received that eventually Lopez was offered an even greater challenge to cover the town square in mosaic art. To accomplish this task, 60 mosaic artists from 22 countries arrived in Puento Alto in January 2014 for a two-week mosaic marathon. A special touch included materials brought by many of the artists from their home countries to be incorporated into the mosaic.



Toadstools grow in city shadows.



Photos Courtesy
of Kim Wozniak



Detail of the new railway wall.



*Over 60 artists work side by side to
complete the railway wall project.*



A toad overlooks the mosaic in progress.

Transforming Communities

Today, no longer ensconced in drab concrete, the Puento Alto rail station, columns, and town square are now truly part of a magical mosaic garden. The artwork depicts local flora and fauna as well as scenes from the history and traditions of the Mapuche people. By all accounts, the local community is enthralled by the resulting mosaic artistry that has earned the community of Puento Alto the title "Mosaic Capital of South America."

Participating Society of American Mosaic Artists (SAMA) member Kim Wozniak, who arrived in 80-degree Santiago after a flight from 15-degree Green Bay, Wisconsin, marveled at the sheer number of artists who came to work on the project and believes that this undertaking could serve as a model for transforming communities throughout the world. Just imagine the drab concrete in your own communities covered in beautiful, sustainable mosaic art. **GA**

The Society of American Mosaic Artists, a nonprofit organization of over 1,200 members, is dedicated to educating, inspiring, and promoting excellence in mosaic arts. SAMA is the largest mosaic arts organization in the world. More information can be found at www.americanmosaics.org.

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