



Discovery play cloches for inclusive nature-based playground



Educational discovery play cloches for new all-abilities playground

Natureworks created a range of educational discovery nodes (play cloches) for an exciting new inclusive playground in Malvern East, Victoria.

The playground at Central Park, designed by **SBLA Studio** and developed by **Terraform Civil** for **City of Stonnington Council**, includes a variety of custom play equipment and tactile elements. Our brief was to create play items that encourage kids and adults to explore and learn about the natural world in an accessible, playful way.

What's a discovery play cloche?

The term *cloche* is derived from the French word for bell, reflecting its typical bell-like shape. Traditionally, a cloche is a dome cover to protect plants or create an enclosed environment.

We've taken that concept further, using the cloche dome shape to hold intriguing mini-environments for playground visitors to explore. The cloches have holes you can look through or reach into. Children or adults are free to touch the items inside but can't remove them.

The cloches are mounted on poles of different heights for access by people of all ages and abilities. Thanks to the Council and project designers, the whole playground was developed to be as accessible and inclusive as possible.



The bell-shaped cloches are installed at different heights so children can access them easily



Peek inside holes to see dioramas!

The discovery play cloches reward childlike curiosity and encourage kids and adults to explore the world around them in a tactile, engaging way.



Children explore play cloches to discover what's inside. Image: Terraform Civil



The cloches contain miniature nature-themed dioramas



What's inside the play cloches?

Each cloche houses a microcosm of life – a tiny representation of the natural world reflecting a specific theme, habitat or ecosystem. They are miniature dioramas (three-dimensional models representing a scene).

When children peer into the cloche, they see micro habitats teeming with miniature animals and vibrant details. This fires their imagination and encourages curiosity about the natural world.

A wide variety of themed dioramas

Here are some of the scenes inside the cloches:

- *Farm animals:* See miniature cows, sheep, and chickens grazing in a pastoral farm setting.
- *Ocean floor:* Explore a marine world with stingrays, dugongs, and colourful fish.
- *Waterways:* Watch frogs hopping and water plants swaying in an aquatic environment.
- *Domestic animals:* Discover horses, bulls and cows, dogs, and pigs with piglets in various lifelike scenarios.
- *Prehistoric world:* Encounter miniature dinosaurs roaming a land of rocks and ferns.
- *Mountainous terrain:* Spot mountain goats climbing rocky landscapes.
- *Reptilian wonders:* Observe lizards, snakes, and crocodiles basking under the sun.
- *Marine invertebrates:* Watch squids, jellyfish, and horseshoe crabs floating in an underwater scene.
- *Creepy crawlies:* Find insects like spiders and beetles crawling up the inside walls.

(The images on this page show a selection of the dioramas)





Designed for playground use

The cloche dome cover is made from sturdy fibreglass with a waterproof finish, to withstand repeated usage and adverse weather. Inside the cloches, the diorama models are waterproof, strong and firmly held down. The scenes are securely enclosed within the cloche cover, which shields them from excess sunlight.

In summary, the cloches are designed to be accessible, engaging and able to cope with the demands of excited young children!

Key facts about the play cloches

- *Sturdy*: made from durable fibreglass, built and finished to withstand outdoor conditions
- *Unique*: Each cloche is hand-painted, ensuring a personalised touch
- *Accessible*: Installed at child height on steel posts
- *Interactive*: Rounded access holes allow light to illuminate the dioramas, and side holes encourage children to touch the scene within
- *Funny*: Some cloches feature playful details such as eyes, beaks, or crawling insects
- *Practical*: Colourful handles enhance the design and make the cloches easy to interact with
- *Compact*: Height and diameter 30cm (tapers to 16cm at top), making the cloches easy to transport and install.

The secure, enclosed design ensures that the miniature scenes remain intact and protected, making them ideal for outdoor installations.



Holes let in light and allow children to see or reach inside



Some cloches have funny faces and crawling bugs



Colourful handles are a practical feature of the cloche covers



Giant Banksia seed pods engage kids in hands-on nature play

As well as the discovery cloches, Natureworks created another nature play item for the Central Park playground – two giant Banksia seed pods for the sandpit area.

Based on the native Australian Banksia, the climb and play structure is designed for safe, tactile play that engages kids with nature.

Right: an Australian Banksia seed pod provided natural inspiration for the Banksia climb & play structure (main images).

Below: mini dioramas at the Natureworks studio, before being transported to the playground and installed in the cloches.



Exciting nature play experiences

At Natureworks, we are committed to creating high-quality themed elements that connect people (especially kids) to the natural world. Our discovery cloches do that in a fun, inclusive way! They can be installed at a playground, park, school, childcare facility or educational centre.

We'd love to provide custom cloches and dioramas to suit your purpose – just ask us!

If you're keen to create interactive, accessible learning experiences, contact Natureworks to enquire about cloches and other quality playground or nature-based theming products.

"Since opening in late 2023, the Central Park all abilities playground has been delighting everyone with its fun and interactive play experiences."

City of Stonnington