

# Site LINES

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## Letter from the Editor

The first quarter of the eighteenth century saw the transformation of the English garden style. At that time the straight allées and symmetrical parterres reflecting the influence of Louis XIV's royal gardener André Le Nôtre were supplanted by a native model of naturalistic landscape design. Known in French as the *jardin anglais*, it was adopted on the continent as an integral feature of the new spirit of Romanticism.

If England had Alexander Pope, Horace Walpole, and Richard Whately to establish its primacy in promoting this sea change, in Germany the new style, which falls into the aesthetic category of the Picturesque, found its proponents in C. C. L. Hirschfeld and Prince Pückler-Muskau. In France the Marquis de Girardin and Jean-Marie Morel also wrote treatises expounding its tenets. In this issue of *Site/Lines*, in an article entitled "Designing with Nature: Jean-Marie Morel's Garden

Theory," Joseph Dispozio explores the work of one of these important and too-little-remembered landscape-design theorists.

French eighteenth-century designers drew on both old and new traditions to create rococo landscape stages for *ancien régime* aristocratic pastimes. Many of the gardens they commissioned no longer exist, but those captured by contemporary artists live on in the imagination. In "Oudry's Gardens of Arceuil," Mary Tavener Holmes shows how the drawings of this garden, with its rocailles, bosquets, grottoes, trellises, terraces, stairs, and faux-perspective allées, denote the spirit of pre-Revolutionary France.

Ironically, in democratic America, the gloriously autocratic landscape style André Le Nôtre created for Louis XIV became the basis of the 1791 plan for the capital of the United States. Ignoring Thomas Jefferson's more modest notions, George Washington's urban planner, Pierre L'Enfant, took Versailles, with its long axes and allées, as his model – a paradigm that he tempered by incorporating existing topography and the scenic attributes of the site.

In this issue, both Gary Hilderbrand and Christopher Vernon discuss the later Beaux-Arts transformation and aggrandizement of Washington's Mall, the core of L'Enfant's 1791 design. Vernon's essay, "Imperializing Washington, D.C.," focuses upon the symbolic meanings of the 1901 McMillan plan for the Mall, which was designed by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., architect Charles F. McKim, and sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens. Here we learn that by the time Congress approved the McMillan plan, America had begun to flex its political muscle on an international scale, engaging in foreign exploits such as the Spanish-American War. Vernon shows how the Mall's original terminal vistas focusing on natural scenery were sacrificed to create an architecturally defined spatial organization.

Hilderbrand's essay, "Evolving the Mall: 'Substantially Complete' or an Open Work for Democracy?" continues the story up to the present. The Mall is the site

of choice for mass political rallies and a repository for memorials and museums. Hilderbrand's perspective as a landscape architect enables him to assess these developments within the context of the Mall as a single public space.

In France, as in America, there was a revivalist shift at the end of the nineteenth century. The geometrical paradigm offered more than two centuries earlier by Le Nôtre was revalorized. Mary Hawthorne takes up this theme in "The Geometry of Emotion: The Gardens of Henri and Achille Duchêne," her account of a visit to the Château of Sassy in the Orne region of Lower Normandy.

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With good green wishes,



Elizabeth Barlow Rogers  
President

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Press

Jack Williams  
*Easy On, Easy Off*  
University of Virginia Press

### On the Cover:

Andrew Ellicott's 1792 revision of L'Enfant's plan of 1791-1792 for the "Federal City," later Washington City, District of Columbia.

# The French Connection: Innovations in Landscape Design in France and America

## Evolving the National Mall: “Substantially Complete” or an Open Work for Democracy?

People across the globe identify Washington’s National Mall with American democracy. When images of Capitol Hill or the south front of the White House drift across broadcast screens or land in schoolchildren’s history books, they carry meanings and messages about Washington’s influence on political, economic, and social conditions around the world. Ideally, they describe spaces from which the government hears and responds to the voice of the people. The Mall is an active and evolving physical embodiment of our republic – one begun more than two hundred years ago by a democratic country that wanted to demonstrate its unity through the organization of its newly founded capital city.

But today’s Mall is not the one that the French architect and engineer Charles Pierre L’Enfant envisioned in his work with President George Washington and future president Thomas Jefferson; nor the one that evolved under Robert Mills, the architect of the Washington Monument; nor even the one envisioned by landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing in the mid-nineteenth century. It is instead the radically reconceived Mall of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and members of the 1902 Senate Park Commission: heavily influenced by European sources and largely executed during the 1930s. Today, eighty years later, more change is under way. Given this history, we must question the declaration by Congress in 2003 that the Mall is a “substantially completed work of civic art” and ask how much stasis we should accept, or how much change we could embrace.

For Americans, the Mall is our preeminent public landscape, the symbolic front yard of our collective ethos and, at times, our collective pathos – a site of unity and contention both. Many redemptive moments of protest and passage have originated or culminated on this plot of land. Who doesn’t identify the Mall with the 1963 March on Washington, for instance, or the 1987 assembly of the AIDS Memorial Quilt? Before the U.S. Department of Energy moved its annual Solar Decathlon to a site well off the Mall, that vast arrangement of student-built projects used to make it seem as if the Mall had

been transformed into our national midway – a lively consumer circus of great proportions, with the icons of democracy captured in the extended view.

From the steps of the Capitol – where we inaugurate our elected Executive every four years before the most commanding urban landscape vista anywhere – the Mall’s long axis ranges toward the horizon and recalls the narrative of the nation’s post-colonial, westward expansion. Two miles away, where the Lincoln Memorial resolutely intercepts the axis, another metaphor looms in marble: Daniel Chester French’s colossal likeness of Abraham Lincoln, conjuring the nation’s emancipation from slavery and its horrendous struggle to remain whole. Lincoln gazes pensively toward the once-divided Congress, contemplating our grave triumph over that weighty national chapter of disunity and human strife (although, of course, he’d observe another kind of division today in the Capitol). We permit these and other narratives to exist in juxtaposition – thereby acknowledging open and multiple interpretations of our history through the Mall’s imagery and associations.

## Partial Rebuild

The nation’s front yard was partially rebuilt in 2012, six years after the National Park Service (NPS) launched its rehabilitation plan for the Mall and its monumental core. Two significant projects came to completion that year: the repair of the upper one-third of the Mall’s eastern half, near the U.S. Capitol, and the reworking of the Lincoln Reflecting Pool at the Mall’s western end. Three more ambitious projects have advanced beyond the stage of national design competitions: the renewal of Union Square; a reimagined Sylvan Grove and Sylvan Theater alongside the Washington Monument; and revisions to areas around Constitution Gardens. These efforts promise more transformative change, should we ever see another Congress willing to uphold its obligation to protect and advance this great legacy. Our legislators need to heed this call. Fortunately, the dedicated agency professionals who work for them and some of the leading designers in the country are positioning the work so that it will be able to move forward when funding – whether by legislative appropriation or private philanthropy – becomes available.

A profound question undergirds the NPS plans: How do we ensure that, as the Mall changes, it continues to represent both a coherent national identity and the overlapping constructs put forth by a pluralistic society – especially as both these things continue to be altered by the course of history? Each transformative project adds to or modifies the Mall’s narrative hold on our shared rituals and national causes.

The two recent pilot projects on the Mall – the rebuilding of its *tapis vert* and the Lincoln Reflecting Pool – have brought about



The Mall at night, with the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, and United States Capitol illuminated.

real change without significantly altering the Mall's features. Both projects have been shaped by a central aim of contemporary design: increasing performance in things we value, while reducing strains on resources. In simple terms, they allow us to keep the Mall as the world knows it, while easing our collective conscience about the environmental costs that water and lawn incur. Today, many landscape professionals, resource managers, and citizens aim to reduce water consumption and adapt or eliminate turf; lawns are both costly and demanding. The aim of projects like the Mall turf renovation is to enable lawns to thrive under stresses – three thousand events are permitted for the Mall each year – without depleting our water supplies or causing nutrient imbalances by drenching soils with nitrogen fertilizer. As for the Reflecting Pool, though purists would see it as an extravagance in this time of necessary water conservation, this consideration must be balanced against the indelible image of the Lincoln Memorial that it fixes in perpetuity. Admittedly, it holds a lot of water – almost 7 million gallons. Before the renovation, leaks and constant refilling used up to six times that each year, from potable sources. But by recasting the fountain's structure and linking the supply and outlet system to the tidal basin's hydrological cycle, the project is expected to save thirty-two million gallons of water annually. In round numbers, these two projects, which were both well executed, cost \$50 million. Important symbols, big investments.

### Origins

L'Enfant, no stranger to symbolism, organized his 1791 plan for Washington around streets named for colonies and a studied, geometrical "balance of power" inspired by the newly ratified U.S. Constitution. The Mall, in contrast, didn't carry a detailed allegorical program and wasn't oriented towards monumentality; that would come much later. It was depicted simply as a wide avenue, flanked by an extensive, park-like precinct designated by President Washington as Reservations No. 1 and 2 – the President's Park and the Mall, respectively – essentially, the new government's first public parks. For L'Enfant, turf held no special importance, and water was neither a precious commodity nor an honorific statement. His plan to drain the land to ease construction and utilize the Washington Canal for transport gave his Mall a pragmatic bent.

Because the new city developed slowly in decades of economic and political turmoil – it had only three thousand residents in 1800 – L'Enfant's Mall languished during the

first half of the nineteenth century. Eventually it became the home of Washington's first major train station and various government facilities. Following plans by Robert Mills and, later, those of Andrew Jackson Downing, its grounds were developed as a series of horticultural gardens surrounding the Smithsonian Institution.

Downing aspired to elevate horticultural matters to a place of prominence in the new republic. He saw his plantations as more than embellishments for L'Enfant's allegorical street plan. Instead, he proposed arrangements of trees that would represent the landscape of the republic in all its botanical diversity – a kind of inventory of North American species and associations, organized along complex, curvilinear geometries that contrasted with L'Enfant's rectilinear frame. He imagined a privileged place for natural science and scenic beauty at the heart of the nation's evolving identity.

Although Downing did not live to see it, his landscape matured over half a century. But by 1900 another vision of democracy was gaining ground. Downing's attempt to position a naturalistic American landscape as a national paradigm, emulating the eighteenth-century Picturesque, would soon give way to breathtaking simplicity and monumentality.

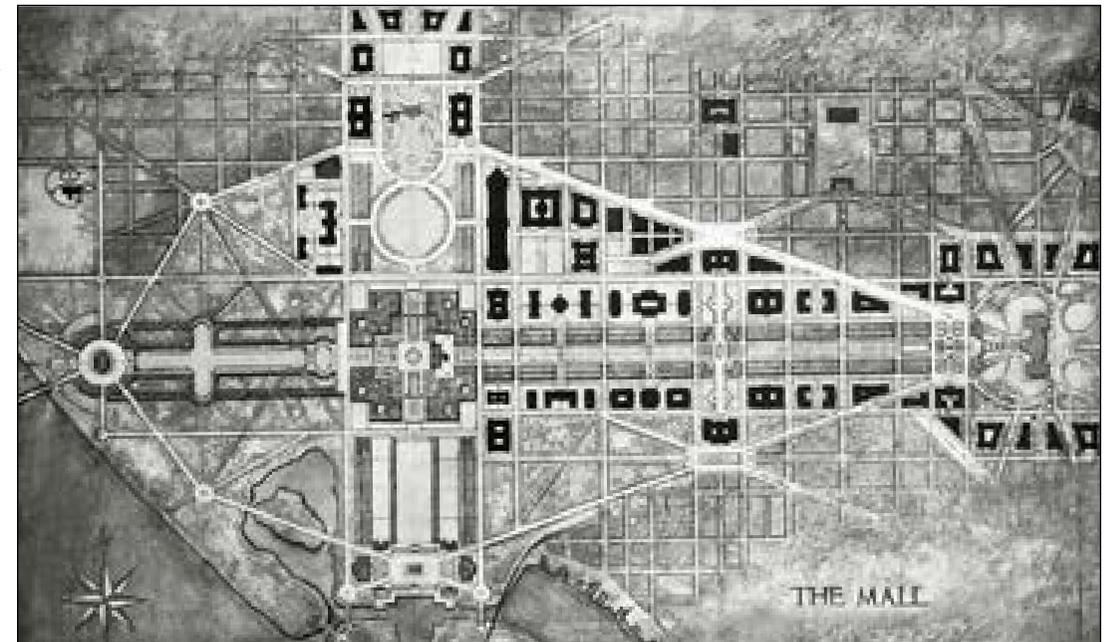
### Radical Change, Continued Evolution

The Senate Park Commission's McMillan Plan, published in 1902, reconceived the Mall as the centerpiece of a vastly enlarged "monumental core." The magisterial ambition of this proposal – doubling the Mall's size, capturing extensive tidelands, clearing run-down neighborhoods, upending Downing's arboretum – never fails to amaze. As many have noted, the McMillan plan shares with L'Enfant's project common roots in seventeenth-century France. L'Enfant's scheme built upon the hierarchical, geometric platting of the French royal gardens conceived by Louis XIV's landscape designer André Le Nôtre. Washington's striking scaffold of

broad diagonals and localized grids harking back to Versailles and other French Classical gardens is centered on the Capitol. It is a plan as impressively systematic and balanced as Le Nôtre's Cartesian-inspired gardens; in the urban context, it produced abundant special streets and squares that could carry meaningful identities. L'Enfant's plan thus afforded, for Washington and for the nation, a way to construe a permanent honor roll for the former colonies, the founders, and the dignitaries who deserved lasting homage in a city that honored memory as one of its organizing conceits.

But if L'Enfant's plan depicted the Mall and the President's Park as settings for the White House and other government institutions, the Mall itself displayed somewhat uncharacteristic asymmetry and an open contour toward the Potomac marshes. The 1902 McMillan proposal, on the other hand, under Olmsted Jr.'s and Charles Follen McKim's guidance, projected a more literal reading of the geometries and compartments of the French royal estate – effectively depicting a grand federal garden with as much equilibrium and balanced closure as its designers could wrestle out of the Mall's further reaches and irregular estuary edge. In contrast to Downing's taxonomic order and lively rhythm of spaces, this plan put forward a more static, predictable compositional structure – a picture of symmetry.

The McMillan Plan remains one of history's most impressive acts of emulation in city planning: one imagines a worn map of Versailles lying on the drafting table, very near the plan's engravers. But this garden association was more than



Plan of the Senate Park Commission, known as the McMillan Plan, 1901–1902.



Here is where we have the chance, in the coming years, to advance the open narrative that supports the people's voice on the Mall. The National Park Service has designated Union Square, where L'Enfant's Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues intersect with the Capitol grounds, as a site that could host organized (and permitted) "free speech" events without trampling the more delicate, rebuilt turf panels and the Lincoln Reflecting Pool. Union Square will be redesigned to provide sturdier infrastructure support and more comprehensive surveillance for events of all kinds.

Rebuilding Union Square as a broad paved plaza will mean eradicating a prior generation's studied revision to the Mall, however. The Capitol Reflecting Pool, completed in 1979 after a Mall rehabilitation plan by Skidmore Owings & Merrill with important guidance by landscape architect Dan Kiley, will be removed or redesigned. But many – though surely not all – support this action because SOM's overscaled reflecting pool awkwardly disrupted linkages between the Capitol Grounds and the Mall itself.

Future protest movements will be giving up something more significant. Once they are directed away from the newly fortified historic areas, activist events will no longer have Lincoln's redeeming, iconic presence as backdrop. The appealing mythology of Lincoln presiding and tacitly endorsing modern-day demands for parity or justice will be lost with the change in location. But the new site is visible from the west front of the Capitol and adjacent to L'Enfant's broadest street, Pennsylvania Avenue, connecting directly with the White House. If we accept that organized protest needs to be controlled – something not everyone can concede – there is wisdom in the choice.

If Lincoln's gaze is relinquished in this trade-off, there is another poignant witness that could help guard and defend the cause of free speech in a newly configured Union Square. Henry Merwin Schrady's arresting monument to America's eighteenth president, General Ulysses S. Grant, commands the head of the square and will remain forever in place. The Capitol Reflecting Pool practically neutralized this great work of public sculpture, the Mall's largest. Reconfiguring the pool will return Schrady's impressive construction to its rightful stature. The equestrian Grant, flanked by charged cavalry and artillery groupings on his left and right, is himself dignified and calm astride his mount. Though history has reflected unevenly on his presidency, upon his death in 1885, many Americans associated him with the country's reunion. In Schrady's depiction, the General appears to be casing the

future, hopeful about the restored republic. He looks guardedly toward the western horizon – where Lincoln's memorial would soon be realized. Twelve years after Grant's statue was erected, his gaze would connect directly with Lincoln's across the Mall's long axis. Herein lies another of those beautiful, meaningful tensions that have auspiciously accrued on the Mall – cumulative testimony to our capacity to give voice to the deeply moving themes that animate our people and their causes.

### **An Open Work and the People's Right to the City**

So the Mall's history is built and rebuilt upon visions that are modestly changed or radically revised. Whether they involve freighted allegories and symbols or abstractions and reductive simplicity, we need to accept that they are potentially transient. Their meanings will change. And if, in our time, some come into disfavor, we cannot simply wave them off and start again – though there is plenty of evidence that we are guilty of that.

For this author, the potential success of both the current generation of changes and the next crucially rests on seeing the Mall as an open, evolving work – not a stable, fixed scene with established meanings, but a dynamic, responsive landscape that can accept revision when the time is right and when arguments for change build appropriate thrust and momentum. We have begun to revive the Mall's infrastructure, again, this time investing massively in water and turf to ensure that it can continue to host ritual and everyday events. We have identified important places where the Mall could change more radically – again. Whether we do this work in the name of historic preservation – because we are saving things and sustaining our heritage – or call it design and see it as agency in an ongoing national narrative, we need to hold fast to an elastic view of democracy and its expression. If democracy's project for Washington includes, as in Henri LeFebvre's formulation, *the people's right to the city* – our collective power to transform the capital and reciprocally transform ourselves – then we can be fixed in our dedication to the search, but not exactly fixed in the answers. This is how we will keep Washington, D.C., the world's reference city of democracy, vital and relevant to our nation and to people everywhere around the world. And it's how we will keep the Mall as our own evolving, working front yard.

– Gary R. Hilderbrand

### **Imperializing Washington, D.C.**

After its 1898 victory in the Spanish-American War, the United States unexpectedly found itself in possession of an empire. The climate of patriotic fervor, at once frenetic and jubilant, galvanized interest in improving Washington's urban fabric to reflect its new imperial status. In 1901, Senator James McMillan convened the United States Senate Park Commission to orchestrate the task, appointing Chicago architect Daniel Hudson Burnham its chairman. Burnham was joined by a fellow architect, Charles F. McKim – like Burnham, a champion of neoclassical architecture; landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (the senior Olmsted's retirement and failing health precluded his participation); and sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens. Burnham was awarded his prestigious post largely owing to his famous managerial success with the construction of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Actually, the commission's formation amounted to a reunion of sorts: all of its members had contributed to the Chicago fair. Now the coterie was charged with the restoration and expansion of Pierre Charles L'Enfant's 1791 foundational plan for the national capital.

Far removed from the iconic urban landscape with which we are familiar today, Washington then registered not L'Enfant's plan but the romantic, picturesque vision of pioneering American landscape gardener Andrew Jackson Downing. At President Millard Fillmore's direction, Downing had prepared a revisionist "*Plan Showing Proposed Method of Laying Out the Public Grounds at Washington*" in 1851. Significant aspects of Downing's plan were implemented through time and by 1901, instead of L'Enfant's open vistas (west from the Capitol and south from the White House), Washington's public grounds remained adorned with a sylvan mantle of meandering groves, camouflaging the original plan's spatial clarity. As Burnham was now charged with restoring L'Enfant's original scheme, an overview of the Frenchman's design enables one to better discern the extent and scope of the commission's revisions to it.

L'Enfant's layout is conventionally categorized as a Baroque plan, derived from André Le Nôtre's royal gardens at Versailles (1661) – a somewhat pedestrian view apparently held by the commission itself. L'Enfant's design, however, was far from a simple, mechanistic exercise in geometric abstraction. In fact, it encapsulated a nuanced response to the future capital's physical site. Although it seems almost unimaginable today, in the late-eighteenth century the locale was distinguished for its picturesque beauty. As described by Washington, D.C., architect and architectural historian

Don Alexander Hawkins, the land was a mosaic of “hilly and level, wet and dry, forested and cultivated, rocky and fertile.” Many period accounts extolled the unusual natural beauty of the area, and L’Enfant was especially aware of its grandeur and variety. After experiencing the site firsthand, the architect praised its suitability, adding, “Nature had done much for it, and with the aid of art it will become the wonder of the world.” In L’Enfant’s urban vision for the new American capital, the natural world would be artfully accentuated, not subsumed.

When conceptualizing his layout, L’Enfant sought to reconcile a geometric template with the site’s undulating topography. The architect first positioned government edifices and monuments on elevated sites or public squares “commanding,” as he put it, “the most extensive prospects.” These were then linked with diagonal boulevards, enabling not only physical communication but also, again in L’Enfant’s words, “reciprocity of sight.” Having established these reference points or anchors, he overlaid them with an irregular street grid, configuring it so that the orthogonals and the diagonals converged at the squares. At the epicentre of L’Enfant’s plan lay a rotated T-shaped parkland of sorts, its form the outcome of two interlocking axes – one north-south and the other east-west. Crucially, he awarded landscape foci to both armatures of his cross-axial composition, fixing its alignment in response to landforms and potential views. From the hilltop Congress House (today the Capitol), L’Enfant projected an axial Grand Boulevard (today the Mall), leading the eye westward down the greensward, past a diminutive equestrian statue of George Washington (not a monumental obelisk, as later realized) and across the Potomac to rest on the more distant wilderness. The north-south cross axis began at the elevated President’s House (today the White House) and extended south some seven miles to terminate with an aqueous prospect, the convergence of the Potomac River with its eastern branch (today the Anacostia River).

Although aesthetically indebted to the Picturesque, this scenographic landscape appropriation was symbolically potent. In the late eighteenth century, the continental interior, evoked by the natural scenery and aqueous vistas in L’Enfant’s plan, was perceived as a pristine, superabundant, and seemingly limitless frontier that beckoned the fledgling democracy to expand westward. By awarding landscape pre-eminence in his cross-axial strategy, L’Enfant recognized that he must not sacrifice vistas to the architectural configuration of his plan. In preserving and accentuating

them, he valorized America’s natural world.

After undertaking considerable historical analysis (including a European study tour, with an obligatory call at Versailles), the Senate Park Commission officially presented its revision of L’Enfant’s design – also known as the McMillan plan, after the commission’s Congressional sponsor – in 1902. Most fundamentally, the new layout underscored the commission’s premise that imperial aspirations, rather than architectural allusions to republican Rome, should manifest the nation’s character. Despite its mandate to restore L’Enfant’s foundational layout, the commission had made significant departures from it, most prominently in its proposal to disassemble L’Enfant’s sophisticated landscape optics. Eschewing his axial landscape foci, the commission instead closed L’Enfant’s vistas, replacing their landscape termini with built objects. A memorial to Abraham Lincoln – envisioned, predictably, as a Greco-Roman temple – was now

View of the Mall, circa 1910, with the newly opened National Museum of Natural History in the foreground and the United States Capitol at its eastern terminus in the background. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

to anchor the western end of the east-west axis. Similarly, a pantheon accommodating statues of illustrious national figures – later realized as the Thomas Jefferson Memorial – usurped the Potomac as the southern

terminus of the north-south axis. In the new plan, L’Enfant’s open, expansive Grand Boulevard metamorphosed into a spatial corridor, a *tapis vert*. It was to be defined and accentuated, as the Columbian Exposition’s Court of Honor had been, with neoclassical public edifices and flanking tree plantations, becoming an extended, linear courtyard of sorts. Eventually, with the McMillan plan’s incremental implementation, the original references to the surrounding wider landscape were sacrificed to Federal monumentalism.

The McMillan plan’s spatially transformative monumentality can be seen as symbolically underscoring the passing of America’s frontier, which Frederick Jackson Turner had famously declared closed at, aptly enough, the Chicago Fair. Its scale and scope anticipated not just a national audience but an international one, as well. Seeing through what he believed to be the design’s imperial façade, critic Lewis Mumford registered the gravity of its symbolism. In *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization*, written shortly after the Lincoln Memorial’s 1922 completion, he mused that “the America that Lincoln was bred in, the homespun and humane and humorous America that he wished to preserve, has nothing in common with the sedulously classic monument that was erected to his memory. Who lives in that shrine, I wonder – Lincoln, or the men who conceived it; the leader who beheld the mournful victory of

the Civil War, or the generation that took pleasure in the mean triumph of the Spanish-American exploit, and placed the imperial standard in the Philippines and the Caribbean?”

Although the McMillan plan is generally esteemed by historians today, it was not implemented without protest, and fundamental to the dissent was the fact that the plan’s regular geometry and spatial formality would require the destruction of thousands of majestic trees. The commission conceded that some of the Mall’s parklands – carefully configured to emulate the natural world – had been highly



developed according to the landscape art of the day, but it nevertheless viewed them as archaic relics. Burnham and his colleagues had underestimated the degree to which the public valued Washington's urban forest, and opposition to their plan ensued.

Most visibly and famously, the *Evening Star*, one of the capital's newspapers, lampooned the commissioners in a front-page cartoon drawing entitled *Group of Le Nôtre–McKim Tree-Butchers and Nature-Butchers*. The image's extended caption explains: "[The group is] represented as on their way with axes to make a 'clean-sweep,' as they proclaim, of all the grand old trees on the Mall. They are costumed in architectural straight lines. Architect McKim heads the party. He is blowing a big horn – his own. He also has a big head." In the sketch's background are men bearing a great number of tubbed trees, their canopies sheared into cubes, to replace those that would be cut down. Although the commission's chair was identified in neither title nor caption, the cartoon included an axe-wielding Burnham, observed by a terrorised and soon-to-be homeless bear cub.

The protest was not simply an aesthetic clash or a reaction to the horror of "butchering" nature. The outcry had more fundamental, albeit implicit, political and symbolic dimensions. Landscapes configured with regular, geometric layouts, especially on an expansive urban scale, were associated with European autocracies. This is implicit in the cartoon described above, with its reference to Le Nôtre, King Louis XIV's landscape gardener (curiously, the cartoonist, Clifford Berryman, seemed to feel that Le Nôtre needed no introduction) and its inclusion of potted topiaries, used in the French royal gardens. In contrast, Picturesque landscapes – both naturally-occurring and designed – came to be seen in the nineteenth century as emblematic of the New World's wilderness and, in turn, American democracy. The desire to convey a more republican message may well have underpinned Downing's decision to revise L'Enfant's layout. Similarly, Downing's predecessor Robert Mills had deliberately positioned the Washington Monument off-axis, motivated by a picturesque landscape aesthetic. This was an optical effect the commissioners dismantled.

As the furor enveloping the McMillan plan suggests, the American and democratic connotations of the Picturesque remained relevant to U.S. citizens in the twentieth century's opening decade. Nonetheless, the Senate Park Commission, with its imperial agenda, turned a deaf ear to protest, and Washington as we know it today is largely the outcome of its plan. – Christopher Vernon

### The Geometry of Emotion: The Gardens of Henri and Achille Duchêne

To the extent that most people outside, or even inside, France have any awareness of the landscape architects Achille Duchêne and his father, Henri, it is mainly as the restorers, in the early part of the twentieth century, of the French formal gardens created by André Le Nôtre at Vaux-le-Vicomte more than two hundred years before. Despite the fact that the two men were the country's preeminent landscape architects from around 1880 to 1947, with Achille alone creating or restoring more than six thousand formal gardens in Europe and the Americas, some scholars and critics have persisted in glossing over their contribution. The younger, more famous Duchêne has been particularly slighted – often dismissed as a rote gardener to aristocrats and millionaires, a mere appropriator of the style of Le Nôtre (who was, of course, an appropriator himself).

As the French garden historian Michel Baridon points out, this is simply not fair. While it's true that the Duchênes were passionate about reviving the precisely laid-out, mathematical "garden of reason," or *jardin à la française*, they weren't just cypcats. It seems more likely that their present obscurity stems from the ease with which their aesthetic can be politically linked to the right-wing French nationalism that arose following the establishment of the Third Republic, and especially during the Dreyfus Affair. "We have exhausted the pleasures of insanity and the attractions of disorder," declared the arch-nationalist Maurice Barrès, who in 1910 commissioned Achille Duchêne to design a garden *tout classique* for him. "At Versailles, at Chantilly . . . Le Nôtre expressed and perfected our best national qualities of order and clarity. Look at these gardens, study them, and you will understand what French intelligence is and you will feel it develop in you."

And yet the Duchêne oeuvre, though always anchored in the classical tradition, was both thoughtfully innova-

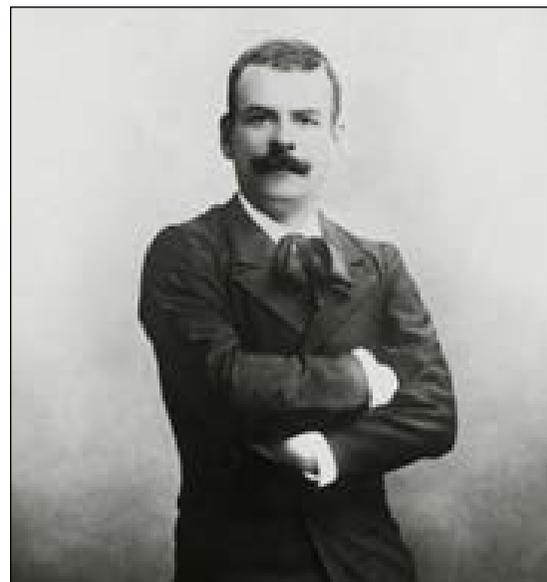
tive and constantly evolving. It encompassed a diversity of styles, including what came to be known as the *jardin mixte*, as exemplified by the gardens at Blenheim Palace. Blenheim's original gardens had been formal, but during the eighteenth century the fourth Duke of Marlborough hired Lancelot (Capability) Brown, the foremost proponent of the "*jardin anglais*," or landscape garden, to redesign the grounds. Brown went about systematically eliminating the very allées and parterres nearest the house that had been at the heart of the formal garden, replacing them with the style Russell Page later uncharitably characterized as "facile compositions of grass, tree clumps and rather shapeless pools and lakes." At

the turn of the twentieth century, however, in another swing of the pendulum, the ninth Duke decided that the gardens closest to the palace should mirror its stately architecture, and so brought in Achille Duchêne, who relegated evidence of Brown's earlier contributions to the property's outer reaches without altogether eliminating them.

Achille, like his father, is said to have been brilliant and charming, and he possessed a voracious energy and curiosity. He was the author of two books with the historian Marcel Fouquier, *Des divers styles de jardins* and *De l'art des jardins du XVe au XXe siècle*. His own revealing collection of drawings, *Les jardins de l'avenir*, testifies to an unexpectedly whimsical, sometimes Deco-ish side and also to a prescient instinct: he foresaw the decline of the private garden and the rise of "educational," urban public parks that incorporate sports. (One droll illustration from the book depicts a swimming pool resembling

Versailles's Bassin d'Apollon, with a tiered diving board the height of the Tour Eiffel and a Busby Berkeley arrangement of tiny, bathing-suited figures flapping in the water and swinging from a flying trapeze high above.)

Unlike Le Nôtre, Achille was not descended from a long line of royal *paysagistes*. Henri was born in Lyon in 1841, the son of a notary, and came to Paris to study engineering at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, where he developed a passion for architecture. He was recruited by the municipality of Paris, under Jean-Charles Alphand, during the city's revamping by Baron Haussmann, and his work on



Achille Duchêne

the new squares and promenades made an impression. Ernest Sanson, an architect who worked in the baroque style of Mansart and whose designs Henri greatly admired, offered him an introduction to society. Henri quickly rose to become a designer of private gardens for the aristocracy, convincing his clients of the aesthetic merits of the *jardin à la française*, which was completely out of fashion at the time.

Achille, who was born in 1866, began working with his father at a young age, and the two men worked closely together until Henri's death in 1902. Whatever Achille may have lacked in generations of inherited horticultural intelligence, he made up for in scholarship and social connections; he formed a significant, lifelong friendship with, among others, Ernest de Ganay, one of the foremost historians of French gardens. And, not irrelevantly, in 1892 he married Gabrielle Lafourcade, the daughter of Jean Lafourcade, the chief gardener of the City of Paris.

All of which is to say that the work of Achille Duchêne, on closer inspection, is far more complex than that of a fusty, repressed imitator. His drawings can feel by turns dreamily fanciful and uniquely modern – even pre-postmodern – in their spare elegance and conscious blending of stylistic elements. In his actual garden creations, he sought perfect balance and harmony. “The soul of the garden is its empty space,” the duc d’Harcourt wrote. “The greatest beauty is inseparable from the greatest austerity.” This suggests an ideal that Achille, having inherited his father’s disdain for the *style mou*, or “soft style,” was forever striving to achieve. Sometimes, he was gently chided for it. In a letter concerning the restoration at Blenheim, the Duke of Marlborough wrote, “With that tinge of melancholy in your temperament, you are inclined to be sombre and therefore severe. . . . M. Duchêne is faultless but he must remember to be human.”

In his writings, Duchêne displays an easy grasp of the trajectory of garden design, piecing together important connecting elements and offering insight into his own sensibility:

In the beginning, in Egypt, in Greece, in Italy and in France, all gardens were of regular form, which is to say geometric. They answered first material desires rather than aesthetic ones. . . . The primitive gardens were merely vegetable gardens or simple gardens, divided into squares in order to facilitate planting: it was the rational side that engendered the form. Trees, planted in alignment, were grouped in separate squares in order to avoid harming, by their shade, the plantings that were done in sections, in forms enclosed by fences of wood or greenery. There was most often a square or rectangle of water for irrigation, or a fountain in the style of the period.

With civilization, utilitarian gardens gradually gave way to ornamental ones:

The squares of plantings, of vegetables or medicinal plants, became *parquets*, then *parterres*, with geometric compartmentalization at first and later the most refined *broderies*. The squares, planted with fruit trees or orchards, became quincunxes, then groves; the squares of water that served for irrigation or as fishponds became mirrors, basins, and canals.

The art of the garden lagged behind that of architecture, Duchêne argues, because châteaux were fortresses: “life was lived on the inside.” It was only after the “thick walls of the donjon and the towers” began to be relieved by mullioned windows that the idea of the garden could truly develop. He continues, “With the installation of a window, opening onto the arid esplanades of the fortified castle, came the need to look out at something: the art of the garden was created.”

It is this hunger of the eye for something beautiful and pleasurable to behold at a distance, through a window, preferably from above, that appears to have resonated with the Duchênes, as evidenced by *Le Style Duchêne*, an exceptional collection of their own photographs of their creations, taken from particular vantage points at different times of day. They used photography to perfect their creations – Achille didn’t hesitate to scratch out landscape mistakes on the glass negative – as well as to document them (wisely, it turns out, since so many of their original designs have either disappeared or been altered). These photographs immediately bring to mind Atget’s photographs of Versailles, some of which were taken around the same time, and though different in execution and intent, they share a kindred melancholy in their evocation of vast, silent spaces populated not by humans but by exquisitely groomed trees and shrubbery or by oversized, half-naked statues of gods and goddesses from antiquity, who, in their impossible marmoreal perfection, seem to have nothing in common with humans at all.

The standard distinction made between the *jardin à la française* and the *jardin anglais* is that the French garden is an expression of man’s subjugation of nature, in contrast to the less formulaic, more “natural” English garden. But the Duchêne photographs, like those of Atget, suggest something different. The despotic Louis XIV might have been infuriated by the sight of a dandelion that had had the nerve to sprout in the *gazon* of one of his parterres, and Mme. de Sevigné

may have shuddered at the barbaric tyranny of the Versailles gardens over the natural world, but the ordinary contemporary garden stroller might be inclined to experience more complicated emotions, of the sort that stripped-down spaces informed by geometry now summon forth. Witness the stark geometry of the National September 11 Memorial pools, designed by Michael Arad. Surrounded by sentinels of identical swamp white oaks, they offer windows to contemplation of the deepest sort. (“Reflecting Absence” was the title of his original design.) The memorial’s landscape architect, Peter Walker, cites as a turning point in his own professional evolution his discovery of “the flat plane” during his first visit, in the nineteen-seventies, to the gardens at Vaux-le-Vicomte – which is to say, Achille Duchêne’s reinterpretation of Le Nôtre’s vision of the gardens.

Among the many memorable photographs included in *Le Style Duchêne* are shots of the original, unadorned parterres created for the commensurately barren, medieval Langeais castle; views of the spare gardens of Nordkirchen, Champs, Courances, Avrilly, Bourlémont, and Le Tremblay; and images of the father-and-son restorations of Vaux-le-Vicomte (projects dating to 1901 and 1924, respectively). And I experienced a pleasurable surprise of recognition when I came upon an aerial view of the more modest but perfectly balanced garden of Château de Sassy, which I had visited last fall.

The château, situated in Saint-Christophe-le-Jajolet, in the Orne, is an hour’s drive west of the village where I planned to be staying during a trip to France last October. Eager to see a garden designed by Achille Duchêne, I had written to the owner before leaving New York, and she had kindly invited me to stop by one afternoon during my time in Normandy.

The day of my visit was chilly, with shifting, moody clouds stalking the sky. The soothing drive along A88 was curiously reminiscent of the expansive feeling of Wyoming. I passed field after field of beautiful, barren plowed earth that now and again offered sun-dotted groves of orange and green and brown trees off in the distance; church steeples poked up and chimney smoke rose.

I was a little early for my appointment, so I drove on to Argentan to check my email at McDonald’s, one of the few venues in France that offer both free Wi-Fi and clean toilets. A short while later, I turned off onto the departmental road that led to the village of Saint-Christophe-le-Jajolet (population 235), which I never found; it seemed not to exist. I happened to pass by a parked taxi idling in the middle of an adjacent road, and turned around to ask for directions. “*Tout droit!*” a cheerful blonde behind the wheel instructed (this is the universal directive in France, I’ve noticed), pointing the way up a hill behind us.

I drove up the road, passing a cluster of houses, until there suddenly loomed before me the sight of a classical French château, perched on a hill, high above a large horse pasture dotted with a random assortment of trees. There was no sign of a garden. I continued along the road, now an allée, which curved broadly around the pasture. At the top of the hill before me were two pretty, slate-roofed pavilions flanking the driveway – the only remaining structures on the property that date from the original Château d’If, built in the seventeenth century.

Construction of the central building of what is now Château de Sassy was begun in 1760. The first duc d’Audiffret-Pasquier, the distinguished great-nephew and adopted son of Étienne-Denis Pasquier – a moderate who held several important positions in the French government before and after the French Revolution – bought the château in 1850, converting the study in its east wing into a library to house the thirty thousand books he had inherited from Étienne-Denis. (One of the pavilions is filled with records from the latter’s tenure overseeing the Chamber of Peers.) In the early twentieth century, the second duc d’Audiffret added on to the château’s west wing and, around 1925, commissioned Duchêne – at the time, the landscape architect most in demand in France among those who could afford him – to make the existing garden, a simple *potager*, into a formal one.

As I passed through the pavilions, the car’s tires loudly crunching on the thickly laid white gravel, the shuttered, handsome château came into view. Except for a few workmen repairing the stables on the other side of the west wing, the place seemed deserted. But as I got out of the car, a window on the ground floor suddenly flew open and a middle-aged woman stood staring at me with a look of seventeenth-century horror. The grounds were now closed to visitors, and she had obviously not been told that I had made special arrangements. As I was attempting to explain, a silver-haired man appeared behind the woman and called out “*J’arrive!*”

A tall, attractive, and affable man in his early seventies strode up to me, introduced himself as Jean de Panafieu, and instructed me where to repark my car, out of sight. He wore slightly scuffed wingtips, wool trousers, and a worn tweed



Vaux-le-Vicomte, Grand Parterre, as restored by Henri and Achille Duchêne in 1901 and 1924, respectively.

he dropped the leaflet to his knee and directed his gaze toward me. “Lancelot Brown, the most famous gardener in the English

style, became known as Opportunity – no, Capability – because he was forever saying, ‘There is always a lot of capability for improvement.’ At the same time, I would say that he was the greatest destroyer of the French garden that the world has ever known. But it is always a question of the prevailing mode – the nineteenth century was a romantic century. In England, you had Byron, Shelley; in France, Lamartine, Victor Hugo. *On parle de coeur, pas d’esprit*. We are speaking of the heart, not the mind.”

He resumed reading from the pamphlet, “The setting of Sassy, with its trapezium-shaped, Italian-style terraces, shows how natural variations in height – due to the convergence of the Orne valley, and its tributary the Baize, with the hills of the Norman bocage – can be mastered.”

“O.K. So you see, at the end there is ‘Horticultural Aspects’? *Donc, je vous explique*. We have a full-time gardener, who unfortunately is not here today. There is also a buried sprinkler system for watering the plantings of yews and boxwoods during the dry season. These plants grow slowly and live a long time. So it’s not a lot of work to maintain a French garden, since, once planted, the vegetation doesn’t require pruning very often. Once a year is sufficient.

“The gardener just maintains what already exists,” he added, after a moment’s thought. “He doesn’t do anything new. *Vous comprenez?*”

And if the boxwood dies?

“You just replace it! It’s only maintenance; it’s not creation!”

A short while later, we donned Wellies and crunched our way across the wet gravel of the parking area toward a long stairway leading to the three terraces that fell away steeply behind the château. At the first level, we were greeted by a row of pretty blue hydrangeas, still in bloom. Strolling across the lawn of the terrace, I looked up at the château and noticed black security gates drawn across the central double doors and also a bottle of Evian on a windowsill on the second floor – a funny, humanizing sight. The cliff-like appearance of the rough, black stone of the terrace wall felt a little menacing as I looked upward. But when I turned to face the garden head on, with its white-sand pathways, elaborate boxwood *parterres de broderie* – planted in sand from Mouen

jacket over a scarf and sweater; there was a pocket square in his jacket and a gold signet ring on the smallest finger of his left hand. As I followed him through a side entrance into the château, I caught a quick glimpse of the garden below; my first impression was that I had spied an exotic bird, deep in the forest. The French garden is intended to be private and viewed only by invitation; for this reason hedges and trees had been planted to conceal it.

Identifying himself as “just the manager” of the château, Panafieu led me through a side entrance into a reception room lined in oak boiserie and shelves of leather-bound books with spines in gold lettering. Only afterward did I notice that, when I had offered him my notebook to write his name in, he had included the fact that he was also “*le gendre de la duchesse d’Audiffret-Pasquier*” – the son-in-law of the duchess. The duchess herself then soon entered the room, in a simple wool skirt and sweater, smiling amiably and offering her hand.

I sat down on a tan leather sofa; patterns in the Persian carpet at my feet reminded me of the volutes of a parterre. Panafieu handed me a leaflet and began reading aloud: “Formal gardens, which originated during the reign of Louis XIV, transform the landscape into a balanced and controlled work of art, symbolizing a total domination over nature. . . . Unlike the landscaped garden . . . formal gardens appeal more to reason than to emotion. Flowers, though not proscribed, are not a necessary feature.”

“So you see, English gardens speak to emotion, French gardens speak to reason,” he declared matter-of-factly, as

that matched the brickwork of the château above – and pleasingly simple *orangerie* at the far end, I was filled with what I can only call a sense of feng shui *à la française*. As we descended, each level brought a new element of the garden into closer view: from the second terrace, the boxwood *arabesques* and meticulously clipped *buis boules* and *buis cubiques* were delightful in their perfection, as were the hedges of laurel that edged the garden.

It was only when we reached the ground level of the garden that I began to experience a feeling of slight unease. As we crossed a narrow moat, a solitary swan swam up to us, seemingly eager for company, or perhaps just food.

“We have one swan and one duck,” Panafieu said. “Whenever another bird comes to visit, one or the other gets horribly jealous.” I wondered if the swan ever went anywhere or just spent his days alone, gliding along the water, contemplating the garden as he pondered the meaning of his existence.

As we walked through the garden itself, I asked Panafieu if children played there, thinking how delightful they would find its mazelike configurations. He said no, that it was a garden merely to be looked at; the children might damage the plantings. I noticed sad, bald patches in the boxwood, due to a blight that had hit a few years ago. Pruning is hard

Terrace view of Achille Duchêne's garden at Château de Sassy, October, 2013.



on the plant, in the way that dancing is hard on a ballerina's feet. Except for a few remaining red geraniums in urns, which found an echo in the berries of the Irish yews flanking the *orangerie*, there were no flowers. And, except for the swan, there were no birds. When I reached the *orangerie* (now a toolshed), I turned around to contemplate the terraces; they were majestic and beautiful from a distance, just as the garden had been only a few minutes earlier, from the vantage point of the terraces. Perspective is everything, I thought to myself. Still, I found myself longing for the luxurious “infinity” offered by a vast expanse.

As we made our way back to the château, Panafieu drew his fingers along the terrace wall's black face, locating a protrusion. “A chicken bone,” he said, “to train the ivy. Nowadays, they are made of plastic, of course.” Returning to my car, I found a xerox of a delicate drawing of the design of the garden lying on the driver's seat, with a legend specifying the placement of specific trees and shrubs: *L'if fastigié*, *Althéa*, *Fleurs annuelles* (*Géraniums*).

Once back in New York, I called up Sassy on Google Maps and zoomed in from the satellite view to compare it with the drawing I'd been given. The garden looked like a *coffret* from Ladurée, a perfect match for its tiny dollhouse château, and very nearly a perfect match for the drawing. From this shifting height, I could also see, extending from the front

of the château, the thrilling, soothing expanse I had been missing: two thousand acres of adjoining forest. Then I looked at a view of Vaux-le-Vicomte, marveling at the beautiful designs it carved into the earth. I thought of the simple squares of acreage and of the crop-irrigation circles that I love to gaze down at every time I fly from New York to Colorado, where my ancestors settled two years before Achille Duchêne was born. And then I looked at the squares cut into the earth in lower Manhattan. Geometry is history, and sometimes it can touch us to the core.

– Mary Hawthorne

## Designing with Nature: Jean-Marie Morel's Landscape Theory

The ecological approach to landscape design so common today can be traced to early twentieth-century studies of plant ecology and their subsequent application to landscape design, a development that culminated in Ian McHarg's seminal *Design with Nature* in 1968. Yet it detracts nothing from the importance of McHarg's contributions and those of his predecessors to note that the process-oriented theory of designing landscapes with natural systems in mind was foreshadowed in the picturesque-garden literature of the 1770s – in particular, in the work of the French landscape designer Jean-Marie Morel (1728–1810).

Morel was the most influential landscape designer in France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. J. C. Loudon praised him as the “Kent of France,” but his style is more akin to that of Capability Brown, which is to say he designed gardens in the natural, picturesque, or as commonly called, English-garden style.

His most famous gardens are Malmaison and Ermenonville, but his output included over fifty landscapes. Morel worked for a Who's Who of the French aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Before the Revolution, his principal patron was Louis-François de Bourbon, prince de Conti; in the years leading to the First Empire, Napoléon headed his client list. Indeed, during the Consulate, Directory, and early empire, Morel was the de facto designer of the Napoleonic circle. Sadly, few of his gardens survive, and those that do have been severely compromised.

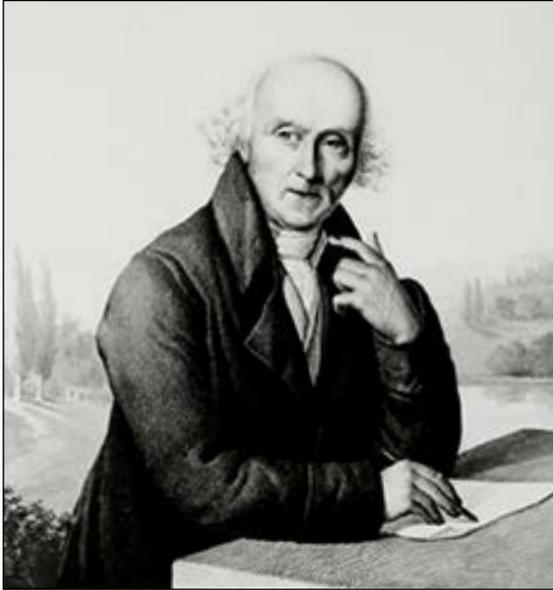
Morel's most enduring work, therefore, is his *Théorie des jardins* (1776; 2nd edition, 1802). In it he forges a theory of gardening that is best characterized as a synthesis of the laws of nature and the metaphysics of empirical aesthetic sensibility. In less abstract terms, he takes a natural-systems approach to landscape design.

Knowledge of the specific needs of particular plants (how much soil, water, or sun they require) is independent of an understanding of the interconnectivity of natural systems. For example, knowing that a particular tree requires a certain amount of water does not presuppose an understanding and appreciation of the global water cycle. But Morel's theory underscores that the requirements of individual plants, the manner in which landscapes are formed, and the ways in which plants are distributed across landscapes are all related

to broader environmental mechanisms. More than any of his fellow garden theorists, Morel placed his theory of garden design within the dynamic framework of the natural world and its interrelated processes.

Morel's work was published in an era that saw the proliferation of theoretical texts on the new picturesque style of gardening. The English can rightfully claim authorship of the style itself during the first third of the eighteenth century, with Charles Bridgeman and William Kent being two of its better-known early practitioners. But the *theory* of the new style was not formulated – or at least not written down and published – until the 1770s, when in quick succession, a slew of picturesque gardening texts appeared. The Englishman Thomas Whately was the first to enter the theoretical debate with his *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770), which went through two editions almost immediately and was translated into French and German the following year. The French, who could never fully accept English dominance over this new art form, were quick to outpace their rivals in the publication frenzy, beginning with Claude-Henri Watelet's *Essai sur les jardins* of 1774, and followed by Antoine-Nicolas Duchesne's *Considérations sur le jardinage* and *Sur la Formation des jardins*, both of 1775, Morel's *Théorie des jardins* of 1776, and René de Girardin's *De la Composition des paysages* of 1777. To these texts can be added countless prose works, poems, epistles, and the like, all dealing with the “new taste in gardening.”

The common thread in these works was the rejection of anything resembling André Le Nôtre's style. That is to say, their authors all professed a “more natural” manner of modeling land, one that eschewed major and minor axes, regular geometries, and clipped vegetation. On a metaphysi-



Jean-Marie Morel (1728-1810).  
Courtesy of Bibliothèque municipale  
de Lyon.

cal level (though few claimed it as such), they were operating in the realm of empirical sensationalist philosophy, creating gardens that moved the soul through the manipulation of natural features such as earth, rock, water, and vegetation. On a more practical level, they gave prescriptions for the creation of gardens that emulated natural scenery. Although they all proscribed the Le Nôtre-type landscape, they did not necessarily agree on what the new landscape should look like. Nonetheless, with the exception of Louis Carrogis de Carmontelle, whose *Jardin de Monceau* appeared in 1779, all these theorists agreed to varying degrees that artifice should be subordinate to nature in the creation of gardens.

Like his contemporaries, Morel raised gardening to the ranks of the liberal arts and wholly accepted the aims and objectives of the new garden theory. He read Whately and followed the Englishman's lead in writing his own book; Duschene's works and Watelet's *Essai* also featured in Morel's *Théorie*. And as he worked with Girardin in the creation of Ermenonville, it is probable that the two men influenced each other. It can be argued that Morel's book was better organized, more synthetic, and more cogently argued than those of his contemporaries, but these reasons are not sufficient to account for its unique and prescient contribution. Rather, Morel's importance – indeed, his achievement – was to have charted a theory of gardening that, while beholden to the new aesthetics, was unique in incorporating an understanding of the processes of nature in garden design. Alone among his contemporaries, Morel argued that to create landscapes that emulate natural scenery, one must recognize that landscapes are the result of natural processes and governed by natural laws. Only in adhering to these laws could success be achieved in landscape design.

During the era that stretched from the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century through the Enlightenment of the eighteenth, our understanding of the natural world was utterly transformed. These crucial years of scientific discovery revealed a world of interdependent systems in continual transformation, governed and regulated by natural laws. Morel was not a scientist – he trained as a geographical engineer and architect – but he was aware enough of the intellectual currents of his era to recognize that understanding the

mechanisms of the natural world was relevant to the creation of landscapes. In this he stood apart.

Morel secured his scientific knowledge from the most authoritative sources of the day. To be sure, Newton still reigned supreme in the eighteenth century, and Morel's *Théorie* is filled with Newtonian tropes, such as “action and reaction” and the “refrangibility” of light. His main sources, however, were closer to home – in particular, the great eighteenth-century natural scientist Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon. Buffon lorded over French natural history from his seat as *intendant* (director) of the *Jardin des Plantes* – the most important center of scientific research in France, if not all Europe. While not as historically important as Newton or Linnaeus, he was the undisputed head of French science, and his monumental, forty-four-volume *Histoire naturelle* ranks second only to Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* among the most influential publishing ventures of the Enlightenment.

Unlike Newton, whose breakthroughs dealt with mathematics and physics, Buffon studied the biological and earth sciences: the workings, mechanisms, and products of the natural world. Morel mined Buffon for the applicability of these discoveries to the development of a theory of landscape design. From Buffon, Morel learned to see the world as a dynamic system of interrelated processes, governed by discernible laws; these laws determined the look and composition of one's natural surroundings. It was the work of men such as Buffon that made possible Morel's systems approach to garden theory.

To better understand Morel's method, one can compare his discussion of landforms with that of his closest rival, Thomas Whately. Whately's chapter “Ground” employs a vocabulary lifted from painting theory: “The shape of ground must be either a convex, a concave, or a plane. . . . By combinations of these are formed all the irregularities of which ground is capable.” In contrast, Morel's chapter “Du Terrain”[sic] begins not with a static description of landscape based on pictorial composition, but instead with a discussion of natural processes. He posits that water, in its physical state of rain (and the accumulation of rain into rivers, torrents, etc.), is the major determinant in modeling land. Thus, leaving aside catastrophic events – volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and so on – the landscape we experience is the result of the actions of water.

Morel extends his discussion to place rain in a broader context, recognizing that it is part of a global water cycle – the “perpetual circulation” of water vapor, clouds, moisture, and rain.

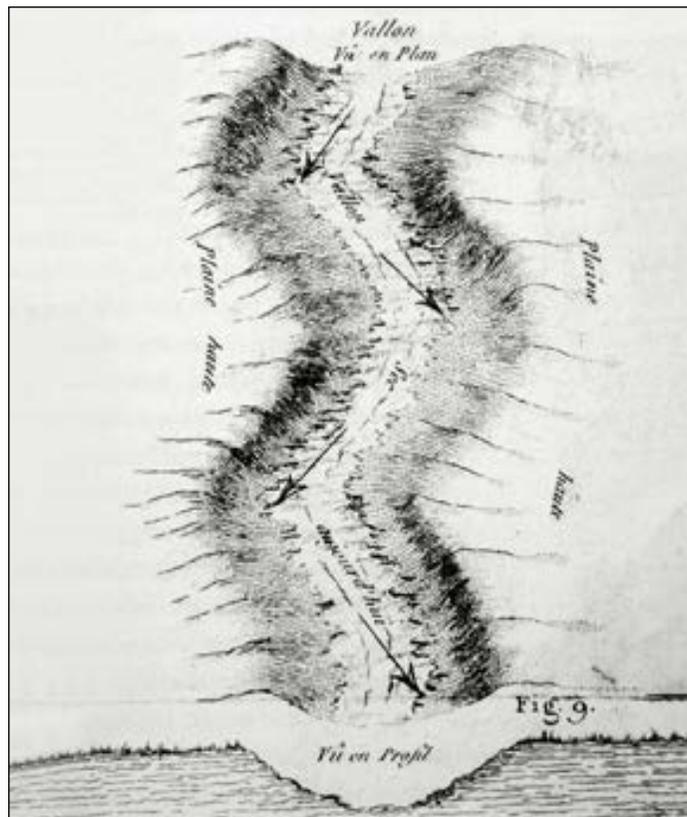
At the close of this key chapter on landforms, he supplies the lesson: that the form of land is not haphazard, but the result of “action and reaction of certain agents.” It is subject to natural laws, and the natural forms we see are result of physical processes. Duchesne is the only one of Morel’s contemporaries to broach the subject in similar terms, and Morel’s discussion is more elaborate, nuanced, and complete.

Continuing his discussion of water’s role in shaping landscapes, Morel acquaints his readers with the principles of river hydrodynamics and river-valley geomorphology: rivers are born in mountains and grow in size as they leave the region of their birth; their meanders depend on the size and volume of the river’s flow and on the substrate of the riverbed; their speed is inversely proportional to the valley width, which increases in the downhill direction. He does not neglect to mention a recent geologic finding: mountain valleys zig and zag in equal or “corresponding” measure in the horizontal plane. (“In their frequent and abrupt changes, they [valleys] form salient and re-entering angles that almost always correspond with one another.”) This bit of natural history was discovered by Louis Bourguet in the first third of the eighteenth century and picked up by Buffon, who called it “the key to the theory of the earth.” Morel lifted this observation from Buffon without attribution.

The fact that Morel gives water and its role in the formation of landscape such lengthy attention betrays his interest in landscape character, one of the central tenets of picturesque gardening. He underscores that landscape character is dictated by landscape structure, which only nature can create. The designer can therefore enhance a site’s character, but he can never create it anew or change its fundamental properties; rather, his task is to work in accordance with the generative operations of nature that created the site in the first place.

One of the earth-science lessons that Morel teaches concerns river islands and lake islands. They differ in appearance, he explains, because they are created by different hydrodynamic processes. River islands are generally tapered at both ends in conformance with the currents that encircle and sculpt them. Their lozenge shapes, more or less invariant, are dictated by the river’s flow. Lake islands, in contrast,

illustration of the correspondence between salient (outward pointing) and reentrant (inward pointing) angles in mountain valleys, an observation first made by Louis Bourguet in the early 18th century. Diagram from Jean-Louis Dupain-Triel, *Recherches géographiques* (Paris, 1791).



are more variable, because they are formed by the drowning of a depression; the resulting island has the shape of the elevated portion of land, whatever that shape may be. The lesson to be drawn here is that the physical appearance of islands is the result of the natural mechanisms that create them. The would-be garden designer must understand these mechanisms when considering whether and how to include islands in a garden. Morel is the only author of the eighteenth century to address this topic.

Elsewhere Morel comments on the distribution of vegetation in mountains. In a passage derivative of Rousseau, he notes how mountains conjure “all climates and all seasons” simultaneously, by which he means that in a mountainous area, both climate and vegetation vary with altitude. He speaks too of emergent vegetation in untended, mountainous fields, where trees, shrubs, and grasses distribute themselves according to nature’s laws.

Closely observing the natural world, Morel did not fail to remark on the “associations” of neighboring plants. Architect

Pierre-François Fontaine noted in his diary that when Morel was summoned to Malmaison by Joséphine, he examined the work already executed and was displeased that trees had not been planted according to their natural associations and physical attributes. Here Morel was following the lead of Duchesne, who had noted how some plants live in association and distribute themselves in groupings.

The use of the words “distribution” and “association” comes tantalizingly close to a reasoned articulation of plant ecology and ecological zonation. As environmentally prescient as Morel may seem, however, he is strictly transferring his observations of the natural world into a theory of garden design, one founded on the belief that only by “seconding” (a word he picks up from Buffon) nature can gardening fully achieve the ranks of the liberal arts.

While it cannot be said that there was any ecologically driven reasoning behind Morel’s theory – other than a perhaps-implicit belief that if it looked natural, it was environmentally sound – he nonetheless broke new ground. As noted, although Duchesne preceded him in introducing environmental science into picturesque-garden theory, Morel went much further. He was the only garden theorist to digest the vast amounts of new knowledge of the natural world available in the eighteenth century and incorporate it into his thinking. Indeed, he was so keen on showing his learning that even those favorably disposed toward his *Théorie des jardins* – J.-F. de La Harpe, for example, who wrote a laudatory review in the *Mercure* – objected to the use of scientific jargon and technical terms, such as *réfrangibilité*, *fermentation*, *se bifurquent*, and *loix de Physics*. La Harpe, however, did recognize the importance of Morel’s work, and especially praised the discussion of water.

Morel’s use of scientific and technical vocabulary was not, in fact, misplaced erudition, but an important sign of the new territory into which he had ventured. Any new theory would need its own critical vocabulary, and Morel’s use of terms from geology, physics, hydrology, and biology arose organically from the need to nudge garden theory in a new direction. The vocabulary to which La Harpe objected only underscores the novelty of Morel’s approach, which recognized picturesque gardening not only as an art but a science. As the first review of Morel’s book in the July 1776 issue of *Affiches, annonces et avis divers* concluded: “Nous avons des Jardins, & un Art mêmes des jardins; mais nous n’en avions pas la science; c’est cette science dont on peut regarder M. M. comme le créateur.” [We have gardens and even an art of gardens, but we haven’t had the science; it is of this science that we can consider M. M[orel] the creator.] – Joseph Disponzio

## Oudry's Gardens of Arceuil

“He paints landscapes which, by the force of poetry, acquire a supernatural air.” Although these words were written by the Goncourt brothers in the nineteenth century to describe the landscapes of Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), they could be applied as aptly to the landscape drawings of his contemporary, Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755). Seduced by the poetry of Watteau and by the light and shade of another Franco-Fleming, Nicolas Largillière (1656–1746), Oudry went on to produce his own supernatural art. He is the hero of this tale of lost gardens.

The village of Arcueil is located in the valley of the Bièvre, less than four miles from Paris. There is not much left to see in the village these days: a remnant of the Roman aqueduct, perhaps; two solid houses from the old estate. But once upon a time, in the early eighteenth century, it was home to one of the finest châteaux in France, with gardens so lovely and complex that artists and writers made pilgrimages to study and draw and write in them.

Françoise de Brancas, princesse d’Harcourt, had bought the property in 1681. She proceeded to restore the old château, enlarge the gardens, and add fountains fed by the aqueduct. But it was not until after Anne-Marie-Joseph de Lorraine, prince de Guise, inherited the property in 1715 that it reached its full glory. As the eighteenth-century observer Piganiol de la Force remarked, “Anne-Marie-Joseph de Lorraine [...]avoit à Arcueil une maison de plaisance qui a de grandes beauties.”

The prince appears to have had a grand vision from the start. His domain – which at its biggest was about thirty acres – was roughly rectangular, running east to west. The pretty little river Bièvre cut it north to south down the middle, and a section of the aqueduct crossed one corner. He restored and added to the old château and orangery, and created other grand structures, including a stable and entrance pavilions. For these projects, he employed either Germain Boffrand (1667–1754), one of the most celebrated architects of the time, or possibly a member of Boffrand’s studio.

Boffrand, who had a house in the nearby town of Cachan, is best known to us as the architect of the Hôtel de Soubise

in Paris, one of the most beautiful eighteenth-century *hôtels* remaining in France today. (It is now part of the Archives Nationales.) He reimagined the gardens that ranged up and down both banks of the river at Arceuil in the spirit of the *rocaille*, with bosquets, grottoes, trellises, terraces, stairs, and *faux-perspective allées*, until they rivaled on a smaller scale the royal gardens of Saint-Cloud or Meudon.

The fame of the gardens was soon well established, and their proximity to Paris ensured that many artists and writers visited. Voltaire spent much time there in the 1730s as a guest of the Guise, and wrote *Zaïre* along the banks of the river. Even after the prince’s death, in 1739, many artists – among them Charles-Joseph Natoire (1700–1777) and François Boucher (1703–1770) – made their way to the site with chalk and paper, allowing us tantalizing glimpses of long-ago glory. But by far the most prolific and systematic of these artists was Oudry. His scores of black-and-white chalk drawings on blue paper, including views of nearly the entire estate, count among the masterpieces of eighteenth-century graphic art.

Oudry was a favorite of Louis XV, who was obsessed with hunting. The king much admired the painter’s facility in depicting the royal hunts, dogs, horses, and prey. Today Oudry is best known as a still-life and animal painter, but those dry terms do little to describe the beauty and focus of his determined examination of nature, be it the king’s favorite dachshund, a pile of just-caught fish, a furious hyena, or a haunting landscape. He was a master of *chiaroscuro*, color, and texture, and the subtlety with which he could describe the shades of white, silver, and cream in a painting such as his famous *White Duck* (still missing after its theft from Houghton Hall in 1992) is magical.

Oudry was also an immensely prolific draughtsman, his surviving sheets numbering in the thousands;

he seems to have had a special regard for his work in this medium. According to his biographer and contemporary, Abbé Gougenot, “In a way he was more attracted to his drawings than to his paintings. He grouped them in portfolios of more than fifty pieces, of such variety that their owner would have an example of all the genres he had practiced. He considered them as an estate that he accumulated for the benefit of his family; very few of them were to be had during his lifetime.” None of them were in any public sales before his death, and he maintained a portfolio for each of his children with drawn examples of each genre that he practiced: landscape, still-life, animals, portraits, book illustrations, and genre scenes.

Oudry began to visit Arcueil as early as 1740; he was there so often that some have suggested he kept a home nearby, although there is no evidence of this – except for his determined examination of every crook and cranny of the prince de Guise’s enchanted estate, even as it was beginning to go to seed. He made as many as one hundred drawings at Arcueil, of which some fifty are known today. It seems possible that the drawings were a commission from the prince, based on the systematic way Oudry recorded all the topographical aspects of the parkland, but the family never owned them. They stayed with Oudry himself. All were made on blue paper (now often faded to gray), in black chalk with white highlighting. All are roughly the same size and date from around 1744 to 1747. Sketched out on-site and then completed in the studio, they are very finished sheets, works of art in their



View of the Gardens of Arcueil.  
Drawing by Jean-Baptiste Oudry,  
1744. Courtesy of The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art.

own right, rather than preparation for something else – and Oudry thought highly of them. Many were exhibited at the Salon of 1753.

Oudry's interest here was in nature and light: he eliminated the extraneous. White highlighting slashes sunlight over the formal elements of the garden; black chalk renders dense shade. Sometimes the light is so bright it obliterates steps; the shade so deep that the bottom of a tree or treillage is lost entirely. There are very few figures, and those have no sense of story or anecdote. Occasionally another artist (Boilly, perhaps), troubled by the focus on nature, added playful figures on an outing, but those are not from Oudry and have little to do with his intensity. The drawings are riveting in their simplicity, their emptiness, their magical focus.

From the drawings, we can make some assumptions about the nature of the prince's gardens, which are firmly in the style of the Regency. They were designed around the stepped terraces that cascaded down to the water's edge on both sides of the river. Some of those terraces were cultivated as kitchen gardens. Others, devoted to decoration or recreation, included architectural elements: stone stairs, arbors, trellises, and vases. Several hidden bosquets were ornamented, too, with sculpture, small ponds, and fountains. The grounds were more formal than those of the emerging 'picturesque' gardens, and there were none of the developments that spoke of that style, such as the turf ramps or hedges that would replace the trellis. The Grand Canal created from the Bièvre ran straight, rather than winding, and was spanned by several small bridges.

On the other hand, it was not the formal garden manner of Le Nôtre either, with vistas protracted to infinity. Arceuil's gardens had diagonal allées, intimate views and corners, and complexity of design, while at the same time retaining regularity. There were no curving walks and twisting shapes as one might find in English gardens of the same era. Like the Rococo manner in other arts, it was a gardening style in transition.

Unfortunately, the prince had been Arceuil's true caretaker, and his creation began to suffer after his death. For a time, this neglect seems to have intensified the garden's appeal; the captivating combination of artifice and unchecked

nature made it especially picturesque and irresistible. But then the prince's son died, in 1747, and the surviving two daughters ran into financial trouble. In 1755, they began to sell off the estate in parcels. Today nothing remains – of the gardens or the buildings. But thanks to Oudry, a meticulous record of its manifold pleasures survives, scattered throughout Europe and the United States. And whenever there is a retrospective of the artist's work, there is the possibility that these sketches of Arceuil may be reunited, bringing the grace and grandeur of the prince's gardens briefly, miraculously, to life once more.

Although not as prolific, Charles-Joseph Natoire and other artists visiting Arceuil sketched views of precisely the same sites that Oudry had, often from the same vantage points. Like Oudry, Natoire, who visited the garden between 1747 and 1751, worked *en plein air*, creating drawings of delicate beauty and charm.

Natoire's importance for our story is less his recording of these beautiful gardens, since Oudry had made such a comprehensive study, but his love of plein air drawing, which was certainly inspired by Oudry's example. In 1751, shortly after his time in Arceuil, Natoire was named director the Académie de France in Rome. He lived there for the rest of his life. During the 1750s and 1760s, he took constant sketching trips to Tivoli, Frascati, Valmontone, and Nemi, making dozens of landscape drawings and falling in love with the Italian countryside. In 1756, the French landscape genius-in-training, Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), joined him to become a *pensionnaire* at the Académie for five years. There the young painter met Hubert Robert, learned outdoor sketching under Natoire's tutelage, and eventually went to live at Villa d'Este in Tivoli.

In this indirect but important way, then, Oudry's love of nature and his field trips to the small village of Arceuil influenced Fragonard's later and more famous accomplishments. For Fragonard, too, fell in love with plein air drawing, lush landscapes, and overgrown gardens – and he went on to make red chalk drawings of Villa d'Este that stand as *tours de force* of garden art. – Tav Holmes

## Place Maker

### William Christie

**T**his story begins with a ten-year-old boy from Buffalo, New York, whose grandmother took him to a performance of Handel's *Messiah* at the city's famous Kleinhans Music Hall, designed by Eero and Eliel Saarinen. He was so struck by the beauty of the harpsichord music that, upon returning home, he put thumbtacks into the piano felts to reproduce the instrument's sound. William Christie grew up to become a harpsichordist himself, as well as a world-renowned interpreter of Baroque music and the founder and conductor of Les Arts Florissants, which performs throughout Europe and the United States. For the past two summers he has brought his particular, passionate vision of beauty home again, hosting a series of elegant concert performances in his private garden in the Vendée region of France, producing a marriage of nature and art that echoes seventeenth-century Versailles.

Harvard-educated, with an advanced degree in music from Yale, Christie set out on a visit to France in 1970 after a brief stint of teaching at Dartmouth. He stayed on in France, seeking a new life made possible by his success as a harpsichordist. In 1975, he left Paris for the Vendée, and in 1979, founded Les Arts Florissants, "a catch-all," as he puts it, for his musical pleasures – staged opera and concert performances of the baroque period that he has made integral to our contemporary life in music. (The name derives from a chamber opera composed by Marc-Antoine Charpentier in 1685 for the duchesse de Guise.)

When he discovered his house in Thiré one Sunday morning in 1985, it resembled a giant mushroom sprouting from desolate, abandoned fields, with only a solitary tree. Built in the late-sixteenth or early-seventeenth century, the seventeen-room house was never lived in by its original owners, but instead sheltered generations of tenant farmers who did not alter it. With seven fireplaces, room for an extensive library, old wooden doors, and outbuildings for further use, the house presented boundless possibilities. The property's timely listing as a Monument Historique provided grants and low-interest loans for restoration by local artisans; today, repairs and renovations are in the hands of the second generation of masons and carpenters. For the grounds, Christie envisioned a green theater. He likens his creation of

the thirty-seven-acre garden to taking a composition by Jean-Philippe Rameau or Charpentier and adding musical ornaments to embellish its structure.

When I arrived in Thiré last August for the *Rencontres musicales en Vendée*, as the festival is called, the first concert I attended was held late in the evening in the village church. My initial encounter with Christie's garden was therefore near midnight, during a candlelight promenade.

Rows of sheltered candles lined the pathways, strings of light illuminated ghostly pyramidal topiary shapes and an open-lattice pergola, and stars twinkled above. Although it was difficult to orient myself in the darkness as I wandered in and out of enclosures and across courtyards and terraces, it was also exhilarating to feel lost there, surrounded by points of light that seemed to reach out to infinity under allées of trees.

The next day, I was given a plan to direct me through this highly structured garden. One might first assume that it had been designed in the French classical style, given its preponderance of topiary and clipped hedges and its owner's devotion to the musical world of the court at Versailles. But in fact his revelatory moment relating to gardens came when Ralph Kirkpatrick, his Yale harpsichord professor, steered him to Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., when Christie was there demonstrating against the Vietnam War in 1967. As Christie tells it, the garden – designed from the 1920s on by Beatrix Farrand for Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss – “blew my mind.”

Already passionate about architecture, he noted immediately how Farrand managed eclectically to combine English arts-and-crafts techniques, the Edwardian and Queen Anne styles, and Dutch and Italian landscape motifs. In essence, Farrand had traveled throughout Europe to garner her mismatched design vocabulary, and under her influence, Christie imported it back to France. With its pergolas, pebble paths, pleached lindens and hornbeams, and rose-laden walls, his garden in Thiré displays the same love of the vernacular that gives Farrand's gardens their charm.



Photograph of William Christie  
by Gary Gunderson.

“In my mind,” Christie says, “the underlying idea of this garden was music, in the way that every opera in the seventeenth century engages gardens.” He remembers dissolving into tears the first time he heard passages of music written for a shady glen in Handel's *Acis and Galatée*, an opera Les Arts Florissants has performed. While he initially enlisted professional advice,

and a coterie of garden-designer friends is frequently about, in the end, he says, “I flew with my own wings, and every detail is my own.” He even trims the topiary himself and “talks” to his garden every day, he says, through his gardener!

By retaining the Protestant austerity of the house's main facade, Christie has provided a rustic, whitewashed foil for the formal entrance courtyard. Containing four parterres of clipped box in elaborate, arabesque patterns, it features fanciful topiaries, including cones, and balls in terracotta pots. After crossing beneath a rustic pergola of grapevines entwined with roses, the visitor enters the Théâtre de verdure, the green theater Christie dreamed of when he first saw the land. Across the top of this dense, circular, yew enclosure is a playful series of pagoda-style roof motifs in yew that create the illusion of architectural chinoiserie. A stone bench around the interior perimeter will provide seating for the concerts to come.

Just behind the theater, a new white garden, planted with nicotiana, salvias, petunias, and asters, among others, has been banked up against the curved yew wall in stunning contrast. Beyond that is a vast orchard of peach and apple trees, divided into four squares with paths running in between. I walked from there into the *potager*, with a mélange of vegetables and flowers, and finally into another garden with a long bed of rudbeckia by a garden pavilion. One realizes that the property's appeal comes from large gestures in a sequence of confined spaces that flow one into the other.

Christie has made imaginative use of retaining walls at either end of the long, horizontal house, creating on one side an enclosed cloister garden with four knot gardens and a fountain, and on the other, a red garden. Here Christie has installed glass doors so that the outside appears to blend

seamlessly with the red décor of the interior grand salon. A raised stone terrace across the back of the house overlooks the entire dramatic landscape. Lutyens-style curved steps descend in reverse semicircles into another series of topiary gardens below.

In the house, a seventeenth-century Flemish tapestry in deep shades of green and blue hangs prominently between the kitchen and the salon. The tapestry depicts a garden with symmetrical rows of clipped hedges and trees, a spouting fountain in a pool, and an arcade in the background, giving visitors a glimpse of the sort of landscape they are about to enter. I descended the main terrace steps and walked between tall topiaries cut into whimsical shapes, crested with balls of yew, and enclosed by a hornbeam hedge with swags. Beyond them lay the garden's culmination, the Miroir d'eau, a rectangular reflecting pool with a central plume of water, lined on either side by allées of plane trees. Farther along, a stand of poplar trees is reminiscent of Rousseau's island tomb at Ermenonville, and a stream edged with wild purple loosestrife meanders off to quiet glens. A seven-arch hornbeam arcade with a stately architectural presence formally closes this view, but in the distance, elevated above an agricultural field, is the final point, an eye-catching grotto on the hillside. Everything then melts into forest.

Throughout the music festival, the garden continuously revealed itself. Afternoons were dedicated to a program of *promenades musicales*, in which small groups of musicians and soloists performed fifteen-minute concerts in one of six garden retreats, each sufficiently distant from another. Over the course of three hours, the audience moved leisurely from one location and performance to the next, with ample time to take in the surroundings: one had the feeling of being in a baroque idyll.

And as the music enhanced the gardens, the gardens enhanced the music. Sitting first in a grove of pollarded willows by the Chinese bridge, listening to a medley of John Dowland's airs sung by a countertenor and accompanied by a theorbo, I became aware of a rippling brook and leaves rustling in the wind, adding their own strains to the music. In the cloister, the trickling fountain could be heard in the quiet between madrigals by Giaches de Wert. And while we were seated in the red garden, listening to one of Handel's English cantatas, a flock of white fantail pigeons suddenly flew up in a circular sweep with a great batting of wings, heading for the sixteenth-century *pigeonnier* next to the house.

For the final promenade concert, everyone gravitated to the main terrace and stood or sat by the immense topiaries,

which by then were casting long shadows in the glow of the late-afternoon sun. The harpsichord was brought out for William Christie, now in a gleaming white jacket, to accompany the singers, and the terrace became a stage seemingly supported by topiary buttresses below. In an earlier conversation, Christie had told me of a teenage summer when he'd worked on an Indian reservation in New York State and escaped a few times to attend concerts at Tanglewood. "It was paradise for me," he recalled. "A summer music festival close to nature, an Arcadian experience that has been important to me ever since." At the end of the piece, as the crowd showed its appreciation with rhythmic clapping, I thought about how Christie had re-created that Arcadian experience for others.

For the grand finale of the festival, everyone attended the evening performance of Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas*, which was performed on a floating stage in the middle of the Miroir d'eau. Narrow rills of water ran in a refreshing trickle down either side of the short flight of stone steps leading to the wide lawn, where the rows of chairs set up for the audience around the watercourse were occasionally punctuated by convoluted rocailles. As daylight faded, the plane trees illuminated from below were reflected in the water.

A hush settled over the crowd as the regally costumed cast and musicians emerged through the trees and filed across a ramp to the stage. In the center once more was the harpsichord with Christie at its helm, his back to the audience to conduct, his signature red socks visible under his pants legs. As the ensemble performed, complete darkness enshrouded the area and the cast glowed, jewel-like, at the center, lit from below by radiant lighting and animated by Christie's superb direction.

While William Kent may have proved that "all nature is a garden," William Christie would say that "all nature is a stage" – and one most suitable to the Baroque period and its music. For the visitor who passes through sunny glades listening to harmonies by day or sits still in darkness as voices waft over clear waters, his garden casts a spell. It is a dream world. "While we are here," I heard someone say, "we are all living William Christie's dream." On this last evening, the resounding opening chorus of *Dido and Aeneas* caught the spirit of the place:

*See Nature, rejoicing, has shown us the way  
With innocent revels to welcome the day,  
The tuneful grove and talking rill,  
The laughing vale, replying hill.  
With charming harmony unite,  
The happy season to invite.*

– Paula Deitz

## Book Reviews

### **Prospect Park: Olmsted & Vaux's Brooklyn Masterpiece**

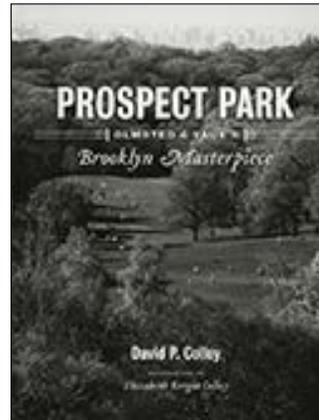
By David P. Colley  
Photographs by Elizabeth Keegin Colley

New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013

Several years ago, when I was writing my second novel, I went on a research excursion to Prospect Park. My destination was the Friends Cemetery on Quaker Hill. Laid out before the

park was built, the cemetery remains private property. One of my fictional characters, a member of the Society of Friends, had died tragically, and I was looking for a place to bury her.

Although by then I'd lived in New York City for decades, I'd never visited Prospect Park. Setting out from Manhattan on a brisk and sunny autumn afternoon, I took the F train to the 15th Street stop and entered the park through the Bartel-Pritchard entrance, with its majestic, neoclassical columns. As I walked along the West Drive, any sense of the city



slipped gradually away. The deeper I went into the park, the more untamed the landscape became. Consulting my map, I turned onto the Center Drive. The foliage was dense around me. The trees were so tall that they hid the brilliant sunlight that had embraced me minutes earlier. I no longer heard the sounds that had

reached me from the Long Meadow – of soccer and baseball, and children frolicking. Even the joggers and bicyclists had disappeared. All was silent. As I searched for the turnoff to

the Quaker cemetery, I had an eerie, disquieting feeling of abandoning not simply the crowded city but the twenty-first century itself, of leaving behind even the era of Olmsted and Vaux and returning to a primeval period before Brooklyn existed.

The entryway to the Friends cemetery was cut into the foliage on the left side of the drive. A muddy path led to the wrought-iron gates, and surprisingly, the gates were open. Still seeing no one, I went in. I walked up a hillside covered with

the small, unobtrusive stone markers traditionally used by Quakers. The landscape surrounding the cemetery was thickly forested. Hawks soared overhead. The cemetery itself had the look of an arboretum, with tulip trees, copper beeches, and elegant Japanese maples.

The actor Montgomery Clift was apparently buried in the Friends cemetery, but I don't recall seeing his grave site. I do remember grave after grave of young adults, mostly in their twenties and thirties, who died in November and December of 1918. Although I'll never know for certain, most of these young people were probably victims of the Spanish Flu epidemic that raged during those months. The epidemic touched the lives of the characters in my novel, too, and seeing the graves brought the past to life for me in all its heartbreak.

After taking some notes, I left the cemetery and wandered the park. The Nethermead, the Lullwater, the Vale of Cashmere . . . the names themselves were evocative of the magical places I found. The paths were an invitation to exploration. The landscape became sheltering, comforting. I felt a sense of both relaxation and renewal, as well as a whimsical curiosity about what lay around each curve of the pathway. I imagined myself walking across a lush English country estate. The park was

simply, sublimely, beautiful.

This sublime beauty is celebrated in *Prospect Park: Olmsted & Vaux's Brooklyn Masterpiece*. Published in collaboration with the Prospect Park Alliance and bearing endorsements from former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, and U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer, this is the first monograph on the park. It's a love letter in the form of a coffee-table book, illustrated by gorgeous photographs taken over a five-year period by Elizabeth Keegin Colley, with text by her husband, David P. Colley, whose previous publications include several books about World War II. Colley approaches his Prospect Park portrait with an astute perspective on the goals of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, goals which remain strikingly relevant today. "Prospect Park," he writes, "realized its designers' vision of the democratic ideal where people would mingle and socialize openly – and without reservation – with others from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and socioeconomic levels. . . . It is a sanctuary that also fulfills its role as a melting pot."

Colley's history of the landscape that became Prospect Park begins in the Ice Age, when "millions of tons

of ice, stacked as high as one thousand feet, scoured the land that today makes up the Long Meadow and the Nethermead.” The glacial erratics found in the park came from the canyon walls of the New Jersey Palisades, and these boulders were utilized by Olmsted and Vaux to construct the park’s Boulder Bridge as well as the Ravine’s Fallkill and Ambergill waterfalls.

When the first Europeans arrived in the early sixteenth century, the Lenape tribe of Native Americans dominated the region. Centuries later, the East Drive of Prospect Park would run, at least in part, along a Native American trail. During the American Revolution, the Battle of Brooklyn (also called the Battle of Long Island) was fiercely fought on the land that became Prospect Park, in the areas now called Redoubt Hill and Battle Pass. “It is in today’s Prospect Park that we find the only urban Revolutionary War battle site that still exists almost as it was in 1776,” Colley notes. In a sad coda to this history, bodies of American soldiers were discovered there during the park’s construction.

In the nineteenth century, Brooklyn experienced remarkable growth, on its way to becoming America’s

third largest city by the end of the 1860s. Colley provides an intriguing history of the Brooklyn of that era – its teeming harbor, its waves of immigrants, its homeless and poor, and the barely checked violence among radically different ethnic groups and economic classes. With parkland essentially nonexistent in Brooklyn, by 1860 Greenwood Cemetery was drawing roughly half a million visitors a year. At this point, James S. T. Stranahan, a Brooklyn businessman and civic leader, stepped forward to spearhead the effort for a park through the Brooklyn Park Commission.

Stranahan, Calvert Vaux, and Frederick Law Olmsted each brought unique gifts to the development of the park, but Colley considers Stranahan the most important player. “Although Olmsted and Vaux are the park’s marquis figures,” Colley writes, “it was really Stranahan’s shrewd political maneuvering and iron will that made the park a reality.” Born near Syracuse, the son of a farmer, Stranahan came to Brooklyn when he was in his thirties. His commercial interests included railroads, lumber, grain elevators, ferry boats, and real estate. He led efforts to bring cultural centers to Brooklyn, as well as schools and libraries. Before the Civil War, he served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Stranahan’s grasp of money and power politics made the park possible, but its primary designer was Calvert Vaux. “Vaux was the man whose plan shaped the raw acres of land – hills, forest, farmland, and bogs – into Prospect Park,” Colley writes, in an extensive and touching portrait of the Englishman whose reputation has always been dwarfed by that of his partner. Olmsted was working at the Mariposa Mining Estate in California when Vaux asked him to return to New York City to assist with the construction of the new park in Brooklyn. Capturing the tragedy of Calvert Vaux, who is thought to have committed suicide in 1895, Colley insightfully writes: “Vaux had the ability to design Prospect Park, but he lacked Olmsted’s hard-nosed management skills to implement his plan. . . . It is Vaux who is responsible for the handsome arches, the Dairy, the Oriental Pavilion, the Concert Grove House, the rustic wooden shelters, and the bridges that blend so seamlessly into the park landscape. But in enlisting the assertive and driven Olmsted, he acquiesced to second billing, and throughout the remainder of his life he lived, largely by his own design, in Olmsted’s shadow.”

Major park construction took place between 1866 and 1873. Colley examines the construction of each section of the park in turn; and the archival photographs, illustrations, and diagrams that accompany this discussion are fascinating. He has a gift for explaining in layman’s terms the technical details of how things work, whether addressing himself to drainage, leakage from the Lake, or the construction of the well and accompanying steam engine that fed the water features and reservoir (which existed into the 1930s). He also identifies English parks that inspired the designers, such as Birkenhead, near Liverpool, which Olmsted visited several times. And Colley explicates the design elements that make Prospect Park so alluring, such as the small waterfalls that fill the air with the sound of rushing torrents; the views framed by archways and strategically placed foliage and trees; and the scenery reflected by the cleverly situated Lake. Paths and drives were curved to create an illusion of distance, as if one were being drawn deeper and deeper into a wilderness. Among the many brilliant details of Olmsted and Vaux’s plan was the lowering of the paths that traverse the Long Meadow, so that the meadow appears endless. Colley explains, “It was through the employment of these design elements –

tricks, if you will – that Olmsted and Vaux sought to create a powerful contrast to the clamoring city streets.”

Prospect Park was mostly complete by 1873. Stranahan led the Park Commission for another decade, fighting stalwartly to maintain it as Olmsted and Vaux had envisioned it. By 1900, however, 15 million people were visiting the park every year. With such heavy use, the landscape deteriorated. Vaux’s rustic wooden structures began to rot, and the Lake turned stagnant. The City Beautiful movement and the growing prominence of neoclassical architecture brought a new aesthetic to the park, reflected in monuments, memorials, arches, and entryways added around the turn of the nineteenth century, many designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White. Meanwhile the decline of the landscape itself – from erosion, deferred maintenance, and overuse – continued unabated. Robert Moses, parks commissioner from 1934 to 1960, took some action to preserve the park, but left a mixed legacy overall. Moses added baseball fields, the band shell, and the zoo (replacing Olmsted and Vaux’s menagerie), and built playgrounds and a skating rink too. But he also destroyed Vaux’s Dairy and

Concert Grove House and replaced his fanciful bridges with “utilitarian cement spans that had lead-pipe railings and chain-link fencing.” Moses welcomed cars to the park, and grasslands became parking lots.

By the 1960s, Prospect Park was well into a downward spiral. By the late 1970s, fewer than 2 million people a year visited the park – down from the 15 million a year in 1900. The park was filled with trash, covered with graffiti, and had become a haven for criminals. Many New Yorkers were afraid to enter it.

Finally, in the 1980s, the situation changed. Tupper Thomas, an experienced public servant, “worldly, tough, and smart,” became the Prospect Park administrator and served in that role for thirty-one years, bringing together competing forces and spearheading the park’s turnaround. She “impacted the development of Prospect Park as much as anyone who had come before,” Colley writes. The Prospect Park Alliance was formed in the mid-eighties, with the restoration of the Carousel as its first project. Landscape restoration began and continues. Today, Prospect Park is a ravishing, glorious fulfillment of Vaux and Olmsted’s original vision.

Is it possible to have too much of a good thing in a monograph about a

landscape as magnificent as Prospect Park? Alas, yes. Colley's text often slips into adoration, as if each sentence ended with an exclamation point. In the chapter entitled "Delights of the Park," he is especially prone to this overenthusiasm. The modern photographs of the park, arresting one by one, take on a sameness. The Long Meadow is pictured over and over, in similar views, each caption once again telling the reader how beautiful the Meadow is. The devastation of the 1960s and 1970s is represented only by several small, generic-looking photos of the effects of erosion, photos that might have been taken anywhere.

A generation of New Yorkers essentially grew up without Prospect Park. If not for the resolve of the citizens who fought to save it, the park could have been lost forever. *Prospect Park* the monograph is a lavishly illustrated celebration of Vaux and Olmsted's great masterpiece, but this celebration would have been more powerful yet had the book included a visual recognition of how very bleak its condition was just several decades ago. Such an acknowledgment would have served as a warning about the future, to jolt us from complacency.

— Lauren Belfer

**Gardening by the Book:  
Celebrating 100 Years of the  
Garden Club of America**

**By Arete Swartz Warren**  
New York: The Garden Club of America and The Grolier Club, 2013

Just over a hundred years ago, twelve local garden clubs formed a national association to share horticultural expertise, encourage civic planting, and protect native plants and birds. The

organization grew rapidly, attracting garden writers and designers as well as community leaders. Within a year, a library committee was established. Over the course of the century, a remarkable collection of rare books grew under its supervision, largely due to the donations of members.

Today the chair of the library committee is Arete Swartz Warren, a well-known speaker and the coauthor of a handsome book on the history of glasshouses. In celebration of the centennial, she curated and wrote the catalog for an exhibition of rare books selected from the library of the Garden Club of America (GCA) and hosted by the Grolier Club, the great American center for bibliophiles and print collectors.



Gorgeously designed by Linda Florio and sumptuously printed in Connecticut by GHP Inc., *Gardening by the Book* enables the reader to absorb the images and information that were offered in concentrated

profusion at the Grolier's gallery in New York. The Garden Club's library emerges as a dynamic collection, a tribute to a venerable association of regional garden clubs and the dedication and generosity of its members.

As its title suggests, the catalog celebrates the organization and its book-loving constituents as much as the volumes themselves. To a great extent, this is a work of social history, noting the names, relationships, estates, and activities of the people associated with these books. At a time when privileged women were encouraged to pour their intelligence and energies into domestic and volunteer commitments rather than professional careers, the formidable talents and characters of leaders in the ladies' clubs produced some monumental achievements.

Rachel McMasters Hunt, for example, is well known to the world of bibliophiles, and it is a revelation to read of her development as a garden-club member who wrote articles for the *GCA Bulletin*, chaired the library committee during World War II, and helped to curate its exhibitions, all the while collecting the rare books that in 1961 would form the contents of the new Hunt Botanical Library (now the internationally respected Hunt Institute for Botanical Illustration at Carnegie Mellon University).

This catalog begins with a series of short introductory essays: one by Leslie K. Overstreet briefly surveying the history of botanical books; another by Denise Otis on American women in garden writing and landscape design (and their many connections to the GCA); and a third by Arete Warren on the development of the GCA, its leaders, and its library. This last is a unique contribution, drawing new attention to the intellectual life of the association.

The essays are followed by 150 entries, organized in six chronological sections, describing each item in the exhibit, from a hand-painted flower book of 1612 to the twentieth-century publications of the GCA itself. Although heavily weighted towards botanical plates, horticultural instruc-

tions, and images of landscape designs, the catalog includes magnificent images from a wide range of other sources as well: books on birds, a treatise on beekeeping, an early interpretation of fossils. There are rare and luxurious plate books represented, such as Johann Volckhamer's eighteenth-century folio of citrus varieties floating on the page above garden views, Mark Catesby's illustrated natural history of the American Southeast, Robert Thornton's famous *Temple of Flora*, Priscilla Falkner Bury's stunning portraits of lilies and amaryllis, and Adveno Brooke's chromolithographed Italianate gardens of Victorian England. These are balanced by botanical textbooks, popular manuals, and more recent volumes still familiar and helpful to gardeners today. Warren adds valuable introductions of the twentieth-century literature to the more thoroughly studied works of previous centuries. Especially useful are the discussions of books connected with the GCA itself. Foremost among these, Alice Lockwood's *Gardens of Colony and State* remains a noble reference work on American garden history, and it is interesting to learn more about its origins and author.

Warren's catalog offers an accessible and enticing window on her subject for the general audience and broadens the awareness of more specialized readers, cogently summarizing information from histories of botanical illustration, herbals, horticulture, and garden design. In order to maintain its broad appeal, the catalog has no footnotes, and the bibliography omits most narrowly focused scholarship as well as works of contextual history.

There is much to be gleaned from casting so wide a net, but inevitably the requirement of expertise on 150 various subjects causes occasional problems. A careless error raises a cautionary flag: Salomon de Caus could not have worked for the Sun King since Louis XIV was born after the death of that garden engineer. This misstatement appears within the entry on Alicia Amherst, which repeats uncritically the claim that Amherst was the "founder of garden history," an overstatement ignoring John Claudius Loudon among others. A presentation of Frederick Pursh's *Flora of North America*, which first introduced plants from the Lewis and Clark expedition, states incorrectly that his former employer Dr. Benjamin Barton was "uninterested" in publishing an American *Flora* himself. Pursh's *Flora* was published

in London in the midst of the War of 1812; and the outrage of Americans supporting American publication of those discoveries, who accused Pursh of purloining his Lewis and Clark specimens, goes unmentioned here. A more balanced presentation of Peter Henderson, described here as someone who wrote only for nurserymen, would have affirmed that he was indeed an important stimulus and guide to those professionals but equally concerned with his audience of amateur gardeners, as evidenced by his books, seed catalogs, and vast correspondence with customers. Missing from the list of influences on Jacob Weidenmann is Rudolf Siebeck, superintendent of the Viennese parks and an influential designer, in whose orbit Weidenmann learned about gardens before coming to America. Siebeck's designs were published in the same distinctive graphic style as those of Weidenmann – this is a comparison yet to be studied and to this reader the most mysterious and intriguing characteristic of Weidenmann's book. Finally, as far as I am aware, Alice Morse Earle's book *Old Time Gardens* (1901) was the first to guide a Colonial Revival garden style in America, preceded by her magazine article on the subject in 1896 – but this essential question about the book

remains unexplored and unmentioned here.

With these reservations, *Gardening by the Book* is undeniably an achievement of great interest to gardening enthusiasts and real value to garden-book collectors. It is a beautiful book with a wealth of splendid reproductions, a pleasure to peruse, and a worthy commemoration of the centennial of an important American environmental, civic, and horticultural organization. – Elizabeth Eustis

***Gardens for a Beautiful America, 1895–1935: Photographs by Frances Benjamin Johnston***  
By Sam Watters

New York: Acanthus Press in collaboration with the Library of Congress, 2012

*Gardens for a Beautiful America, 1895–1935* celebrates the heyday of American gardens from the Gilded Age to the

Jazz Age, and the work of a pioneering photographer. This lavish book is illustrated exclusively with glass lantern slides taken by the renowned photojournalist Frances Benjamin Johnston



for use in her popular lectures. The 250-plus images included here – many of which have not been seen in decades – are but a small sampling of Johnson's important collection of eleven hundred black-and-white and color slides. Unlike the archives of most other garden photographers of the era, which were either broken up or destroyed, the Johnston collection is intact. It is housed in the Library of Congress, and searchable online.

While sifting through the collection to select representative images for this volume, architectural historian Sam Watters discovered that many of these long-forgotten glass slides were unlabeled, which made his task more challenging. During the identi-

fication and selection process, he compiled extensive research data, evident in the detailed notes to the text

and plates. The book also includes an excellent bibliography and a list of the books on garden design that were in Johnston's library. In conjunction with Mac Griswold and Eleanor Weller's *The Golden Age of American Gardens: Proud Owners, Private Estates, 1890–1940* (1982), which is

illustrated with vintage slides from a different collection, this book provides a near-comprehensive visual record of American gardens during an important time period and a treasure trove of information for future studies.

Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864–1952), who was born in West Virginia and died in New York, began work as a photojournalist in the 1880s selling illustrated stories to magazines. At the Academie Julian in Paris and the Art Students League in Washington, D.C., she learned how to frame her compositions and acquired the technical skills necessary for her path-breaking career. Johnston, who tirelessly promoted photography as a profession for women, was an educated woman who needed to earn a living. As C. Ford Peatross of the Library of Congress writes in the preface, "Frances Benjamin Johnston was a protean figure – pioneer photographer, photojournalist, and visual artist – who moved with equal ease among presidents and plutocrats, reformers, architects, designers, publishers, and promoters." Theodore Roosevelt recommended her highly: "She does good work, and any promise she makes she will keep."

After moving from Washington to New York City around 1909, she began

a partnership with Mattie Edwards Hewitt (1869–1956), another important pioneer photographer. Together they began photographing gardens while on architectural assignments around the country, profiting from the large-format magazines devoted to American country houses and gardens that began appearing around 1900. The inclusion of Johnston's and Hewitt's evocative black-and-white photographs in *Country Life in America*, *House and Garden*, *The House Beautiful*, and other magazines helped codify American gardens and bring recognition to the careers of leading women designers like Ellen Shipman and Marian Coffin.

After her collaboration with Hewitt ended, Johnston focused exclusively on garden photography, which proved to be a lucrative venture. Her career surged significantly when some of her photographs were included in important books devoted to gardens, such as Louise Shelton's *Beautiful Gardens in America* (1915), the inspiration for the present volume. Up until the mid-1930s, Johnston photographed hundreds of city and country gardens for home owners, editors, and landscape architects.

In her studio in New York City, Johnston trained production assistants to hand-tint her black-and-white photographs and glass slides, supplying them with

explicit field notes for guidance. She used hundreds of the hand-colored glass lantern slides in the popular lectures she gave around the country to garden clubs and other organizations. Her first lecture, in 1911, was entitled "Our American Gardens," and from there she branched out into more specialized topics such as garden planning, small gardens, famous gardens, and the like. Between 1915 and 1923, Johnston delivered more than one hundred lectures, charging \$75 to \$100, plus \$10 for the purchase of individual slides or prints. By 1930, her reputation well established, she commanded \$150 per lecture. As Watters points out, Hewitt made her living as a photographer, while Johnston became a "garden celebrity."

Taking a cue from Johnston's own slide albums, Watters has organized the book around five themes: Gardens of the East, the West, the South, and the Old World, and City and Suburban Gardens. The sites photographed range from elite, East Coast estate gardens on Long Island, in Bar Harbor, Newport, and the Berkshires to more informal country gardens. Some places are iconic, such as The Breakers and The Elms in Newport, while others are comparatively unknown,

such as Brookside in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and Waveny in New Canaan, Connecticut. The images that stand out visually are classically oriented gardens, with axial views, linear hedges, and formal statuary, rather than more informal gardens filled with billowing flowers. The views of classical French and Italian gardens Johnston took during the summer of 1925 – the Villa d’Este, Villa Gamberaia, the romantic Château de Courances – rival photographs shot by Charles Latham in Italy and Frederick Evans in France.

The oblong format of the book is ideal for viewing horizontal photographs. In several cases, gatefolds allow a series of photographs to be shown in sequence. For example, Beacon Hill, the Arthur Curtiss James estate in Newport, is shown in six photographs dating from 1914. Among them are images of the iconic Blue Garden (currently undergoing restoration) and the ornamental farm on the estate. The lesser-known outdoor theater at Piranhurst in Montecito is recorded in three views – the theater boxes, the wings, and the stage – all created from immaculately clipped hedges. By today’s standards, the “green” theater is refreshingly modern.

Johnston firmly established herself as the foremost photographer of gardens in the West, as

well – in particular, in Santa Barbara, Montecito, and Hillsborough, which she began photographing in 1917. She also photographed missions, adobe houses, and ranches. In her travels through the South in 1927, she captured both Ellen Shipman’s once-exquisite colonial revival garden at Chatham Manor in Fredericksburg and Charleston’s Magnolia Plantation in all its lushness. City and suburban gardens photographed by Johnston range from the modest garden of a janitor’s apartment in New York City to the private enclave at Turtle Bay Gardens.

Wisely, Watters has kept the captions brief so as not to detract from the pleasure of viewing the pictures. The highly informative notes in the back matter, however, include dates, names (of designers, architects, and clients), published references, and explanations of features. Beatrix Farrand, Marian Coffin, Olmsted Brothers, Charles Gillette, Martha Brookes Hutcheson, Rose Standish Nichols, Ruth Dean, Clarence Fowler, George Thiene, Ellen Shipman, and Greene & Greene are among the numerous landscape architects and designers whose work is represented in the book. In his introduction, Watters provides biographical information about these indi-

viduals and firms as well as technical information about the images.

In 1945, after her long and productive career had ended, Johnston retired to a cottage in New Orleans’ Vieux Carré, where she made her own tiny garden. She was eighty-eight years old when she died in 1952, by which time photography had become a popular pursuit with cheap cameras. Since her death, she has been the subject of many books and studies, but this one is outstanding. Not only does it contain a wealth of scholarship for historians and preservationists, but it beckons to armchair readers as well, thanks to its visual appeal. As Frances Benjamin Johnston wrote, “There is more to photography than just taking pictures!”

Sam Watters is guest curator of Gardens for a Beautiful America: The Women Who Photographed Them, an exhibition based in part on this book. It will be on view in the Rondina and Lo Faro Gallery at the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) from May 17 until September 7, 2014. The exhibition includes forty of Johnston’s original color slides, a camera of the same model used by Johnston and Hewitt, period prints of photographs, glass lantern slides, and vintage magazines and books from the NYBG’s LuEsther T. Mertz Library. – Judith B. Tankard

## Exhibition

**André Le Nôtre en perspectives, 1613–2013**  
Château de Versailles,  
October 22, 2013 to  
February 23, 2014

The commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of André Le Nôtre (March 12, 1613) was lavishly celebrated with an exhibition held at the château of Versailles and

accompanied by a luxurious hardcover catalogue, *André Le Nôtre en perspectives, 1613–2013* (Éditions Hazan, 2013). Although the public premise of the exhibition was to reveal the landscape designer’s “secrets, genius and vision” – themes well entrenched in Le Nôtre scholarship – the title word “perspectives” evokes not only Le Nôtre’s transformation of the landscape through axial alignment but also suggests that curators Patricia Bouchenot-Déchin and Georges Farhat, under the direction of Beatrix



Saule, hoped to place his work “in perspective” by offering new interpretations of his accomplishments. Indeed, newly attributed archival documents were used to illuminate Le Nôtre’s social status as well as his working practice. Exceptional loans from the

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Institut de France, the Musée du Louvre, and Stockholm’s Nationalmuseum provided unrivaled opportunities to contemplate the complexity of landscape architecture in seventeenth-century baroque visual culture.

The curators placed Le Nôtre’s work in the broader context of the era’s scientific and mathematical innovations, recalling the 2010 exhibition *Sciences & Curiosities à la Cour de Versailles* (also under the direction of Beatrix Saule), and *André Le Nôtre: Fragments d’un paysage culturel; Institutions, arts, sciences et techniques* (2006), the proceedings of a colloquium organized by Georges Farhat. In the catalogue accompanying *André Le Nôtre en perspectives*, over thirty scholars joined the two curators in providing a

wealth of contextual analysis that will surely encourage students to explore not only the role of the landscape architect but also the dissemination of the baroque garden. It is interesting to note, however, that the catalogue stresses (as did the exhibition) connoisseurship on the one hand and scientific innovation on the other, rather than interdisciplinary analysis of landscape garden design.

The exhibition filled eight rooms with over four hundred objects, including paintings, books, drawings, sculptures, models, videos, and scientific instruments. The introductory room, dedicated to Le Nôtre’s art collections, was configured as an octagonal space. In it, the curators reconstituted the *cabinet* from Le Nôtre’s home in the Tuileries gardens, which archival research revealed was hung with paintings from floor to ceiling. They were remarkable works – primarily landscapes by Poussin and Claude and Italian masters such as Albani. The collection was a vivid manifestation of Le Nôtre’s accession to the nobility (in 1675) and his status as an academician. Notably, three allegories by Albani – *Earth, Air, and Water* – as well as two

sunsets by Claude Lorrain, all included in the exhibition, demonstrated his eye for harmoniously balanced, luminous landscapes. A selection of small bronzes from Le Nôtre's cabinet, also included in the first room of the exhibition, suggested that he preferred subjects often associated with gardens, such as Apollo and Daphne and the Farnese Hercules. Seen in the context of Le Nôtre's own work, the bronzes inspired reflection about his conception of scale in sculpture, given the contrast between works he could hold and manipulate and those he was asked to place strategically in gardens.

In the corridor leading from the first to the second room, visitors could retrace the beginnings of Le Nôtre's sixty-five-year-long career. There they found Carlo Marrata's famed portrait of Le Nôtre; a video exploring Le Nôtre's family tree; and several paintings by Simon Vouet, with whom Le Nôtre apprenticed, and who rivaled Poussin in the first half of the century. Le Nôtre's first circle of patrons was also evoked: Gaston d'Orleans, Madame de Sevigne, Madame de Scudery, and of course Nicolas Fouquet. In 1635 Le Nôtre became first gardener to Gaston d'Orléans, and in 1637 he

moved to a royal position, *Jardinier ordinaire du roi en charge de Tuileries*, inheriting the title held by his father, Pierre Le Nôtre.

Traditionally, this career path has been considered a transfer from father to son, with a prescient father enrolling his son in the atelier of Simon Vouet to assure that he would be able to master perspective. However, in essays in the catalogue, Patricia Bouchenot-Déchin and Nicolas Milovanovic reveal that Le Nôtre benefitted from extraordinary patronage from the outset of his apprenticeship. By 1647 he was no longer a *Jardinière ordinaire* but *Conseiller du roi et controleur général des bâtiments, arts & manufactures*. At the age of thirty-seven, he received the most important commission of his career – from Nicolas Fouquet for the creation of Vaux le Vicomte (1649–1660). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Vaux received little attention in this exhibition, represented only by one large painted view of the château and gardens. And yet it was Fouquet who empowered Le Nôtre to apply his aesthetic vision in unparalleled circumstances, signaling that he had mastered the unusually wide skill set (mathematics,

horticulture, hydraulic engineering) needed to organize extensive landscape commissions.

In the second room, a series of large-scale representations of Versailles, notably by Martin and Cotelle, were exhibited with paintings and plans of Le Nôtre's other interventions at Choisy, Meudon, Saint Cyr, and Clagny. Le Nôtre worked at the center of a large royal patronage network in France and Europe, and these images helped to illustrate the extent of his practice.

The third room provided exceptional insights to Le Nôtre's practice within the political and economic context of the seigneurial domain. Between 1660 and 1693, he coordinated teams of workers to expand the domain at Versailles, glorifying the king and his family, mistresses, and courtiers. Brilliantly conceived interactive plans and videos demonstrated that Le Nôtre's conception of the central allée often dictated the extension of the domain. During Le Nôtre's lifetime, the Petit Parc and Grand Parc of Versailles were expanded to total ten thousand hectares – approximately ten times larger than they are today. A series of registers on display – such as the *Carte de Rocquencourt*, which records

monies spent on parkland for Versailles – revealed that the king carefully expanded his *seigneurie* by acquiring tracts of land that were destined for the garden.

Le Nôtre at work was the theme of the exhibits in the fourth room. Scientific instruments (compass, quadrants, surveying tools) surrounded a glass worktable, where plans, notes, drawings, and tools were superimposed to suggest an active designer developing several sites simultaneously. From 1660 until 1683, Le Nôtre did not have his own studio but supervised his projects on site or from Versailles or his home at the Tuileries, aided by a team of assistants. Drawings by Le Nôtre's own hand are very rare; however, we saw in this exhibition a number of drawings prepared by his design team that bore his annotations. Using ink and gouache, he sketched in fountains, with their spurting jets of water; created new axes; outlined the placement of underground pipes; commented on scale and slope; and indicated appropriate plantings. His assistants, including the Les Desgots and Mollets, and individual gardeners such as Le Bouteux, Carbonnet, and Trumel, both assisted and created side by side with the

master. His “teams” were often drawn from his familial networks.

Entering the fifth room, one was greeted by a stunning, fifteen-meter-long, glass model of the axial perspective at Versailles. Conceived by Georges Farhat, it dramatically demonstrated Le Nôtre's use of optical illusions to compensate for extremely flat terrain. The model was accompanied by a video explaining Le Nôtre's exploration and manipulation of mathematics (notably the anamorphose) to modify the slope of the land to suggest boundless space. Engravings and plans of the Tuileries, Champs d'Elysée, and Chantilly, exhibited near the model, revealed the primacy of the axis in their designs as well, underscoring Le Nôtre's mastery of optical illusion.

The next two rooms focused on the parterres and the bosquets respectively. Room Six, dedicated to the parterres, displayed plans, accounts for bulbs and plants, ingenious drawings of topiary, and schemes by both Le Nôtre and Lebrun for the Parterre d'Eau. Room Seven evoked the magic of the fifteen bosquets of Versailles, the symmetrically aligned spaces that framed the axes while also offering an enchanted scenography for marvelous baroque spectacles. Dissimulated behind green walls, these fountains,

*jeux d'eau*, treillages, and rocailles rivaled sculpture. They testified to Le Nôtre's fertile imagination and the desire to surprise and captivate the king and his courtiers.

The final exhibition space was dedicated to Le Nôtre's legacy. While it was helpful to view seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architectural plans by such masters as Claude Desgots, Alexandre LeBlond, and Contant d'Ivry, and instructive to reexamine the illustrated theories of Dezaillier d'Argenville, who disseminated the formal style, the inclusion of works by nineteenth- and twentieth-century urban planners and landscape architects was perplexing. To suggest that these projects were inspired by Le Nôtre's, without really engaging their cultural implications, added up to a formalist teleological analysis that undermined the complexity of seventeenth-century garden aesthetics. Likewise, although it was certainly fascinating to speculate on whether Corbusier's plans of the Ville d'Avray, Sigfried Giedion's “Space, Time and Architecture,” and drawings of the Washington Mall could be considered Le Nôtre's “legacies,” the overload of mate-

rial reduced the debate to a simple question of influence and interest in symmetry. The inclusions of a Donald Judd minimalist cube and a photo of the 9/11 memorial in Manhattan might have been more interesting if the organizers had seized the opportunity to interpret potential economic, political, or cultural reasons for French formal or symmetric revivals in contemporary landscape practice.

Far more successful was the inclusion of plans for an installation commissioned from Louis Benech and Jean Michel Othoniel for the Theatre d'Eau, and scheduled to open in 2014. The plans for this project offered a unique opportunity to evaluate Le Nôtre's impact on contemporary design. Similarly, Giuseppe Penone's monumental tree sculptures, commissioned for the gardens at Versailles and magnificently sited, spoke to both the past and present. Although it is unfortunate that the curators did not highlight the connection between Penone's cast-bronze trees and Le Nôtre's Bosquet du Marais – a bronze tree that spouted water into a temporary swamp formed by painted bronze – Penone's plays of dissimulation and revelation perhaps best incarnated Le Nôtre's legacy. – Susan Taylor-Leduc

## Contributors

**Lauren Belfer's** first novel, *City of Light* (1999), is a portrait of Buffalo during its glory days at the turn of the last century. It was a *New York Times* Notable Book as well as a *New York Times* bestseller. Her second novel, *A Fierce Radiance* (2010), set in New York City during World War II, was a *Washington Post* Best Novel of the Year and an NPR Best Mystery of the Year.

**Paula Deitz** is editor of the *Hudson Review*, a magazine of literature and the arts published in New York City. She writes about art, architecture, and landscape design for newspapers and magazines here and abroad. *Of Gardens*, a collection of her essays, was published in 2011 by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

**Joseph Disponzio** is a preservation landscape architect with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and director of the M.S. in Landscape Design program at Columbia University. Currently he is finishing a book on Jean-Marie Morel.

**Elizabeth Eustis** specializes in the history of garden-related prints and publications. Her own publications range from "The Garden Print as Propaganda, 1573–1683" in *The Changing Garden* (1993) to entries in *Romantic Gardens: Nature, Art, and Landscape Design* (2010). Her chapters on the history of American seed catalogs and on early publications of the American flora will appear in the forthcoming *Flora Illustrata: Great Works from the LuEsther T. Mertz Library*, to be published by the New York Botanical Garden and Yale University Press.

**Mary Hawthorne** is a journalist whose reviews and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, the *London Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Her article "Handmade in Switzerland" appeared in German translation in the anthology *Was ist schweizerisch?* (2009) and her essay on Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac* was included in *The Good of the Novel* (2011), a book of contemporary literary criticism. She is on the editorial staff of *The New Yorker*.

**Gary Hilderbrand** is principal of Reed Hilderbrand in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a professor in practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he has taught since 1990. He is a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the American Academy in Rome. His published works include *The Miller Garden: Icon of Modernism* (1999), *Making a Landscape of Continuity: The Practice of Innocenti & Webel* (1997), and *Visible | Invisible: Landscape Works of Reed Hilderbrand* (2013). Reed Hilderbrand received the 2013 Landscape Architecture Firm Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects.

**Mary Tavener Holmes**, PhD, is a teacher, curator, and author specializing in baroque and rococo European Art. Her publications include *A Magic Mirror: The Portrait in France from 1700 to 1900*, with George T.M. Shackelford (1986); *Nicolas Lancret 1690-1743* (1991); *Eighteenth-Century French Drawings in New York Collections*,

with Perrin Stein (2013); *Französische Gemälde I: Watteau, Pater, Lancret, Lajouë*, with Christoph Vogtherr and others (2010); and three illustrated children's nonfiction books. Recently she co-curated an exhibition on the *fête galante*, on view at the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris from March to July 2014.

**Susan Taylor-Leduc**, PhD, is the dean of Parsons Paris, the French academic center for Parsons The New School of Design. Since 1994, Taylor-Leduc has taught international and American students in Paris. She has served as a visiting lecturer at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, Sciences Po in Paris, and Columbia University's Global Center in Paris. Building on a background in eighteenth-century landscape design, Taylor-Leduc has explored multiple periods and disciplines, such as the interconnections between gambling, play theory, and French picturesque garden design.

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