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## **THE STORY OF GARDENING**

Written by **Penelope  
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# Contents

<b>1 The Origins of Gardening</b> The records and remains of the gardens and parks of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia	8	<b>11 Gardens of China</b> The long history of Chinese gardening, and its links with the landscape and painting	338
<b>2 Gardens of Ancient Greece and Rome</b> The beginnings of botany and herbalism in Greece and design developments in the Roman world	26	<b>12 The Japanese Garden</b> The essential elements of Japanese design and its influence on the rest of the world	372
<b>3 The Gardens of Islam</b> The Islamic concept of the 'fourfold' garden and its spread from the Middle East to Spain, India and Turkey	52	<b>13 From Naturalism to Modernism</b> Pioneer voices in America and Europe as gardening goes global	412
<b>4 The Medieval Gardens of Christendom</b> The layers of meaning in the gardens of the Middle Ages	98	<b>14 Visions of the Future</b> The designers, ecologists and landscape architects who are shaping the way we garden in the 21st century	444
<b>5 The Renaissance Vision in Italy</b> The transition from the classical villa gardens of 15th- and 16th-century Italy	122	Bibliography and Picture Credits	496
<b>6 The Flowering of the European Garden</b> Louis XIV's power-gardening in 17th-century France and its translation in Holland and Britain	144	Index and Acknowledgements	503
<b>7 Plants on the Move</b> Botanists, collectors and artists who drew, grew and went in search of new species	188		
<b>8 The English Landscape Garden</b> The 18th-century Landscape Movement	226		
<b>9 The Eclectic 19th Century</b> Fashions in European gardening at a time of technological change	262		
<b>10 The Americas</b> Gardening's evolution on the American continent from the Inca and Aztec civilizations to the ideals of Frederick Law Olmsted	300		

Previous: Mary, Duchess of Beaufort (1630–1715) was one of the most avid plant collectors and a skilled horticulturist of the period, obtaining many newly arrived plants from Robert Bobart at the Oxford Botanic Garden. She specialized in constructing greenhouses for growing newly arrived tender plants from all corners of the globe. She assembled a total of 750 species, first at her husband's Badminton Estate and later in London. In London, after 1681, she constructed a 36m (120ft) greenhouse against a 5.5m (18ft) wall at Beaufort House in Chelsea, experimenting with the latest heating methods. The painting is from her own sketchbook.

Opposite: Louis Carrogis Carmontelle (1717–1806) presents the keys of the Parc Monceau in Paris to the Duke of Chartres (1747–1793) on completion of his commission.

# Foreword

The history of gardening, traced through three millennia to the 21st century, is not just one story but an infinite number – as many as there have been gardeners – and these can be told in myriad ways. In this case the storyteller is a passionate gardener as well as a designer, so the viewpoint is an aesthetic one, with beauty as well as practicality the final aim. Although my primary interest seems to be in layouts – garden styles – and their evolution, I am equally involved in the plants themselves: how they have been used in the past and might be used in the future as we become increasingly conscious of their ecological and sustainable role. Today we see the practicality of gardening as part of a science, in which viability depends not only on style, but also on a knowledge of plant needs.

I believe that discovering the way in which gardening has evolved through the centuries not only enriches every gardener's life, but that understanding how successive periods have influenced one another can help us to identify our own aims. Being able to recognize echoes of previous garden styles makes it possible to adapt them to our individual needs and desires, so this book is intended for the enjoyment of all gardeners, not just those interested in history. We tend to think that early gardeners cared only about edible plants or those for treating ailments, but ancient myths and recorded literature (and sometimes cave paintings), reveal something different. Chinese emperors, Assyrian kings and medieval poets were absorbed by the idea of beauty in the garden (some became avid collectors of new plants obtained from conquered lands), while 12th-century poets wrote of roses and nightingales as a measure of garden delight. By the 14th century, Petrarch (1304–1374) began to express a new relationship with nature, leading ultimately to the birth of humanism in Renaissance Italy. In gardening terms, it became a dialogue between the relative values of 'art' and 'nature', that developed into the concept of nature 'improved' and 'expanded' by man's management.

What is a garden? The English word is derived from the French *jardin* and Teutonic roots of the word 'yard', an enclosure, usually walled and fenced, in which the soil is worked for growing plants. The concept itself goes back beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Garden of Eden and the imagery derived from it, which the Muslims from the early 7th century transformed into a terrestrial paradise, for them a foretaste of heaven to come, differing from the Persian hunting parks of kings, known as *paradeisos*, in the Fertile Crescent before the Muslim conquest.

Different people seek different things from gardening; different cultures and climates mean that people see things in different ways. Over the centuries we have been learning how to respect nature and preserve it for the future. We can learn to garden wisely without sacrificing the idea of gardening as a fine art. For garden designers today there are many rules and warnings, but the importance of the consideration of ecological factors does not mean the elimination of the concept of beauty, only a more thoughtful approach.

This book, published originally in 2002, has now been updated with the help of the distinguished garden-writer Ambra Edwards, making use of her more recent knowledge and interpretation of 20 years of development and change. Renovations, new ideas, new gardening rules, including a more scientific attitude to designing, have led to some major alterations in the book's layout. Ambra also contributes the final chapter, in which she explores exciting modern trends and techniques employed by the greatest of our modern designers, as well as bringing the recent ideas up to date. She also helps us to appreciate what we can learn from a knowledge of garden history. By doing so she also brilliantly interprets not only gardening today but also predicts its future.

Penelope Hobhouse

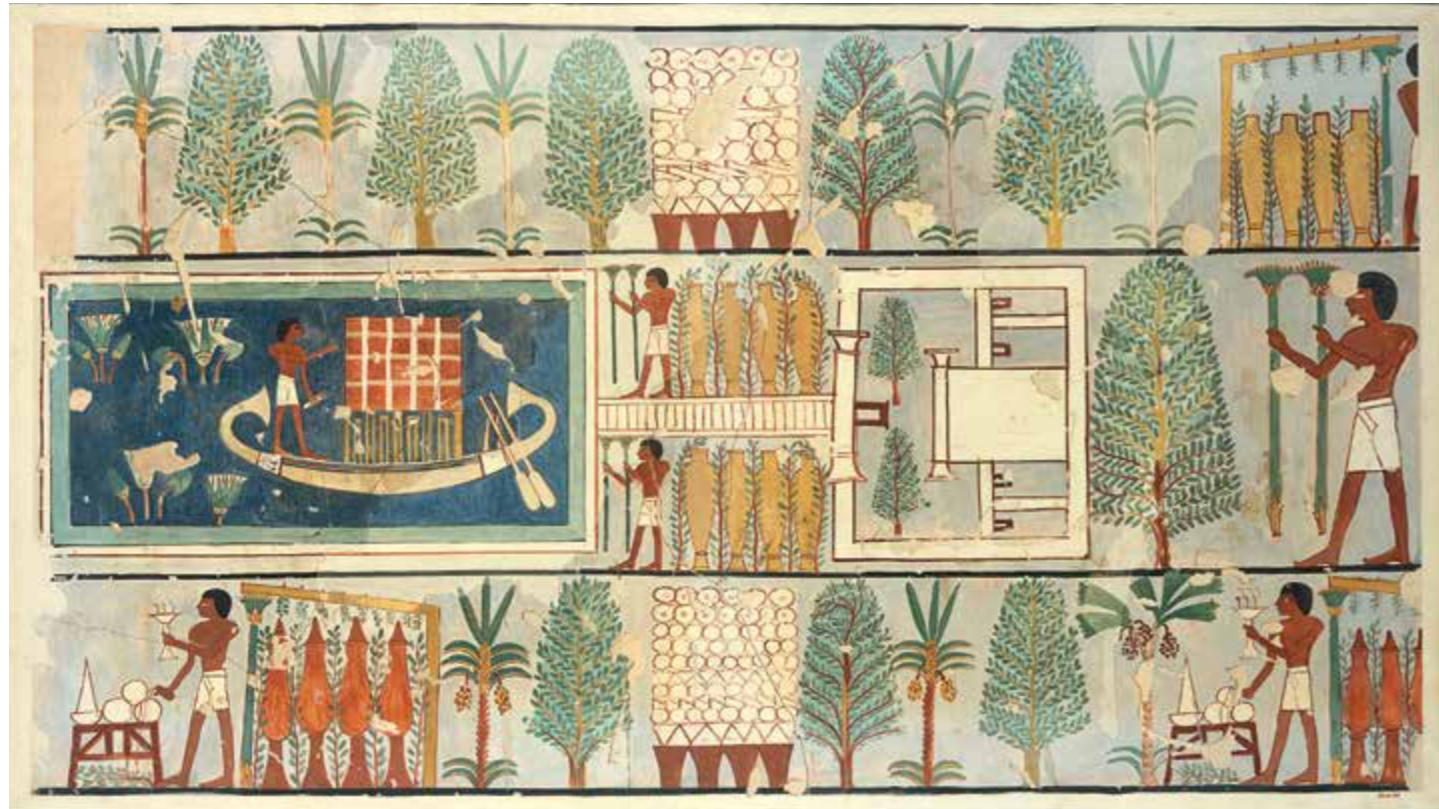


# The Origins of Gardening



**From the beginning, gardening has always depended upon topography and climate, for gardens, like life itself, depend on water. Gardening has always tended to develop first in warmer climates, where water comes as melting snow from mountains or where rivers periodically inundate floodplains. Early civilizations learned to harness water – storing it behind dams, channelling it in canals and sluices, and finding ingenious ways to conduct it to where it was needed. Sometimes exploiting gravity, sometimes defying it with the motive power of animals or slaves, early humankind made skilful and imaginative use of this precious resource. Perhaps it is time we, too, ceased to take it for granted.**

This wall painting from the tomb of Nebamun dates to c.1380 BCE and shows a garden and ornamental pool with ducks and fishes swimming among the sacred lotus. Palms with single stems and branched doum palms grow against the walls, while the goddess Hathor emerges from a sycamore fig to equip the souls of the deceased for their journey into the afterlife. The papyrus planted around the pool is a symbol of rebirth and was often used as a decorative motif on capitals and columns in ancient Egypt.



The first gardens must have been primarily productive, with little conscious emphasis on beauty, supplying fruit and vegetables for food, and herbs for medicines and offerings. The need for irrigation systems would have dictated a regular layout. Even now, for many of us, a formal layout based on geometric forms remains immensely satisfying, providing the safe logic of an identifiable pattern, pleasing both the eye and the understanding. Valuable plants would have needed protection from raiding animals and enemies, so gardens were walled or fenced, excluding the outside world. In spite of the undoubted beauties of naturalistic open landscapes, many of us still crave the sanctuary offered by a secure walled retreat, a place in which to create our own idea of paradise.

We can picture the garden-owner gradually beginning to derive pride, status and pleasure from the plot that it was within his power to make fertile and beautiful. He – almost always a he – would want somewhere to sit and admire his domain, and paths to stroll along, the better to appreciate it. A very early Sumerian fable relates how a king planted a date palm and a tamarisk in the courtyard of his palace and held a banquet in their shade.

At the same time, both garden-owner and labouring gardener beheld with awe the mysteries of nature. Any ‘green’ site became a sign of the mysterious power that ruled the universe. To early agriculturists, water and the vegetation it supported were tangible symbols of the mercy of the gods, and it is not surprising that the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations, utterly dependent on their respective rivers for survival, worshipped their river gods as personifications of fertility. The palm tree, able to perpetuate itself by producing new leaves as the old ones dropped, took on a magical aura of immortality.

This tomb painting from Thebes, dating to c.1475 BCE, shows an Egyptian funeral ceremony in the garden of a temple. A canopied barge bears the deceased through lotus-filled waters edged with papyrus, and with date palms and sycamore figs in the surrounding beds.

## The Fertile Crescent

We think of Western civilization beginning in the foothills of north-east Mesopotamia and the Anatolian plateau where, 8000 years ago, our ancestors first evolved from nomad hunter-gatherers to settled agriculturists. By 4000 BCE, these people’s descendants, the Sumerians, the world’s first literate civilization, had migrated from the cooler, wetter uplands with their forests of scrub oak, planes, box, cedar, cypress and poplar, to the alluvial plains of the Euphrates and Tigris delta. Within another millennium they had constructed canals for irrigation and drainage to turn desert and swamp into rich cultivated lands – the ‘fertile crescent’ of history. The fertile crescent includes Egypt, but we shall consider the two regions separately here since the gardens each produced are markedly different, the Egyptians making smaller, enclosed gardens, while the Mesopotamians and Assyrians were better known for their extensive hunting parks and landscaped gardens.

Originally, only willows grew along the riverbanks, and date palms in the deltas, while nothing grew in the swamps between the river basins except the giant common reed *Phragmites australis*. But within a few hundred years, the Sumerians were laying out large and luxuriant hunting parks with elaborate watering systems. These they stocked with exotic new plants, animals and birds collected on their foreign campaigns. New crops were introduced, and new techniques to grow them. In addition, a more complex society developed in which there were hierarchies of wealth – a key prerequisite for gardening, for it fosters the development of non-utilitarian attitudes to horticulture. Wild fruits and flowers, herbs and spices were transformed into domesticated plants, grown for interest and pleasure as well as for offerings to the gods.

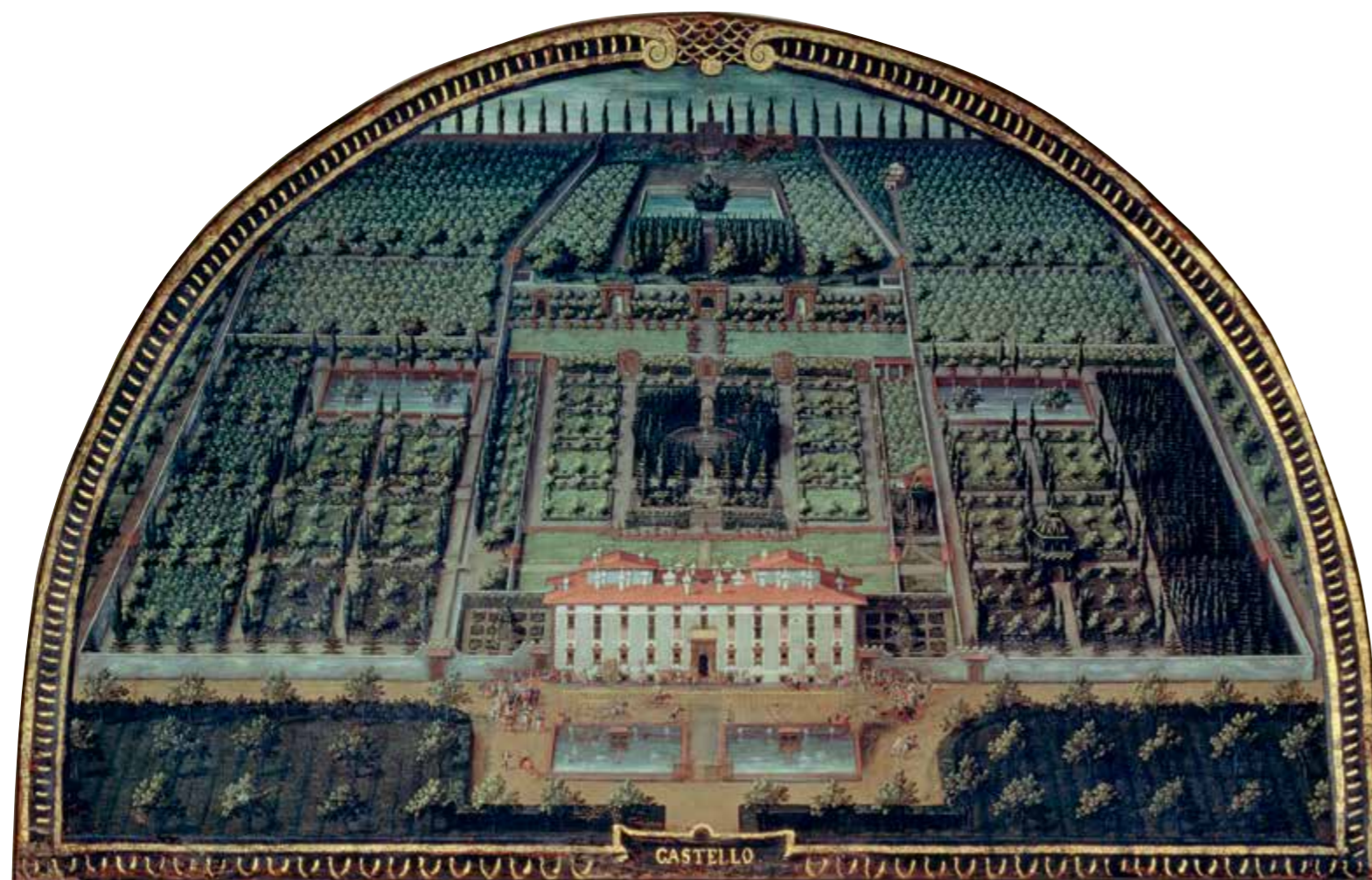
## The Paradise Garden

The idea of paradise as a garden is very ancient, certainly predating the three great monotheist religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The detail changes with time and culture, but it is invariably a place of perpetual spring, usually set in some past golden age, where men could live without toil, in accord with each other and with the animals, secure of fruits in abundance. For the desert dweller, it was a place of water and shade; for warrior nations, an idyllic garden of peace and plenty. The Sumerian-Babylonian Garden of the Gods corresponded to the Elysian Fields of Ancient Greece and the mystic islands where dwelt the Immortals of Chinese fable.

The first evidence we have of the concept of the paradise garden was on the oldest of known cuneiform tablets (the earliest known writing), unearthed in Mesopotamia and possibly dating to c.3500 BCE. The Sumerian god of water, Enki, had ordered the Sun god, Utu, to create a divine garden by providing fresh water to transform the parched land of Dilmun – a land ‘pure, clear and bright’ where inhabitants knew neither sickness, violence nor ageing, but who had no fresh water – into a paradise with fruit trees and green fields.



Sargon of Akkad (c.2334–2279 BCE), the garden-making ruler of Mesopotamia, salutes a sacred tree. The tree is a symbol of immortality, embodying the annual rebirth of nature in spring and ‘death’ in autumn.



## Gardens and the Landscape

Italian Renaissance gardens, especially in Tuscany, although remarkable for their new, sophisticated designs, were deeply rooted in the agricultural landscape. Broad garden terraces reflected the ancient layout of olive groves and vineyards cultivated for centuries in the surrounding countryside. Indeed, some new gardens incorporated these very elements, often planting trees in a traditional quincunx arrangement, so that each would receive as much light and air as possible. (A basic quincunx is formed from five trees, four making a square, with the fifth in the centre.)

The 17 lunettes painted for the Villa di Artimino by the Flemish artist Giusto Utens towards the end of the 16th century show gardens owned by the Medici family, and illustrate how agricultural patterns were adapted for fruit and flower-beds. Utens showed how the earliest 15th-century country villas were actually set into farming spaces, although subsequent designs, such as those at Castello (above) and Petraia, nearer the centre of Florence, were more complex. And at Pratolino

Fernando I de' Medici commissioned 17 lunettes of the family's villas and the surrounding countryside. This depiction of the Villa di Castello shows the original layout of the garden, designed by Niccolò Tribolo, and completed before 1599.



## The Lemon

We still cannot be sure when *Citrus × limon*, the sweet lemon, was first grown in Europe, nor are we certain of its country of origin. The Chinese have been growing members of the genus for at least 3000 years, but the lemon itself – along with the citron, *C. medica* – probably came to China from tropical East India a little later, and was used in the hybridization programmes first described in Han Yanzhi's *Ju Li* in 1178. In fact, the lemon is probably a hybrid of *C. medica* and an unknown parent. We know that the citron was grown in Roman gardens at Pompeii and by Renaissance times, citrus fruit, brought to Spain, Sicily and Southern Italy by the Arabs, was grown extensively. By the 1550s, there were 200 varieties at the Medici villa at Castello.

The earliest illustrations ever produced with the aid of a microscope contributed to GB Ferrari's *Hesperides*, published in Rome in 1646. Engravings of the sweet lemon, grown in Italy and Portugal, were made from drawings and watercolours by Vincenzo Leonardi (active 1621–1646). These watercolours were in the famous Paper Museum (Museo Cartaceo) of Cassiano dal Pozzo, whose collection in Rome was intended specifically to help classify the natural world and included drawings of many items besides plants.

During the 17th century, European horticulturists developed considerable expertise in growing citrus fruits, devising winter shelter and heating to coax them into flower and fruit. This watercolour by Vincenzo Leonardi is not featured in the *Hesperides* but once formed part of the collection assembled by Cassiano dal Pozzo. Today, one of the most popular lemons is a compact dwarf variety called *Citrus × meyeri* 'Meyer', which, in cold climates, can be cultivated in conservatories. The scented flowers and fruit are often carried in the same season.



(see page 138), the most complicated of all the Medici villas, Grand Duke Francesco transformed a mountain slope into a ‘garden of miracles’.

The architect, as stressed by classical writers, had to consider the relationship of the villa and garden to the surrounding landscape and its function as a place for the owners to walk in, to enjoy the fragrance of lemon blossom and other flowers, to find shade under trees, pergolas or loggias in the hot summers, and to enjoy the sound and refreshment of water. The best sites also provided the right sort of conditions for the plants – terraced slopes, for instance, improved the drainage for tender exotics and citrus bushes. In his suggestions for a hillside site for a villa, Alberti borrowed extensively from classical sources, writing:

*I would have it stand pretty high, but upon so easy an ascent, that it should hardly be perceptible to those that go to it, till they find themselves at the Top, and a large prospect opens itself to their View. Nor should there be any Want of pleasant Landskips, flowery meads, open Champlains, shady groves. Or limpid Brooks, or clear Streams and Lakes for swimming ... with all other Delights of the same*

This engraving by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) of the plan of the Villa d'Este shows the whole scheme as it was in the middle of the 18th century. The villa enjoys a view over the plain below as recommended by Alberti.

*Sort ... to be necessary in a Country Retreat, both for Convenience and Pleasure ... I would have the Front and whole Body of the House perfectly well lighted, and that it be open to receive a great deal of Light and Sun, and a sufficient Quantity of wholesome Air.*

Alberti echoed Pliny the Younger’s descriptions of his two country villas (see page 46) when he went on to explain how the ancients planned their sites so that loggias should be filled with winter sun but shaded in summer, and arranged so as to give shelter from winter winds.

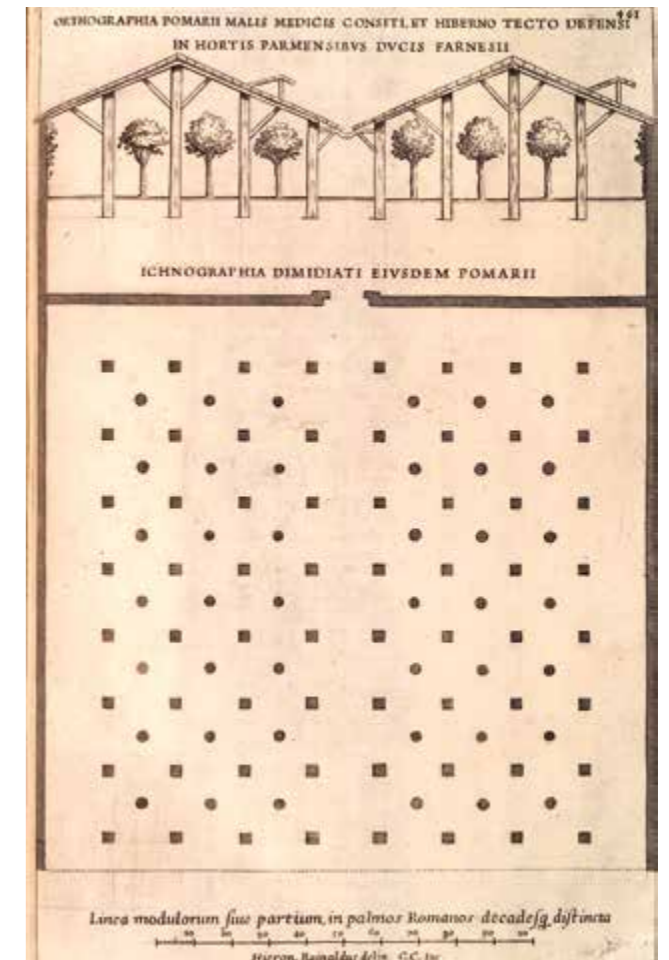
It was not only the garden that was changing; the villa itself, instead of being an inward-looking fortress with views on to an enclosed courtyard, now turned outwards to incorporate the prospect of landscape and light. Except for the entrance used by Cardinal d’Este himself, the original approach to the Villa d’Este at Tivoli (now through the villa at the top of the steep slope) was from the plain below. It led through orchards and covered *berceaux*, and up the ramps and staircases, from where the visitor could enjoy, as the French philosopher and essayist Michel de Montaigne did in 1581, the rainbows produced by the spray of sparkling fountains. It was impossible to appreciate the full splendour of the site until the visitor had climbed up through the garden and looked back down across the Roman Campagna.

## Nature Meets Artifice

The most basic ingredients of the Renaissance garden were evergreen plants, stonework and water – all permanent, rather than ephemeral, materials. There were dark groves of ilex or cypresses (at Castello a circular cypress grove formed a labyrinth), pergolas, arbours and topiary, as well as the stonework of terraces, stairways, sculpture and pavilions. Caves were made into grottoes, while water might be contained in still pools, or sent tumbling down cascades or shooting high from fountains.

The thinkers of the Renaissance conceived of nature as a reflection of an ordered cosmos. So insofar as the garden appropriated the forms of nature, it too must have an ordered pattern. But a garden could not be mistaken for nature: rather it sought to express the underlying, if elusive, pre-ordained order of the natural world – and could do so all the more successfully where the forms of nature were enhanced by the gardener’s art. Making tree houses, building mounts and laying out flower-beds in patterns were all manifestations of this manipulation of nature.

From about 1520, this pursuit of artistry became ever more ambitious, mirroring the Mannerist movement in Italian art (between High Renaissance and Baroque), in which style became the dominant preoccupation and was sometimes taken to extremes. In its enthusiasm



Giovanni Battista Ferrari’s *Hesperides*, published in 1646, was the first book completely devoted to the cultivation of oranges, lemons, citrons and limes. This plan of a section of the Horti Farnesiani on Rome’s Palatine Hill shows citron trees arranged in a series of quincunxes, a planting pattern that gives maximum light and air to each specimen.





for decoration and drama, Mannerism is sometimes likened to the Post-Modernism of the 20th century. All over Europe, 'Mannerist' gardens were characterized by their artificiality and fantasy and made much use of symbolism and hydraulic intricacy. Gardens typifying the style include Pratolino and Bomarzo in Italy and *Hellbrunn* in Austria, one of the few Mannerist gardens to have survived the Thirty Years' War in Northern Europe.

But even in the most consciously artificial gardens of the 15th and 16th centuries, in contrast to the architecturally contrived areas near the villa, there would be more naturalistic *boschetti* with paths winding through the woodland, much as might be seen

This engraving of the garden at Villa d'Este is taken from *Theatrum Civitatum et Admirandorum Italiae* by Johannes Blaeu (Amsterdam, 1663), a celebrated work that documented the towns and monuments of Italy.



The gardens of Bomarzo, near Viterbo, now known as the *Sacro Bosco*, were laid out from 1552 by Count Vicino Orsini. It is a fantastical landscape of gigantic monsters, toppling buildings, violent statuary and alarming allegorical figures, such as this gaping Mouth of Hell (pictured above). Rather than the traditional classical texts, it took its inspiration from the poetry of Dante and Petrarch, and from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, a rip-roaring romance epic that was very popular at the time. Bomarzo, still very much visited today by tourists, remains an enigma, its fame arises partly from horror but also from admiration and undoubted appreciation of Count Orsini's allegorical figures.

in a modern layout. The woodland grove at the Villa Lante through which the visitor approached the main garden, tracing a journey from uncultivated nature to triumphant sophistication, vividly illustrates this juxtaposition. This 'naturalism' was especially appealing to the 17th- and 18th-century Englishmen on the Grand Tour and would prove hugely influential.

Water was not merely a characteristic feature of Renaissance gardens but an essential tool. It enlivened the architectural stonework and sombre evergreens with movement and sound, and powered cunning effects to astonish and entertain visitors, while the transformation from slow, murmuring stream to noisy, splashing majestic fountains offered a vivid metaphor for the owner's power and magnificence.

Water is the dominant theme on the steep slopes of the Villa d'Este. As at the Villa Lante, water links the whole garden scheme from the grotto at the top, through pools, cascades and fountains that descend to broaden out into a great water parterre. Water was used ingeniously to drip down walls, to arc over sitting areas or create a pergola from its sparkling beads, and to replicate the sound of music or chirruping birds. Water was also used as a diversion. Trick water jets (*giochi d'acqua*) produced surprise showers to soak unsuspecting spectators, who found themselves sprayed yet again when they tried to escape. Fountains and *nymphaea* were, along with grottoes, important features, designed with symbolic undertones. Invoking classical precedent, a stream's source might be suggested by a statue of a river god pouring water from an urn.



## Colonna's Dream Vision

The allegorical romance the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, by a young Italian prince, Francesco Colonna, was written at almost the same time as Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, and was published in Italy in 1499 (and soon afterwards in France and then England, although with much reduced text). Its title was compounded from three Greek words, *hypnos* ('sleep'), *eros* ('love') and *mache* (strife), and translated as 'the strife of love in a dream'.

It is the illustrations rather than the story that make it so important in the development of garden design, with depictions of an amphitheatre and a peristyle garden with antique reliefs, statues, herms and altars used as decoration. At one point the hero and heroine wander through a landscape of classical ruins.

Colonna's references to mythological and historical statues, along with fountains, grottoes and living plant features such as groves of cypresses and labyrinths, inspired the allegory and symbolism of the Mannerist gardens of the 16th century. The elaborate parterres and planting details were essentially derived from contemporary 15th-century gardens and closely resembled those described in Pietro de' Crescenzi's 14th-century treatise *Liber ruralium commodorum* (see page 109), with pergolas covered in intertwined climbers and hedges of mixed plants.

Colonna's knowledge of plants and gardening practice was considerable. His flower-bed patterns were among the earliest to be published. Just as Alberti had declared that 'every fine fruit that exists in any country' should be planted in a garden, so Colonna wanted it to contain 'all the delights that were scattered throughout the universe, so that one could come to know all that had been created'.

The Roman ruins depicted in Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in an engraving by François Rabelais published in 1554, influenced the development of Renaissance garden architecture and is still worth studying.



The Oceanus Fountain in the Boboli Gardens, Florence, was carved by Flemish sculptor Giambologna (1529–1608) for Francesco I de' Medici in the 1570s. The sculpture that adorns the fountain is a copy; the original is now housed in the Museo del Bargello.

## Mythology and Metamorphosis

Some Renaissance gardens, especially from the mid-16th century, were intended as more than pleasure gardens: they were an expression of an individual's splendour. But to 'read' them, as the humanists would have done, required an understanding of mythology, the classics and contemporary politics.

At Villa Castello, the youthful Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–1574), asserted his right and fitness to rule over Florence through a combination of water, planting and carefully chosen statuary. An aqueduct brought water from the mountains to the garden reservoir, ornamented by the shivering god Appenninus. And with the water (representing the rivers Arno and Mugnone) descending through the garden then flowing out to supply the townsfolk below, it was as if Cosimo himself had bountifully provided the water for them. Florence herself was symbolized by Giambologna's statue of Venus emerging from the waters. (Boticelli's *Birth of Venus* fulfilled a similar role indoors.) A fountain depicting Hercules defeating the giant Antaeus by lifting him from the earth from which he drew his strength, sent a clear message that it was Cosimo's intelligence and guile, as well as political muscle, that fitted him for power. Moreover Hercules, having stolen the golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides, was a highly suitable figure for garden decoration at a time when citrus-growing was all the rage. Castello became famed for its citrus collection. And the garden as a whole, cultivated with the choicest of plants, could be understood as a symbol of careful nurture and good governance.

Niccolò Tribolo, who devised the scheme, went on to do more of the same at the Boboli gardens. Here, the colossal fountain of Oceanus, carved by Giambologna in the 1570s, symbolized the



## The Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets

Wang Shi Yuan (pictured above) is one of the most famous private gardens in the serene city of Suzhou, about 75km (46 miles) east of Shanghai. Hidden behind high white walls, and no more than 0.4 hectares (1 acre) in area, it is a labyrinthine composition of more than ten small courtyards, each of which has its own distinctive atmosphere. Some of these courtyards have been designed to ‘vanish’ around corners, some are open-ended, yet others are closed off as intimate cul-de-sacs.

Everywhere in Wang Shi Yuan there is a play of contrasts – between light and shadow, high and low, tranquility and liveliness. At the garden’s heart is a lake-like pond of such an artfully irregular shape that the garden cannot be viewed

in its entirety. This pond is surrounded by reception halls and shaded viewing and resting places, distinguished with delicious names such as the Waterside Hall for Washing the Tassels of One’s Hat, the Verandah for Viewing Pines and Looking at Paintings and the House of Concentrated Study.

Wang Shi Yuan has been the site of a garden for 800 years, but its name, which translates as ‘the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets’, dates from the 18th century, when its owner was an official at the court of the garden-loving Qing emperor Qianlong. The lone fisherman was a familiar figure in landscape painting, representing the ideal of the reclusive life spent close to nature to which the gentleman scholar aspired.



Thomas Allom (1804–1872) was an English architect, artist, and topographical illustrator who spent several years in China. His scenes of Chinese landscapes and street and domestic life, published in *China Illustrated* in 1845, offer a revealing insight into life in 19th-century China. In *House of a Chinese Merchant Near Canton*, he shows the house of Consequa, one of the most powerful of the Hong merchants, in whose garden plant collector John Reeves discovered numerous plants previously unknown in Europe.

compound to inspect teas, and took the opportunity to visit nursery gardens as well as to buy specimens from fruit and vegetable markets. Many hundreds of new plants were recorded by Canton artists whom Reeves trained in the European tradition of botanical painting, and the plants were sent to the Horticultural Society of London. Reeves also helped to make arrangements for the plant collector Robert Fortune, allowing him to amass more than 120 new garden species, including three viburnums, forsythia, weigela, winter-flowering honeysuckles and the first ‘Japanese’ anemone. (The epithet *japonicum* was often applied to plants collected from China.) Fortune is best remembered, however, for the 23,892 young tea plants he pirated from China to form the basis of the Indian tea industry.

By the 1830s, opium from India (the only foreign import for which there seemed to be a market) was flooding into China to counterbalance the tea, silk and porcelain flowing outwards. When, in 1840, a Chinese official in Canton seized 20,000 chests of the illegal drug from British ships, this triggered the First Opium War. The resulting Treaty of Nanking was the first of a series of ‘unequal treaties’ that legalized the opium trade and granted trade and territorial rights to Western powers. China was now open to Western exploitation. The civilization that had lasted for thousands of years was weak in the face of European industrial and military might, and the imperial gardens of the Old Summer Palace (Yuan Ming Yuan) were among the first casualties.



This extraordinary marble paddle steamer was built in 1889 as a tea-house for the equally extraordinary Empress Dowager Cixi, who used funds intended for China's navy.

## Yi He Yuan

Among the gardens destroyed in 1860 was the Qingyi Yuan (Garden of Clear Ripples), created by Emperor Qianlong for his mother's 60th birthday. This involved vastly enlarging an existing lake into a sheet of water some 6.4km (4 miles) in circumference, and using the spoil to build up Longevity Hill. These works provided a happy precedent for the Empress Dowager Cixi, the effective ruler of China from 1861 until 1908, to celebrate her own 60th birthday by rebuilding the garden, adding a theatre stage, a 700m (3000ft) *fang* or walkway running along the lake shore, a series of graceful bridges and a marble tea-house in the shape of a paddle steamer. Cixi was an able and tough-minded ruler, but she was also greedy: the money lavished on her birthday garden had been intended for the modernization of China's navy. She obtained it on the pretext of developing her garden, optimistically renamed Yi He Yuan (the Garden of Happy Harmony), as the site of a new naval academy, which would use the lake for training exercises. It became a bitter joke among her subjects that the only modern boat in China was made of stone.

The Summer Palace was torched again during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, and restored two years later. Following the end of imperial rule, it remained in the deposed emperor's hands, but in 1924 Yi He Yuan became a public park, where the Empress Cixi's reviled stone boat instantly became a popular attraction. The turbulent years of the early 20th century were not a good time for garden-making, and during the Cultural Revolution the 'old ideas', 'old customs', 'old culture' and 'old habits' on which Chairman Mao declared war were all embodied in gardens. Countless gardens that had endured for centuries were destroyed within a decade by the Red Guards.



## Restoring the Old, Creating the New

Made on the site of old rubbish dumps, a serpentine structure that doubles as seating and lighting is the central feature of a new wetland park that promotes enjoyment of the local ecology through meandering boardwalks and bike paths.

*'I remember reading in some old Book,'* says the son in the Story of the Stone, *'that to recall old things is better than to invent new ones, and to re-cut an ancient text is better than to engrave a modern ...'* The Chinese garden has always looked to the past as a touchstone of quality and integrity. Indeed, novelty has never been much appreciated in Chinese art. So perhaps it is not surprising that in recent years, more effort has gone into restoring old gardens damaged or destroyed under Mao Zedong than into creating new ones. Indeed, this might be seen as a welcome return to pre-revolutionary values. However, a crop of new parks combining schemes for water management with facilities for public recreation, such as the Living Water Garden Park at Chengdu, the Floating Gardens at Taizhou on the Yongning river and the Qunli Stormwater Wetland Park, has introduced a modern ecological approach, familiar in the West, to landscape design. Particularly exciting is the Red Ribbon Park at Qinhuangdao City on the Tang River. Here a 500m (1640ft) red steel ribbon winding through the wetland and cloud-shaped pavilions offers an exciting new synthesis of post-industrial minimalism and traditional Chinese ideas.

Jekyll taught gardeners to look at planting in a painterly way, and her lesson has never been forgotten.

The fame of Jekyll and Lutyens has eclipsed the reputation of others who were equally highly regarded at the time, such as George Dillistone, who planted the garden Lutyens laid out at Castle Drogo in Devon, or Thomas Mawson (1861–1933), the first to call himself a landscape architect. Favouring a formal style, Mawson had been both a builder and a nurseryman before he became a designer, and saw it as his job to reconcile the conflicting demands of these professions and create an orderly progression from house to countryside. Many of Mawson's clients were, like himself, self-made men, so it is perhaps not surprising that some of his schemes, like Lord Leverhulme's The Hill garden in London, could tend to the grandiose, employing a rather heavy Baroque Italianate style. But Mawson was also capable of great inventiveness and delicacy, balancing hectic architecture with reflecting pools or wide expanses of lawn to give the architecture a breathing space, creating broad terraces to call in the view or, where there was no view, creating interest with sequences of varied garden rooms, long before Hidcote or Sissinghurst. Indeed, his book, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (1901), is known to have influenced Lawrence Johnston at Hidcote and may well be the source of the term 'Arts and Crafts'. The garden at Dryffyn in Wales, made for (and with) the plantaholic Reginald Cory and now being restored by the National Trust, demonstrates the range of his skills (and diplomacy). Mawson wrote: *'we felt at liberty to indulge in every phase of garden design which the site and my client's Catholic views suggested ... As each garden is enclosed in its own screen of architecture or foliage, it seldom clashed with its neighbour.'*

Lawrence Johnston's Hidcote, in Gloucestershire – the most influential of the compartmented gardens, and 'parent' of Sissinghurst (see page 442) – has become an icon of 20th-century garden design. Its hedged rooms, planted with mixed beds of shrubs, roses, peonies, perennials and bulbs in quiet cottage-garden style, represented all that was considered best and most sensitive in English gardening in the early 20th century. Begun by the American-born owner Lawrence Johnston in 1907, Hidcote's success depends on his sophisticated sense of space and the interlocking axes which define the garden areas that are separated by several layers of hedging. The geometry of box-edged beds, pillars of yew, topiary, straight lines, right angles and circles confirms the garden's Italian nuances. Inside this framework, Johnston's planting was informal and luxurious, rare plants jostling with traditional favourites in different colour schemes. The masterpiece was the installation of the aerial hornbeam hedges – the Stilt Garden – which extended the view from the house through the Scarlet Borders to frame the sky above the escarpment. The White Garden has elegant clipped box topiary. Hidcote has sometimes been called a collection of cottage gardens, but Johnston's genius ensured that the overall design was coherent and disciplined. Restored in recent years to more closely resemble the garden as it was in the 1930s, it remains an example of British/American gardening at its best.



The vision of the romantic cottage garden was promulgated by garden writer Margery Fish (1892–1969), whose cheerful books and relaxed cottage garden at East Lambrook in Somerset showed the way for a new generation of gardeners with busier lifestyles, slimmer resources and no staff. Fish did not take up gardening until her forties, when she married, and rapidly discovered that her husband's regimented, Victorian way of gardening was not for her. She, like Gertrude Jekyll, preferred the unfashionable, unshowy perennial plants scrambling about in local village gardens, and set about collecting them. But she combined them in an easy, informal way that was completely unlike Jekyll's carefully orchestrated schemes. From the 1960s, she was a great champion of ground cover, which was both more pleasing to the eye than bare earth and more labour-saving for the gardener. While Fish wrote encouragingly for the less experienced gardener, those with greater horticultural pretensions tended to prefer the elevated cottage style – all old roses and overflowing borders – as perfected by Vita Sackville-West at Sissinghurst (see page 442). Determinedly romantic, labour-intensive and concerned primarily with colour effects, this was still gardening very much in the Edwardian tradition.

It was a very different picture in continental Europe, where there was perhaps more eagerness to draw a line under the past. In the 1950s in Germany, an experimental approach to planting gathered pace, Scandinavian Functionalism led the way in European design, and by the 1980s deconstructivist architect Bernard Tschumi was designing the vast Parc de la Villette in Paris as a place that could exist outside history. Meanwhile, the United States saw a flowering of Modernism.

Walter Gropius (1883–1969), founder of the Bauhaus Movement in Germany, had arrived at Harvard in 1937. For his students, still being schooled in the richly ornamented Beaux Arts style of 19th-century France, the simplicity and spareness of Modernism was a breath of fresh air. Three students in particular – Dan Kiley, Garrett Eckbo and James Rose – rejoiced in the Modernist commitment to function, of adapting design to human behaviour. It was no longer enough for a garden to be decorative: it must also be useful space, geared not to some long-gone aristocratic ideal, but to how we live now. In *Landscape for Living* (1950), Eckbo (1910–2000) showed how practical necessities such as parking places, washing lines and sand-pits could be successfully integrated into the garden. At the age of 19, he had spent a formative six months with an uncle in Norway, where he had seen how Modernist architecture could be entirely compatible with the embrace of nature. The time had come to dispense with old oppositions – formal versus informal, Euclidean geometry versus the organic shapes of nature, even inside versus outside. Working in the balmy climate of California, he could write: *'Outdoors and indoors are inseparable ... two sides of the same door ...'*

While the merging of indoors and outdoors was hardly new (Pliny the Younger advocated it in the 1st century CE), it became the basic tenet of California Style, a new kind of garden that was in tune with the modern, informal way of living emerging in post-war California. Foremost among its practitioners was Thomas Church (1902–1978). Like Eckbo, Church was influenced by Scandinavian design, his most distinctive work marrying crisp geometry with flowing curves. Also like Eckbo, Church noted how the average house had become smaller, so that the functions of the house now spilled out into the garden. *'The new kind of garden,'* he wrote, *'is still supposed to be looked at. But that is no longer its only function. It is designed primarily for living, as an adjunct to the function of the house. How well it provides for the many types of living that can be carried on outdoors is the new standard by which we judge a garden.'* The garden must also provide for the emotional needs of the owner, offering *'a green oasis where memories of his bumper-to-bumper ride from work will be erased.'* In short, Church invented the modern garden. His *Gardens Are for People* (1955) remains (along with Sylvia Crowe's *Garden Design*, 1956) the most useful work on garden design ever written.



Margery Fish admired what she called the *'simple, steadfast qualities'* of cottage garden flowers. This photograph shows her in the garden at her home at East Lambrook Manor in Somerset; today the planting is much as it was when she originally created it.

Church's most famous garden is at El Novillero in Sonoma County, made between 1947 and 1949 on a rocky hillside overlooking San Francisco Bay. With its bold asymmetry, its interplay of curving forms and strong contrasts of colour and texture, El Novillero could scarcely have been more different from the Neoclassical gardens of East Coast taste. The single viewpoint was abandoned in favour of multiple viewpoints in the manner of the Cubists, and traditional symmetry gave way to biomorphic shapes reminiscent of Juan Miró: this new garden style sought inspiration not from the classics, but from modern art. It remained, however, deeply respectful of its setting: Church worked the natural vegetation, especially the live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) puncturing the decking, into the design.

The idea of the 'room outside' was carried to Britain by John Brookes (1933–2018), who published a book of that name in 1969, where he showed how the diminutive garden spaces that were now the norm could be successfully adapted for modern living. In a series of pioneering gardens, books and articles, he embraced modern materials, introduced novel features like the built-in barbecue, and prioritized the organization of space over what he dismissed as *'fiddly-diddly horticulture'*.

These were designs that accepted without snobbery the idea of leisure gardening for the masses. This idea, which had perhaps begun with the Festival of Britain, was greatly aided by the arrival,



over the ensuing decade, of another import from America – the garden centre. Plant-buying was no longer the preserve of the knowledgeable few but just another branch of shopping. (The effect would eventually be a huge reduction in the choice of plants available, as specialist nurseries went out of business.) And it was then, too, that the fantasy of the ‘low-maintenance garden’ became entrenched. With handy new power tools and aggressive use of chemicals, the garden could (and should) be managed with minimal expenditure of time and effort. It was a long way from James Rose’s vision in the 1930s of a new, dynamic garden culture that united man and nature.

Rose (1913–1991) had been ferocious in his rejection of historic precedent. His former classmate Dan Kiley (1912–2004), however, visited the classical gardens of France at the end of the war and discovered that the formal *allées* and mirror-like bodies of water of Le Nôtre were far more impressive than the sterile teaching at Harvard had led him to expect. This insight ushered in a new era of design that welcomed geometry and proportion, without being backward-looking. Rather, the geometric lines of International Style buildings could be extended to dictate the layout of outdoor space.

Brought up on Thoreau’s *Walden*, with childhood memories of the fragrant pinewoods of New Hampshire, Kiley had a deep feeling for nature. He applied a grid system to his designs, using its discipline to work with the changing dynamics of nature and the seasons, and making use of light and shadow to enhance trees, shrubs and ground cover. His most famous garden was made in 1957 for the J Irwin Miller House in Columbus, Indiana, where his avenue of honey locusts (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) with a Henry Moore sculpture at its end has become an icon in garden history.

The famous pool in the Donnell Garden in Sonoma may well have been inspired by a kidney-shaped pool made by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto at the Villa Mairea. The flowing lines of Thomas Church’s pool were suggested by the winding creeks in the surrounding salt marshes, and continued in the smooth abstract sculpture by Adaline Kent that rose from the centre of the pool – a play island for swimming through, sunbathing or diving.



## A New Geometry

Kiley’s elegant formalism finally created a grammar for gardens that really worked with Modernist architecture. Getting rid of all extraneous clutter could make gardens of extraordinary purity and power, as Church had also shown. This orthogonal approach, with orderly lines of trees, sheets of water and blocks of planting, usually allied with modern materials such as concrete and glass, could offer clarity, coherence and free movement round the space without becoming cold or clinical.

Kiley was followed by Arne Jacobsen, whose fusion of sandy brick, glassy canals and blocks of planting at St Catherine’s (1959–1964) offered a new template for an Oxford college. In Europe, father-and-son team Jacques and Peter Wirtz reimagined the canals, lawns and topiary of Le Nôtre to make tranquil green gardens of deceptive simplicity, clothing minimalism in green. In Spain, Fernando Caruncho has taken Kiley’s grid system as his starting point for gardens both large and small, and at Mas de les Voltes famously extended the grid out to include agricultural elements (see overleaf). In California, Andrea Cochran’s open, rhythmic spaces clearly owe a debt to Kiley, as do so many of today’s most exciting designers, including Sweden’s Ulf Nordfjell, Italy’s Luciano Giubbilei and British designers Tom Stuart-Smith and Christopher Bradley-Hole.

Bradley-Hole has been hailed, much to his annoyance, as the father of British minimalism (perhaps inevitable given his two seminal books – *The Minimalist Garden* (1999) and *Making*

International flower shows, such as London’s RHS Chelsea Flower Show, the Chaumont Festival in France and the PHS Philadelphia Flower Show, have become powerful vehicles for introducing new design ideas to the gardening public. Christopher Bradley-Hole’s 1997 Latin Garden at Chelsea created a new appetite for planting in gravel, for dark-coloured irises and for urban minimalism. In 2000, the same show introduced New Perennials planting in a garden by Piet Oudolf and Arne Maynard. Recent shows have drawn attention to issues of water management and climate change.



*the Modern Garden* (2007)). He insists that good design is not about copying the past, but about thinking laterally and taking inspiration from every different source (an entirely Modernist stance). Nonetheless, his pared-down, intellectually rigorous designs, with their insistence on perfection of execution and quality of materials, perfectly achieve the qualities that the Modernists sought to express in their architecture. Here are purely proportioned and orderly sequences of spaces, cool and calm and always human in scale, where space and light are elements of composition that are as tangible as flowers and trees.

Certainly the garden that brought Bradley-Hole to public attention borrowed themes – white render, panels of glass, architectural framing – that are familiar from Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye or Tunnard's Bentley Wood (see page 442). The Latin Garden, a meditation on the life of the Roman poet Virgil, shown at RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 1997, was a strikingly modern reinterpretation of a classical garden, subtly subverting the pure proportions of Euclidean geometry with a Modernist spareness and asymmetry. It could scarcely have been more different from the fulsome, nostalgic, Country House style that dominated English taste at that time, and it seized the imagination of designers and public alike. Finally, it became acceptable to have a clean, crisp, contemporary garden, especially in urban situations. Bradley-Hole, of course, moved on, drawing ever more on the philosophy and craft techniques of Japan, and adopting the plant palette of the New Perennials movement (see page 470), which he often deployed in a simple grid of planting squares. Framing perhaps reached its apogee in a garden overlooking Beirut, somewhat trickily named *This is Not a Framed Garden*. Early Modernist influences are also in evidence at Japan's Hyakudanen ('100 Stepped Garden'; see page 410), where architect Tadao Ando clearly references Guevrekian's Villa Noailles (1927).

*This is Not a Framed Garden*. At Bsalim in the Lebanon, landscape architect Frederic Francis created a garden that frames views over Beirut and out to the Mediterranean, yet melds gently into the surrounding forest.

## Fernando Caruncho's Agricultural Garden

The Spanish designer Fernando Caruncho (b.1957) came to garden design while studying classical philosophy at the University of Madrid. Best known for his repetitive groves of silver-grey olive trees, wheat-fields, avenues of tall, slender cypresses and water parterres at Mas de les Voltes in northern Spain (pictured right), Caruncho has long used a grid as the basis for his design. The grid enables him to employ straight lines and right angles on a large landscape scale, and to emphasize light and shadow, movement, form, leaf colour and texture, with little reference to flowers. Caruncho believes that the mind craves the reassurance of geometry, and his schemes are the antithesis of the popular, romantic, Jekyll-style English garden, in which plant shapes disguise any formality in structure.

Caruncho's work follows in the tradition of the Moorish gardens of the Alhambra and of Italian and French Renaissance gardens, particularly as evidenced in his native Spain, in the royal gardens of Aranjuez in Madrid, and at La Granja in Segovia. Also much influenced by the Mexican architect Luis Barragán, Caruncho uses walls of sienna-coloured stucco to define his spaces – sometimes clothing the walls with rippling ivy.

At Mas de les Voltes, Caruncho made an entirely new garden around the house, with wheat-fields and carp pond parterres enclosed by groves of evergreen oaks, orchards of cherry, apple, pomegranate and fig, and stands of rustling bamboo. He calls it an 'agricultural garden', where flowers would look out of place: *'For flower-filled borders one can go to Sissinghurst, but the landscape of the Mediterranean needs something quite different. This is a garden of forms, geometry and light ... In the summer, the wheat is tall and golden and the great plots sway gently in the wind. There is fruit in the orchard. Autumn brings the grape harvest and the cutting of the wheat. In the winter the earth is ploughed and sown and marked by wonderful patterns. And in the spring once again, all is a sea of green.'*

In recent years, he has turned to the circle as his starting point, creating patterns of concentric circles in Florida, interlocking circles in Madrid, and planting vines in bold parabolas in Puglia, Italy. In the last, he relishes the 'visual shock' of straight roads driving through the curves of the vines: a challenge of grid against waves. But once again, the garden is a perfected agricultural scene that recalls classical ideals of rural living.







## Luis Barragán and the Soul of the House

While European Modernism was predicated on some inexorable path to a technologically improved future, in Central and South America there emerged a very different understanding of Modernism. In Mexico, Luis Barragán (1902–1988) created a new architecture that offered, by contrast, a safe haven from the modern world, inspired by the brightly painted village houses, rough wooden aqueducts and horse pools of his country childhood. ‘*My house is my refuge,*’ he wrote, ‘*and the garden is the soul of the house.*’ All the colour and light of the Mexican *pueblos* were distilled into features of miraculous simplicity: thick adobe walls rendered in glowing jewel colours, minimalist rills and chutes of water, and enclosed cubes of space enlivened by the simplest ornament – a group of pots or a twisted tree.

These features have been widely copied, most successfully by designers working in similar climatic conditions – Barragán’s effects depend on bright light and strong shadows. John Pawson’s striking Neuendorf House in Mallorca, Martha Schwartz’s pink boxes (Davis Residence, Texas) and the bright earth walls and shadow-play that characterize Steve Martino’s desert gardens, all derive from Barragán. (Fernando Caruncho’s studio in Madrid is pure Barragán.) What is harder to emulate is the almost mystical sense of stillness and silence that pervades Barragán’s work. This is apparent not only in the luminous chapel he built for an order of nuns in Mexico City, but in his own gardens, in the great stable complex of San Cristóbal, and at the Fuente del Bebedero in the suburb of Las Arboledas, where a eucalyptus avenue leads to a plain white wall where shadows dance, and where a simple horse trough is magically transmuted into a water feature of breath-taking refinement.

As a young man, Barragán travelled widely in Europe and attended lectures by Le Corbusier. By his mid-30s he was turning out Modernist glass and concrete boxes. A more powerful influence, however, was the dreamlike garden of the painter Ferdinand Bac, an authority on Moorish gardens. In his 40s, Barragán changed direction, first building his own house, then a housing development at El Pedregal – a surreal moonscape of lava formations. After this, he could pick and choose his own commissions. Perhaps the greatest is the stable complex at San Cristóbal (1967–1969) in Mexico City. Here, his painted walls are colourful backdrops, waiting to be animated by movement like a stage set.

## Looking Back to History

While Modernism slowly infiltrated the garden, others took the opposite approach. Rather than seeking to invent a new language for gardening, they were more than happy to reanimate the old.

The wealthy of Europe (and some in America) turned to English designer Russell Page (1906–1985) to design in the grand manner (albeit in a cool and understated way), with axial arrangements of lawns, trees and topiary, and dignified bodies of water. Page valued clarity and simplicity, and disliked the fussiness and incoherence of the average plant-stuffed, shapeless English garden. (Indeed, he had started out as a Modernist, designing Battersea Park’s Festival Gardens in 1951.) But he could rarely resist a rare and special tree, and was more than capable of a romantic flourish, as at the picture-book-pretty San Liberato estate near Rome. He was skilled at making new gardens round old houses, always seeking to establish harmony between the topography of the site and the architectural style of the house, and paying careful attention to detail. Although many of his gardens have a sculptural ‘green’ quality, he also excelled at making perennial borders (which he cheerfully dismissed as ‘brightly coloured hay’), not least in Italy, where there was a great vogue for Jekyll-style ‘English’ gardens from the 1970s. Much of Page’s work disappeared within his own lifetime, but his exquisite, Islamic-inspired rill survives at La Mortella in the Bay of Naples, while his book, *The Education of a Gardener* (1962), has become a gardening classic, still avidly read by amateurs and professionals alike.

Back in England, in 1972, the 6th Marquess of Salisbury succeeded to his title and brought his wife Mollie to live at Hatfield House. Here, she spent the next 31 years restoring the character of the once-famous gardens created by James VI and I’s garden-mad first minister, Robert Cecil, and his gardener John Tradescant (see pages 204–205). Over the years, elaborate topiary and box parterres, a knot garden with authentic pre-1620 planting, avenues of mop-headed ilex and gilded statuary steadily reappeared at Hatfield, all underpinned by Lady Salisbury’s exhaustive historical research. (In another departure from the prevailing norms, everything was gardened organically.)

Another gardener with a strong sense of history was Rosemary Verey, who squeezed her own knot garden, a formal layout of box-edged beds and even a garden temple into a scant 2 hectares (5 acres) at Barnsley House in Gloucestershire. If John Brookes’s 1960s gardens had been the outdoor expression of shopping at Habitat, demonstrating a new appetite for modern design, then Verey’s represented the Country House style that became overwhelmingly popular in the 1980s, all flowered chintz and swags and tails and tasteful pastels. Arbours, knots and fulsome box-edged beds became *de rigueur* in aspirational gardens.

Two gardeners who combined a knowledge of garden history with an irreverent wit were Frank Cabot and Gervase Jackson-Stops. At Les Jardins des Quatre Vents on the northern shores of the St Lawrence river in Canada, Cabot threaded a sylvan landscape with Baroque *allées* and canals, a Chinese moon bridge and a French *pigeonnier*, along with a panoply of other features both elegant and eccentric, not least of which were giant copper frogs variously playing Mozart and jazz. A similar deftness was shown at The Menagerie in Northamptonshire in England, where Jackson-Stops restored the Palladian folly and made a clever garden round it that played fast and loose with historical features, from mounts and obelisks to shape-changing garden buildings. History is also the inspiration for the theatrical gardens of Julian and Isabel Bannerman, who followed both Lady Salisbury and Rosemary Verey in advising the Prince of Wales at Highgrove.