

# Eden





Above: The mysterious smoke trees of Palm Springs. Photo by Millicent Harvey.

# Eden

JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA GARDEN & LANDSCAPE HISTORY SOCIETY

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Successive owners have preserved Sarah Ferrell's expressions of spirituality in the Georgia garden she began in 1841. Tichenor Brothers Collection, 1930s postcard courtesy the Boston Public Library.

Artist Paul Grimm  
(American, 1891-  
1974) was inspired  
by the smoke trees  
of Palm Springs,  
painting them for  
decades. This  
painting is titled  
"Smoke Trees  
Neath San Jacinto."  
Courtesy Heritage  
Auctions.

THE MYSTERIOUS  
*Smoke Trees*  
OF PALM SPRINGS

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STEVEN KEYLON  
EDEN EDITOR





*“The nudist cult, which so many of the desert plants appear to have joined in their battle to limit transpiration of moisture content to its irreducible minimum, presents one of its most striking and beautiful members in the form of the desert smoke tree. Such leaves as appear on the plant are simple and few and persist on young shoots for a very few weeks at most, seeming to be more of a jaunty gesture than any serious attempt to convince the world that foliage is necessary either to the health or beauty of well-ordered plant life on the desert.”<sup>1</sup>*

— Ralph D. Cornell, *Conspicuous California Plants*, 1938

The resort village of Palm Springs is known around the world for its golf courses, museums, entertainment, and shopping. However, one of the great pleasures of being there is the ability to get away from all visible signs of civilization very quickly, and to hike into desert landscapes with dramatic rock formations, often populated with Bighorn sheep. Deep in the canyons, one can find cool, shady riparian oases, filled with native trees. Palms (*Washingtonia filifera*), sycamores (*Platanus racemosa*), willows (*Chilopsis linearis* ssp. *arcuata*), and cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii* ssp. *Fremontii*) line the creeks, the banks covered in trailing wild grapevines (*Vitis girdiana*).<sup>2</sup>

There is another native tree that has captured the attention of artists for over a century. The smoke tree (*Psoralea arguta*; syn. *Dalea spinosa*) at first glance looks like its name—graceful groves of soft, hazy

blue-gray clouds cascade down the dry, sandy washes like puffs of smoke on the horizon. In 1938, landscape architect Ralph D. Cornell, who was fascinated by the flora of the desert, wrote a book titled *Conspicuous California Plants*. In it, he describes the smoke tree as “a softly outlined form of mythical substance silhouetted against the deeper blue of a cloudless sky.” Upon closer inspection of the mysterious tree, he finds:

*Its leafless branches divide into countless thousands of branchlets, which in turn may be reduced to slender spines in such profusion that what actually is rather a harsh and thorny plant presents the appearance of being soft and ephemeral in its illusory intricacy of structure. A scattered band of these trees seen traveling in casual disorder down the drifted wastes of a desert wash, with the light of a full moon pouring its rich silver hither and yon o’er the*

Opposite: Artist Stephen Willard was well known for his large-scale photographs of smoke trees, which he would overpaint with Rembrandt oils. This example is titled *Song of the Sunshine*, courtesy Hindman Galleries.

All smoke tree photos and captions are by landscape photographer Millicent Harvey, who has kindly given permission to publish them in *Eden*.

Above: Title: *Smoke Tree Ranch*. During late May and early June, the inconspicuous smoke tree goes into a full bloom for two weeks. Photographed at Smoke Tree Ranch in Palm Springs.

night-softened forms of rugged landscape, is a mystic sight that bestirs childhood memories of ghost tales and goblins.<sup>3</sup>

For much of the year, the tree remains cloaked in nondescript gray spiny branches. In the early summer, however, it suddenly erupts into a dazzling display of deep and fragrant indigo flowers. As Cornell described it,

*To know the smoke tree is an experience; but one cannot know it at its strikingly best unless he has seen it in full flush of flower in June or early July, after the first blast of summer heat has driven visiting dilettanti back to the refrigerated comforts of coastal civilization. Then, the tiny, pea-shaped flowers, that have been described as pure ultramarine and as deep as violet-purple, appear in such profusion and in such unbelievable intensity of color that they actually obliterate all vision of the plant structure with a saturating deluge of brilliant pigment that can be seen from afar. Closer inspection also discloses a delicate perfume that further adds to the illusory charm of so unusual a plant.*<sup>4</sup>

It is surprising to learn that the smoke tree is a member of the pea family (*Fabaceae*). Even more astonishing is the fact that so are most of the other trees native to the Coachella Valley. Don Admiral, the founder

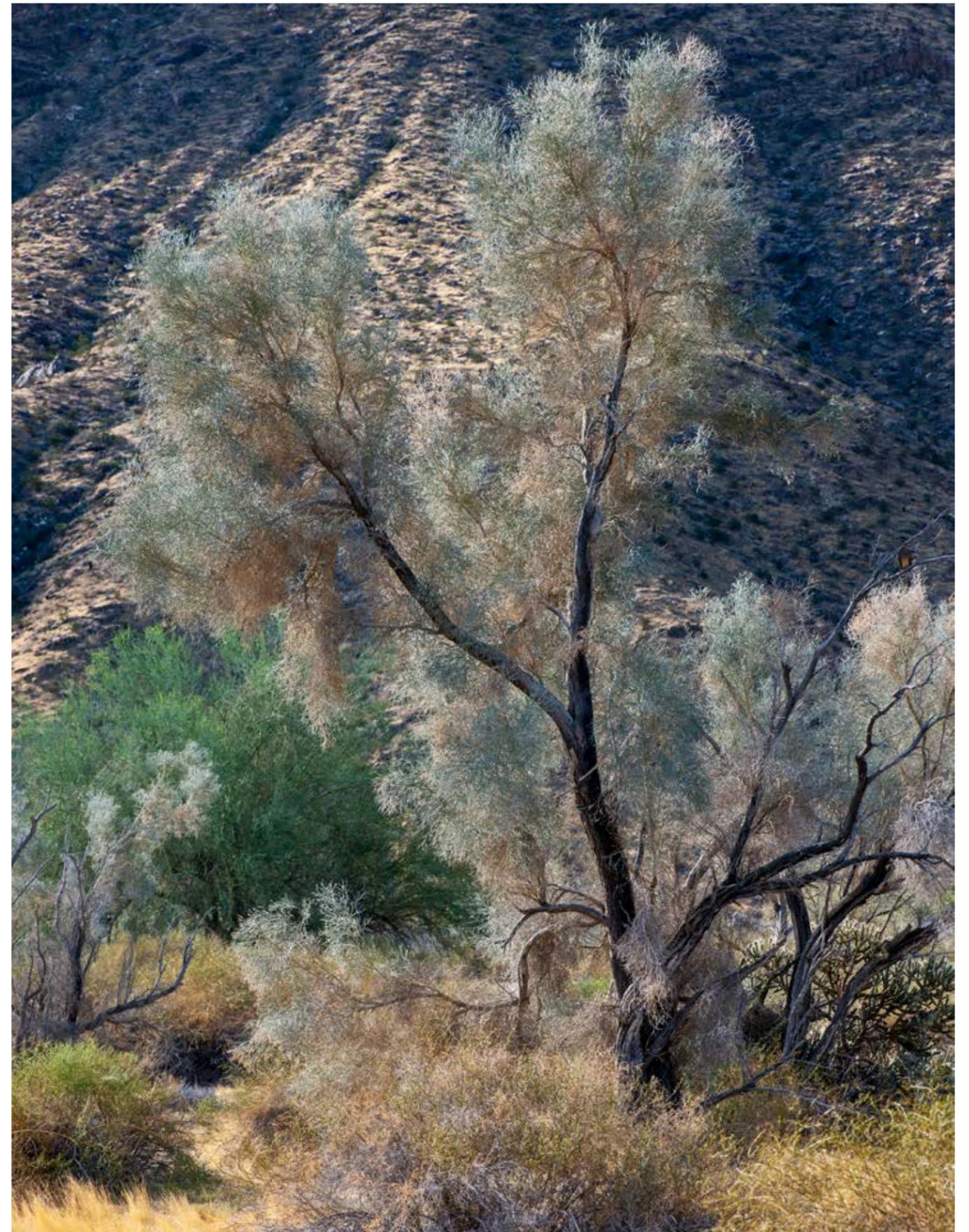
of the Palm Springs Desert Museum in 1938, was an admired naturalist, educator, native desert plant champion, and author of the book *Desert of the Palms* (1938). In a 1935 news article, he explained:

*The trees of our desert are few in number but of a hardy strain, able to withstand the demands of life in a land where the unfitted succumb quickly. There are seven kinds that might be classified as native, six of these dwell in the sandy washes and waste places, the other requires a constant supply of water, hence is confined to the canyons and water holes. Of these seven, five—ironwood, Palo Verde, honey mesquite, screwbean, mesquite, smoke tree—belong to the pea family. It is remarkable that a single family, extensive as it is, should furnish such a large percent of the hardy desert trees.*<sup>5</sup>

The first inhabitants of the Coachella Valley, the Agua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla Indians, were known to have utilized the diverse flora of the desert. Dr. Katherine Siva Saubel and Lowell Bean, who together studied the Cahuilla's uses and experimentations of more than 250 native desert plant species for culinary, medicinal, and technological benefits, found that the smoke tree was not among them.<sup>6</sup> The first non-native to discover the smoke tree was legendary Captain

Below: Title: *Desert Glow*. An atmospheric day with dark clouds and dramatic light reveal the detailed beauty and varied color of the smoke trees in Araby Wash in Palm Springs.

Opposite: The smoke tree creates stark contrast and blends well with other desert flora, creating a beautiful palette of color. Photographed in Smoke Tree Ranch.





Title - *Morning Splendor*. While walking one early morning along the Art Smith Trail in Palm Desert, I came across this stunning backlit smoke tree in full bloom.

John C. Fremont, who undertook one of his plant-gathering expeditions of the west in 1844. One of the specimens he acquired on that trip was a smoke tree, bringing back a small, incomplete sample.<sup>7</sup> In 1852 Dr. George Thurber, of the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission, was able to secure an excellent specimen. Thurber gave the example to Asa Gray, professor of botany at Harvard, who gave it the name *Dalea spinosa*.<sup>8</sup> The genus *Dalea* has several species in the Coachella Valley, but the smoke tree is the largest. Named after the English botanist, Samuel Dale (1659-1739), it includes about 150 species, most of which are Mexican, but also found in South America.<sup>9</sup> *Spinosa* refers to its spiny branches.

### THE SMOKETREE SCHOOL OF ARTISTS

For over a century, artists have come to the Coachella Valley for inspiration. The pioneer of the group, Carl Eytel, arrived in Palm Springs in 1903, and, “found his passion in capturing the beauty of the palm tree in the oases scattered throughout the desert canyons.”<sup>10</sup> Starting in the early 1920s, artists

such as Alson Skinner Clark, Paul Grimm, Gordon Coutts, Jimmy Swinnerton, Agnes Pelton, and Carl Bray painted landscapes—native flora against the dramatic backdrop of Mount San Jacinto. They became naturally drawn to the smoke tree, forming what is now known as the “Smoketree School” of painting. Art historian Ann Japenga, who coined the name of the school, has observed:

*On the California coast, it seemed that everyone painted the eucalyptus tree; art critics referred to the Eucalyptus School. In the desert, it seemed that everyone painted the smoke tree. Given the painter’s love for the shrub, it seemed only fitting to call them the Smoketree School. The artists arrived in great numbers, looking for more than a pretty arroyo. For many, a trip to the Palm Springs area became an essential spiritual pilgrimage. After all, for thousands of years, the desert has been a universal symbol of the soulful quest. But the desert held allures aside from enlightenment.*<sup>11</sup>

Stephen H. Willard (1894-1966) was a painter as well as a highly-regarded photographer and often combined the two in his smoke tree images. Willard was drawn to the subtle hues and contrasts of the desert,



referring to it as the “land of the purple shadow.” Known for his large-format photographs, he often painted over them with Rembrandt oils, adding texture and color, which illuminated the scenes of smoke trees against Mount San Jacinto. These hand-colored images were reproduced as postcards, which were sent all over the world, broadcasting the mysterious smoke trees of Palm Springs.

### INTERVIEW WITH LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER MILLICENT HARVEY

The Smoketree School lives on through the lens of photographer Millicent Harvey. A photographer for 40 years, Harvey, a Boston native, has lived in Palm Springs since 2010 and has been photographing smoke trees for the last eight. During Modernism Week in February, Harvey had a show of her work at Stephen Baumbach Gallery in Palm Springs. The editor of *Eden* recently interviewed Harvey about her captivating smoke tree photography.

**EDEN:** *How did you get started in fine art photography?*

**MILLICENT HARVEY:** In the early 2000s, I decided I wanted to go back to school at night and get my bachelor’s degree while still working during the day. My thesis project was using photography as an expressive art therapy, and throughout the process, photographing landscape became central to my thesis. It rekindled my love for the fine art side of photography. It also solidified the idea that photography is about a connection between the subject and the photographer.

**E:** *I know your work as a landscape and architecture photographer; how did you decide to focus on that?*

**MH:** I was a portrait photographer for many years, and I loved taking portraits. I learned a great deal about working with clients, subjects, working with artificial lighting, and coming up with creative solutions in a short amount of time. One of the companies I was taking staff portraits for was a landscape architecture firm. At the same time, I was getting my bachelor’s degree, and my landscape architecture client asked to see my new

Title: *Perseverance*. During the drought of 2014, Araby Wash in Palm Springs turned into a cracked desert wash and the smoke trees, with their long tap root, bloomed anyway reminding me of why they have survived the desert’s harsh conditions.



Above: Title: *Smoke Trees in Araby Wash*. Against the beautiful backdrop of the San Jacinto mountains, this family of smoke trees once thrived in Araby Wash.

Opposite: Title: *Wandering Light*. Early morning in Araby Wash I was struck by the trail of light illuminating the smoke tree and trailing up to the mountain peak.

photography from my thesis project. I showed him some of my latest work, and intrigued, he asked me to photograph one of their projects, which turned into twenty-five more projects. Ultimately, the work I produced for them became an extended photographic essay for a monograph they produced.

Today, I photograph for landscape architects, publications, and landscape related clients, and I work on my own personal projects. I love photographing natural landscapes and designed landscapes because I love what I am looking at and how it feels to be in the landscape. I am driven by photographic elements that I am drawn to and inspired by—light, shadow, atmosphere to convey a feeling, and the interplay with design elements that I see naturally—form, texture, pattern, shape, and lines.

**E:** *You've lived in Palm Springs for about ten years now, what do you like about it?*

**Has living in the desert influenced your photography?**

**MH:** There are many things I love about Palm Springs, and as a photographer, I find the desert landscape magical with its vibrant and pastel palette of colors and rich textures. Combined with the many weather elements all happening at once magic happens—it is inspiring to me as a photographer. I enjoy that Palm Springs has so much going on culturally and in five minutes you can be hiking in a glorious canyon.

**E:** *Tell me about your relationship to smoke trees—when did you discover them? What draws you to them? What are you trying to capture when you photograph them?*

**MH:** When I moved to Palm Springs, I was fascinated by the diverse desert trees and plants, which were all new to me. Here I discovered a





land where sun, sand, wind, drought, and flood gave tenuous hold to only the hardest plants. I found it so peaceful to be out in the desert by myself. I walked the washes and mountain trails amazed at their adaptations to survive this harsh climate. Over time my initial trepidation turned to awe—a reverence for the austerity of desert life and a transformation in my aesthetic sensibilities.

Then, a friend pointed out the smoke tree. Intrigued, I began exploring Palm Springs, looking for more information. I went to the Palm Springs Historical Society and the Palm Springs Art Museum, where I observed that the smoke tree was a constant subject for the *plein-air* painters from the early 1900s till today. The smoke trees were depicted so beautifully in the paintings that I became curious about photographing them.

Smoke trees thrive in the desert washes, so I followed my curiosity and went searching for them. When I first spotted smoke trees from a distance, I was intrigued by what I saw—their wispy tangle of thin, gray branches looked like puffs of smoke. Fascinated, I walked the washes in search of their scarce, small groves. One late afternoon I ventured

into the Araby Wash in Palm Springs, and I was stunned and intrigued with what I saw—the luminosity, color variation, and grace of the smoke tree. As I spent more time with these curious beings, I fell in love as they revealed their grace: light, lyrical, dancers in the wind. While I have photographed smoke trees in various places, Araby Wash became my favorite place, this most beautiful grove of smoke trees—it became my home away from home.

Once I had experienced the compelling contrast these trees present—how different they seem from afar vs. up close—I dedicated my photographer's craft to bring the barely visible—these puffs of smoke—into photographs to share with others their ephemeral beauty. My photography, both technically and spiritually, became more attentive to the subtle, muted, tonal dimensions of my adopted home. My photography of the smoke trees became symbolic of this personal transformation.

**E: You speak about the smoke trees in Araby Wash in the past tense. I know that you photographed the smoke trees in Araby Wash,**

Opposite, top: *Smoke Tree Blossoms*. In stark contrast to the smoky appearance of the smoke tree, it produces small clusters of beautiful deep purple to deep blue pea like flowers for a brief time every spring. Emerging from the petals are bright orange anthers. Photographed in Araby Wash.

Opposite, bottom: Title: *Up in Smoke*. A favorite of mine - This fully grown family of smoke trees used to reside in Araby Wash and were washed away in the Valentine's Day flood of 2019. Photographed in late 2018, you can see the size difference compared with the "Smoke Trees in Araby Wash" image which was taken in 2013.

Above: Bird's eye view lithograph looking west, title: *Mystic Lace*. Black and white close-up showing the delicate grace of the smoke tree. Photographed in Araby Wash - Palm Springs.



Above: Title: *Brush Falls*. Black and white photograph of an elder smoke tree aging gracefully. Photographed in Araby Wash.

Opposite: Title, *Araby Wash*. A view of the smoke trees in Araby Wash, photographed in 2013. Millicent's first series of smoke tree images were in black and white.

*exploring them in every light, and all seasons. You have said they became a family to you. Tell me about the "Valentine's Day Massacre," the flooding in the Coachella Valley in February 2019, and what it did to the groves of trees. Will they recover? How long might that take?*

**MH:** The desert washes where these families of smoke trees reside are drainage ways where water flows after an intense rain or flash flood. Because the smoke trees have a long taproot, they can survive a heavy rain,

but on Valentine's Day 2019, Palm Springs saw its wettest day in seventy-six years. The desert washes were overwhelmed by fast-flowing water, and the smoke trees in Araby Wash and other washes were swept away. The day after the flooding, I went away for two weeks. When I returned, I went to Araby Wash to photograph my trees and was shocked to see the smoke trees gone. My home away from home had been destroyed.

Today, the recovery of the smoke trees in Araby Wash is stalled because the city is



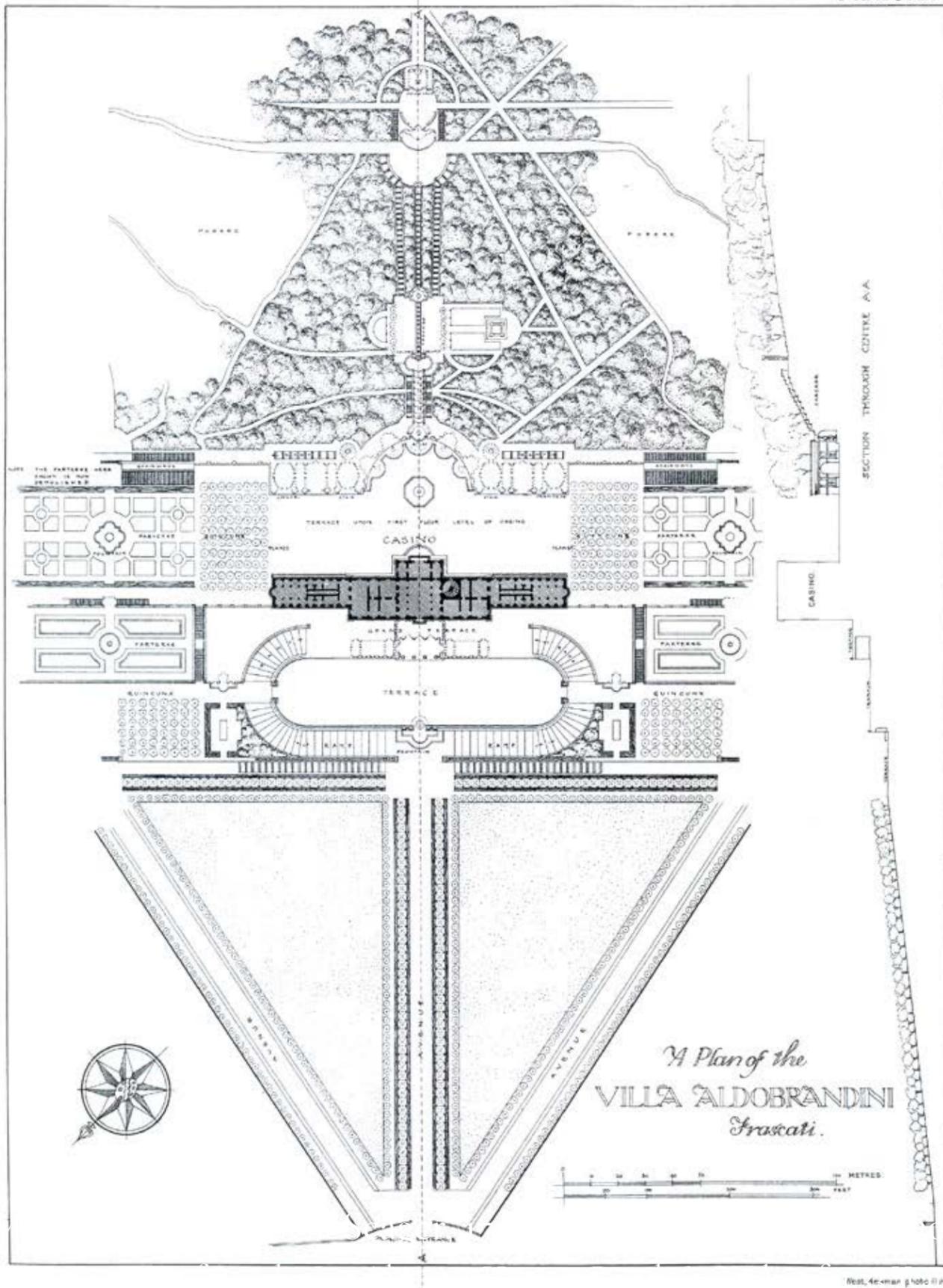
working to remove the sediment and debris left behind after the Valentine's Day flooding. Once they are finished, I am not sure if the smoke trees will return, and if they do, it will take a long time for the trees to grow. On the other hand, I am grateful to have found and photographed these smoke trees, and now I have a collection of historical images.<sup>12</sup>

#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Conspicuous California Plants*, Ralph D. Cornell, San Pasqual Press, Pasadena, 1938, 152.  
<sup>2</sup> "Flora of Palm, Andreas, Murray and Tahquitz Canyons

below 3000 Feet Elevation, San Jacinto Mountains," Tom Chester, Robert Hepburn, James Dillane, Kate Harper, Dave Stith, Keir Morse and Pam Palette. ([http://tchester.org/sj/flora/lower\\_palm\\_canyon\\_area.html](http://tchester.org/sj/flora/lower_palm_canyon_area.html), accessed April 18, 2020)  
<sup>3</sup> *Conspicuous California Plants*, Ralph D. Cornell, San Pasqual Press, Pasadena, 1938, 152.  
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 153.  
<sup>5</sup> "The Desert," Don Admiral, *Naturist*, *Desert Sun*, February 22, 1935, 1.  
<sup>6</sup> "Cahuilla cultural practice in the twenty-first century: The reformulation of ethnicity," Jenkins, D. G. (1997). Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers, 34. (<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/5385>, accessed April 11, 2020)  
<sup>7</sup> On that same trip, Fremont found the Joshua Tree in the nearby high desert, writing in his diary that, "their stiff and ungraceful forms make them to the traveller the most repulsive tree in the vegetable kingdom." *Joshua Tree Journal*, National Park Service, Fall 1993-Winter 1994, 1.  
<sup>8</sup> *The Silva of North America: A Description of the Trees which*

*Grow Naturally in North America Exclusive of Mexico*, Charles Sprague Sargent, Houghton, Mifflin, 1892, 36.  
<sup>9</sup> "Museum Notes." T. D. A. Cockerell, *Desert Sun*, May 12, 1944, 5. Though it is generally said that Fremont "discovered" the smoke tree, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians had inhabited the area for centuries. I couldn't establish that the tribe used any part of the smoke tree, and David Prescott Barrows' book *The Ethno-botany of the Coahuilla Indians of Southern California* (1900) makes no mention of it.  
<sup>10</sup> "Early artists inspired by Palm Springs area landscape," Renee Brown, *Desert Sun*, May 28, 2016, accessed online April 18, 2020 (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/05/28/palm-springs-desert-artists-carl-eytel-steph-willard/85016314/>)  
<sup>11</sup> "The Smoketree School: Painters respond to the call of the desert," Ann Japenga. *Palm Springs Life*, November 22, 2010 (<https://www.palmspringslife.com/the-smoketree-school/> accessed April 18, 2020)  
<sup>12</sup> Interview with Millicent Harvey, Palm Springs, April 19, and May 6, 2020.



# From a Renaissance Villa: The Italian Landscape Style in America

NANCY CAROL CARTER

When a 1971 Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium examined the influence and presence of the Italian style in American landscapes, a preface to the conference papers asserted that “the history of western gardening from the Renaissance to the present is the history of either permutations of the Italian garden or reactions to it.”<sup>1</sup>

Subsequent scholarship on America’s designed landscape has not quibbled meaningfully with this sweeping statement. Twenty years after the Dumbarton colloquium, a wave of scholarship examined Italian influences. Historian Richard G. Kenworthy set the scene by creating a state-by-state list identifying published documentation on every Italian garden in the United States. Kenworthy included gardens “either directly described as in the Italian taste or . . . clearly identified with Italy.” He excluded gardens that may have displayed Italian features but were perceived by their owners or creators as belonging to another tradition. Also omitted were gardens described by the “nebulous term, Mediterranean.” He concludes that the Italianate garden flourished in the United States from 1840 to 1940, ten years longer than the period generally marked by other scholars.<sup>2</sup>

A 1992 book on art and gardens in the United States whimsically offers an early date for American susceptibility to Italian influence: “Like a magic potion, Italianita has seeped through the stream of American aesthetic consciousness ever since Benjamin West stepped onto Italian soil in 1760.”<sup>3</sup> Deborah Warren Davidson agreed with the notion of a diffused

Italian sway and argued in 1994 that insufficient attention had been paid to the Italian garden as an influence in the United States. The Italian garden has “exercised uncommon fascination upon Americans,” and is consequently one of the most significant influences on the designed landscape. The principles of the Italian garden were adapted and transformed into principles of the American formal garden, Davidson wrote. Even when the garden is not “recognizably Italian.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1993 the first English-language book on Italian gardens was reissued. The new edition of Charles A. Platt’s *Italian Gardens* (originally published in 1894) included an introductory essay by Keith N. Morgan, an architectural historian.<sup>5</sup> Morgan also authored a 1994 symposium paper, “The Rise and Fall of the Italian Garden in America.”<sup>6</sup> He produced the catalog for a 1995 exhibit on Charles A. Platt<sup>7</sup> seventy years after his seminal *Italian Gardens* book was published. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Morgan concludes, “no foreign culture exerted a stronger influence on the American garden than that of Italy.”<sup>8</sup>

While there is wide acceptance of the reality and strength of an Italian influence in America’s

Left: H. Inigo Triggs presented detailed villa plans in *The Art of Garden Design in Italy* (1906). The concept of garden and grove is captured in this illustration of a still extant villa near Rome.

gardens and landscapes, there is less agreement and understanding about the ways in which this influence reveals itself. What is an Italian garden? What is the “Italian style?” This two-part *Eden* series looks to a wide array of sources, gardens, landscapes and practitioners to understand the origins of the Italian style and its American manifestations.

**Part 1** describes the Italian Renaissance villa and its early influence in England. The Italian style arrived in the United States via England, but also found a direct conduit in the deep affinity between Americans and Italy. The earliest Italian gardens in the United States are described. Later nineteenth-century interpretations of the Italian style are seen to veer toward caricature until scholarship and the work of landscape architects combine to mature the Italian style in America.

**Part 2** (scheduled to appear in the next

issue of *Eden*) includes a research bibliography and focuses on the Italian style in California, a state romanticized from an early date as “America’s Italy.” California’s terrain and plants present opportunities for pure forms of the Italian style. Yet, it is a fusion of Italian and Spanish-Moorish influences that eventually produce the celebrated “Mediterranean style” of architecture and gardens in California.

## PART 1: ORIGINS AND ADAPTATION OF THE ITALIAN STYLE

### THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE VILLA

In imitation of the open-air academies of ancient Athens, the earliest Italian Renaissance gardens were created as places of study and learned discussion. These “philosopher’s gardens” were typified by the Villa Medici in

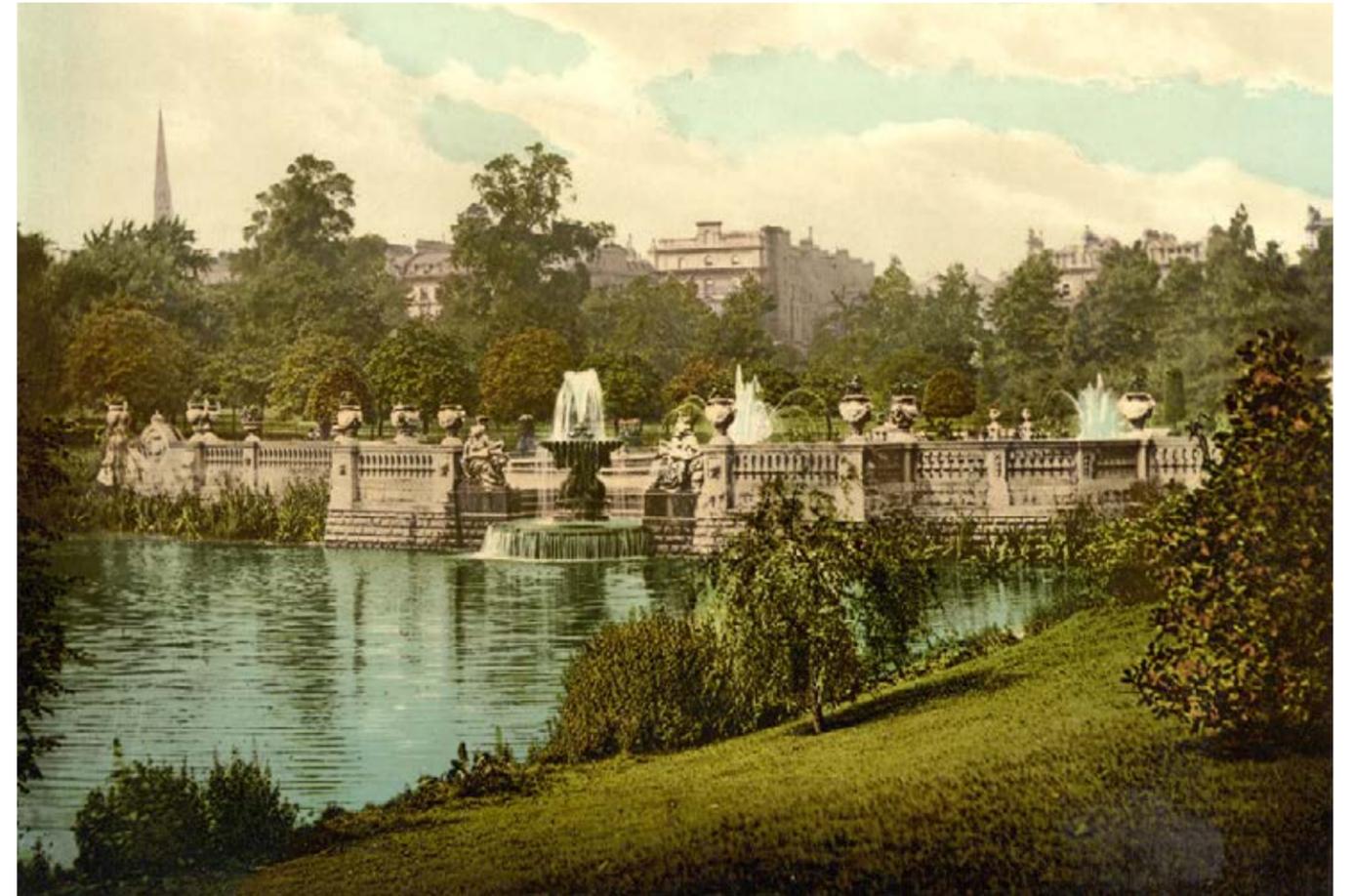
Careggi, built in 1434. Geometry and symmetry were ruling design principles. Elongated terraces encouraged thoughtful strolling, while flowers, herbs and the sound of moving water roused the senses.

Gradually, the inward-looking enclosed gardens of the medieval period were opening to the wider world. The Villa Medici above Florence at Fiesole, built in the 1450s, introduced a fashion for hillside homes and gardens, sited to capture a view. Steep terrain was made usable for outdoor living by the construction of balustraded terraces joined by a central axis. Staircases and cascading water linked terrace levels. Clipped hedges, fountains, pools, grottos, topiary, statues and urns became standard features. Vines and fruit trees were grown on pergolas or espaliered on a sunny wall. Lemon and orange trees were displayed in pots and marching cypress trees marked entrances.



Right: An unaccommodating Tuscan building site explains the configuration of the house, grove and a garden of this Coliodi villa. Drawing from H. Inigo Triggs, *The Art of Garden Design in Italy*.

Opposite: Prince Albert conceived the Kensington Italian Garden in 1860 as a gift to Queen Victoria. The garden is open to the public and was renovated in 2011. Vintage postcard courtesy the author.



Flowers played a considerable part in the Italian gardens of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with new plants flooding into Italy from Istanbul and the New World.<sup>10</sup> Some villas made room for a contemplative labyrinth and some had secluded private or secret gardens (*giardino segreto*) adjoining the house. Almost all villas had a *bosco*, a native or naturalistic grove of shrubs and trees;<sup>11</sup> a danger-free reminder of the once wild world. The grove was maintained as a deliberate counterpoint to the controlled formality of the garden. “Garden and grove” became shorthand for describing an Italian-style landscape.

The Italian Renaissance villa was a proclamation of power, wealth and the imposition of order. Leading families and officials of the Catholic Church competed to produce ever more elegant layouts and lavish water gardens, some with complicated mechanics that produced the sound of twittering birds or played “water tricks” on unsuspecting visitors.<sup>12</sup> Three constructions around Rome were much imitated over the centuries. Pope Julius II built Cortile del Belvedere in Rome to link the Vatican Palace with the Villa Belvedere. The design of this Belvedere Courtyard with its series of terraces connected by stairs was widely copied

or adapted. A series of Catholic cardinals built Villa d’Este at Tivoli, beginning in 1560. Expert hydraulic engineering is demonstrated in the scores of water features across the expansive gardens. Copying of specific design elements was facilitated by the popularity of Villa d’Este paintings and prints. Villa Lante outside Rome also inspired imitations. Constructed over a 30-year period, beginning in the 1560s, its gardens received more attention than buildings on the property. A natural watercourse is imaginatively harnessed for man-made enjoyment, illustrating the Renaissance aim of artfully taming nature.

The important legacy of the Italian villa is the treatment of the house and garden as a whole composition, “a unified outdoor place that has been the model for the future gardens of the western world.”<sup>13</sup> By amalgamating a menu of repeated design principles and decorative features, Renaissance villas fashioned a recognizable “Italian style.”<sup>14</sup>

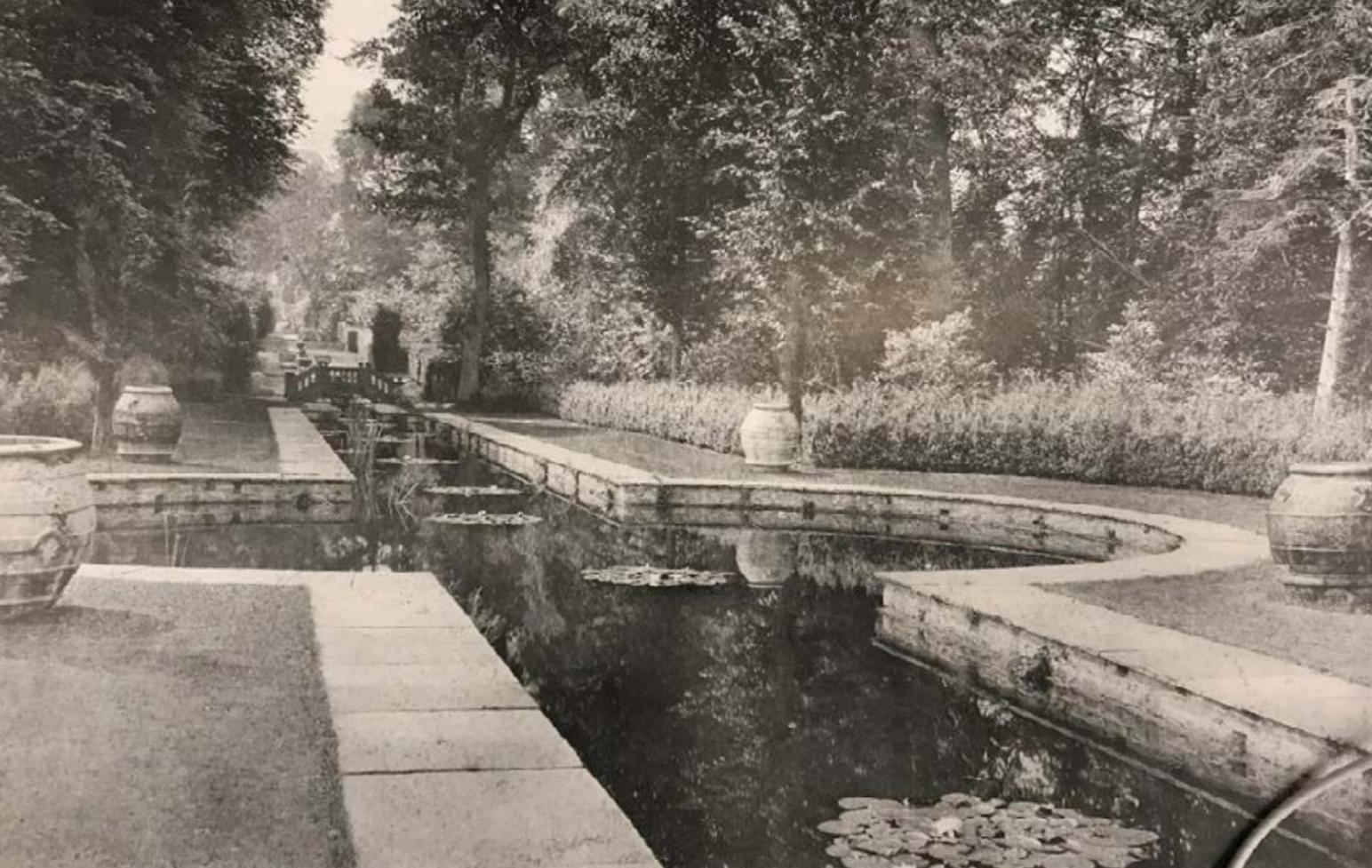
### THE ITALIAN STYLE IN ENGLAND

English visitors to Italy were entranced by the Renaissance villa from the earliest date. Their opinions were captured in seventeenth

and eighteenth-century travel journals, guidebooks, and other writings examined by John Dixon Hunt for *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination, 1600-1750*. This 1986 book used original documents to describe how the Italian Renaissance garden was perceived and understood. The English were charmed by the concept of garden and grove and attracted to the aesthetic principles of decorum and contrast in Italian architecture. Observers saw a pleasing proportion and order. They debated the ratio of art to nature in the Italian villa and particularly noticed the Renaissance villa’s celebration of variety, a design principle valued by the English and one that English visitors saw disappearing in French gardens.<sup>15</sup>

The second part of Hunt’s book looks at the adoption of Italian forms in England and controversially asks, “how English was the English landscape garden?” Hunt’s research and analysis find a continuing emulation of Italian Renaissance models right through the “so-called English landscape garden” which he contends was not the leap generally credited to William Kent (1685-1748) and Capability Brown (1715?-1783).<sup>16</sup>

The other essential reference is Roy Strong’s



*The Renaissance Garden in England*, a study of English gardens from the crowning of Henry VIII in 1508 to 1642 when the English Civil War began. England responded to all that had happened to garden design in Renaissance Italy, Strong concluded. Under Henry VIII the garden became a symbol of power and wealth. Then “statement” gardens spread from royal palaces to the great houses of England during the long Elizabethan peace.<sup>17</sup> Roy Strong bemoans the loss of these classically designed gardens and bitterly condemns Capability Brown for his role in changing them.

A group of Oxford dons in 1659 wrote of their hope that Italian glories and beauties would one day be brought into the English garden, as far as climate would permit.<sup>18</sup> The dons were out of touch. By that date, a century of experimentation was already determining which desirable elements of the Italian style could be imported to an often rainy and cold island with a different assortment of plants and trees.

Lord Lumley, the owner of Nonsuch Palace, had visited Italy and by 1559 was adding classical elements into his garden and organizing it as a garden and grove. He installed symbols representing Queen Elizabeth I and the crown, the first large-scale creation of a heraldic garden of the type seen in Italy. A visitor described “miracles of perfected art” at Nonsuch Palace that would “rival ancient Rome.” Around this

time, orangeries became popular.<sup>19</sup> This structure offered indoor protection for tender trees during the colder months while permitting an Italy-like outdoor display of potted citrus in the summer.

Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire was praised as looking like an Italian villa after 1575 when fountains and obelisks were added, and gardens were terraced and redesigned to reflect features seen at the Villa d’Este. In Hertfordshire, a garden and grove arrangement was executed at Theobalds House over the years 1575 to 1585, along with new stairways, loggias and statues of roman emperors.

These piecemeal adornments at various English estates evoked the Italian style, but two other developments were of greater significance. When Sir Francis Willoughby built his home at Wollaton in the 1580s, it was “the unique Elizabethan instance of a house and garden conceived as a single architectural unit,” thereby replicating a design principle of the Italian Renaissance villa.<sup>20</sup> A few years later, Wilton House near Salisbury was completely renovated with a full and elaborate Italian makeover, including the construction of a grotto with water tricks that became known as the best in England.<sup>21</sup>

It was not until 1622 that Sir John Danvers (1588-1655) built what was called the “first wholly Italian garden” in England.<sup>22</sup> It was in London’s Chelsea area, one of three gardens built by Danvers after his return from Italy.<sup>23</sup>

An even more important and more fully realized Italian garden was built by John Evelyn (1620–1706) at Wotton in Surrey, between 1643 and 1652.<sup>24</sup>

Many additional examples of Italian influence may be traced through the years, notably in the English classical creations of Inigo Jones (c.1573-1652) and the buildings and gardens of William Kent. Jones studied and observed architecture in Italy, paying special attention to the work of Andrea Palladio (1508-80). Kent lived in Italy from 1709 to 1719. Within Kent’s work, the Italian inspiration was ever present, but he was said to successfully localize it. He could “make Palladian speak good English.”<sup>25</sup>

Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Britain, interest in the Italian style waxed and waned. The still-famous Italianate terraces in County Wicklow, Ireland, at the Powerscourt Estate, link the house with the lake below. Begun in 1843, they were completed over 12 years. Prince Albert brought attention to the style in the mid-nineteenth century when he built an Italian garden at Osborne House, a royal residence on the Isle of Wight. Queen Victoria was delighted with the garden, prompting Albert to present her with an ornamental Italian water garden on the grounds of Kensington Palace in London. Built in 1860, the gardens have been open to the public for many years and were fully renovated in 2011.<sup>26</sup> The National Trust of England is restoring

the important Italian garden at Belton House in Grantham, Lincolnshire, to its “glory days of the 1930s.”<sup>27</sup>

At times formalism was militantly pitted against the more naturalistic style inspired by the English cottage garden and the Arts and Crafts Movement. During the Victorian era, architect and formalist Reginald Blomfield (1856-1942)<sup>28</sup> and the naturalistic garden style-maker William Robinson (1838-1935) traded barbs as the vocal proponents of two different approaches to garden design.<sup>29</sup>

Robinson and his celebrated contemporary Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) carried the day for Arts and Crafts informality into the twentieth century. Still, the silver thread of Italian Renaissance influence was not severed and is never fully out of the English garden picture.<sup>30</sup> For example, shaped topiary is one classical touch that carried over into Arts and Crafts gardens (although William Robinson vehemently disapproved of the practice).

The revived interest in the Italian style has been sparked by a new turn of attention to the classical world or a wave of design formality or, as occurred in the Edwardian Era, by the emergence of an extraordinarily skilled practitioner. Harold Ainsworth Peto (1854-1933) worked in the Italianate style and is recognized as one of the most successful garden designers of his generation. Peto’s own home, Iford Manor, and his famous water garden at Buscot Park, both preserved and open to visitors, are among many testaments to a continuing reverence for the Italian style in England.<sup>31</sup>

#### THE FIRST ITALIAN GARDENS IN THE UNITED STATES



Americans received contemporary accounts of Italian gardens from early travelers. During his five-month Italian sojourn in 1833, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was entranced by the Villa d’Este outside Rome and the sensuality of Italy (compared to Boston).<sup>32</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1789-1867), a popular novelist and essayist of the day, introduced her readers to the “perfection” of the Italian gardens she visited in 1839, along with the features she did not like, such as “torturing trees” into topiary shapes.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, a leading garden design text discouraged the adoption of the Italian style in the United States. Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852) grew up in the nursery business and developed expertise as a horticulturist, gardener, and journalist. He was the first significant landscape designer in the United States. In the influential book that established him as a national authority and tastemaker, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America* (1841),<sup>34</sup> Downing called “the ancient style” of Italian gardening a labored art, overly reliant on regularity and symmetry. It was therefore inferior to the naturalistic, refined and modern Picturesque style of gardening that Downing favored.<sup>35</sup>

Downing’s *Treatise* was issued in new editions for 80 years. Seven years after Downing’s death, Henry Winthrop Sargent<sup>36</sup> wrote a lengthy supplement to the sixth edition published in 1859. Sargent brought an open-minded approach to the Italian style as in introduced readers to the “most successful” Italian garden in the United States, the creation of financier and horticulturalist Horatio Hollis Hunnewell (1810-1902) in Wellesley,

Opposite: Harold Peto, England’s leading designer of formal Italianate gardens, installed the water garden at Buscot Park, Oxfordshire, in 1904. Photograph from *The Great Edwardian Gardens of Harold Peto*, by Robin Whalley.

Left: The Italian Garden of Horatio Hollis Hunnewell, on Lake Waban, Wellesley, Massachusetts, photograph taken 1906, courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Massachusetts. (As explained below, Sargent was unaware of another thriving Italian garden in the United States.)

Hunnewell had never visited Italy. His garden was directly inspired by travel in England. He saw a sophisticated interpretation of the Italian style by Sir Charles Barry (perhaps at Trentham Hall), but the garden that made the strongest impression on him was at Elvaston Castle in Derbyshire where thousands of conifers had been planted by the reclusive Earl of Harrington and an army of gardeners. One area of the Elvaston garden was “Italian in spirit.” An enormous acreage was densely planted with trees sheared into pyramids, pillars, round “huts” with conical roofs and other strange shapes.<sup>38</sup>

Elvaston’s topiary garden was said to represent a “fairyland Italian” style,<sup>39</sup> but it inspired Hunnewell. Back home in Massachusetts, he began in 1851 to lay out a series of formal gardens on a steep lakeside property. The Italian garden was created on six terraces planted with American evergreens<sup>40</sup> shaped into cones, toadstools, globes, pyramids and layered tiers. At the bottom of the topiary hillside, a balustraded walkway ran along Lake Waban.

Inclusion in Downing’s ever-popular *Treatise* brought attention to Hunnewell’s garden and to ways of adapting the Italian style in the United States. By 1889 it was described in the

prestigious pages of *Garden and Forest* as “by far the finest example of an ‘Italian garden’ with clipped trees and hedges that exists in America.” Such gardens should not be used everywhere or very often, the discerning journal advised, but it was good to have one in the country and Hunnewell’s garden had already provided hundreds of visitors with their first and only sight of topiary work.<sup>41</sup> Three years later *Garden and Forest* published an admiring article encouraging others to emulate the Hunnewell topiary garden, even on smaller parcels of land. The garden made the author “grateful for a chance to know in our own land some of the charm that haunts the classic grounds of Italy.” Why not capture Old World charm in American gardens?<sup>42</sup> Other *Garden and Forest* articles described the Hunnewell Italian garden as “worth a journey from any part of the United States,”<sup>43</sup> as it was “always fresh and inviting,”<sup>44</sup> and the finest of its type in the country.<sup>45</sup> Despite these positive assessments, Hunnewell’s creation was more admired than copied by others.<sup>46</sup> Today, the Hunnewell Estate remains in private ownership and is occasionally opened for garden tours. Topiary trees still populate one of the hillsides.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, on the western boundary of Georgia, the oldest Italian garden in the United States was thriving, despite being unknown to the horticultural journalists of New York and

Boston.<sup>48</sup> Ferrell’s Gardens, also called ‘The Terraces,’ predated Hunnewell’s garden by exactly ten years.

Started in 1841, the garden was the lifetime work of Sarah Coleman Ferrell (1817-1903). She was a passionate gardener who once wrote that plants and flowers were not just a part of her life, “they were life itself.”<sup>49</sup> Her garden was the pride of the region—the “finest garden in 30 states”—and was frequently photographed for postcards during the 1880s and 90s.<sup>50</sup> An attraction from an early date, it is still known as one of the most notable designed landscapes in the American South.<sup>51</sup>

In La Grange, Georgia, around the knoll on which her Gothic Revival home overlooked farmland, Ferrell gardened for 60 years, interpreting the Italian style. The inspiration or guide for the Italian garden she created is a mystery. Sarah Ferrell never visited Italy or traveled beyond Florida.<sup>52</sup> She extended a formal garden of four acres down five terraced levels, building walls and steps with local stone. Ferrell added clipped boxwood hedges, abundant topiary, flowers, and unusual species of specimen trees.<sup>53</sup> She created garden rooms and an allée 16 feet wide. A few large urns were displayed, but no fountains or statuary.<sup>54</sup>

Ferrell believed that developing a garden was an act of religious piety. She referred to her “moral garden” and envisioned an afterlife

of flower tending.<sup>55</sup> A distinctive Ferrell signature was topiary shaped into religious messages, his-and-her mottos and Masonic iconography. One hedge read “God is love.” These decorative elements reportedly saved her home from destruction by Union Army troops occupying Georgia during the Civil War.<sup>56</sup>

Beneath its idiosyncratic flourishes, Ferrell’s garden was geometrically designed with formal axial organization and symmetry. While her guide for this effort is undocumented, she had—at the very least—seen illustrations of the Villa Lante. On a slope she simulated one of its famous designs by planting parallel rows of boxwood, clipped into the undulating “water chains” of the Villa Lante cascade.

Sarah Farrell died in 1903. The wealthy new owner of her property replaced the house in 1909 with a large Palladian villa appropriate to the garden. Fountains and some classical statuary were added to enhance the Italianate character of the terraces.<sup>57</sup> The estate was renamed Hills & Dales and the new owners became conscientious custodians of the Ferrell garden. It was still carefully maintained when Earl Draper, an established landscape architect, declared it “an Italian Renaissance example” in a 1932 article for *House Beautiful*.<sup>58</sup> The house and garden were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and are open to visitors today as the Hills & Dales Estate.<sup>59</sup>



Opposite: A collection of urns atop a stone balustrade carry out the Italian theme at Hunnewell’s Wellesley, Massachusetts garden. 1909 postcard, courtesy the Library of Congress.

Left: Inspired by an Italian garden in England, H. H. Hunnewell terraced a hillside on his estate and created a topiary forest. Photo courtesy the Library of Congress.



H. H. Hunnewell was inspired by a garden in England; Sarah Ferrell probably saw books or photographs of Italian Gardens. In the hands of these early amateurs the Italian tradition was not well understood or realized. However, their creations are recognized as the earliest Italian gardens in the United States and both won popular acclaim for their interpretation of the Italian style.

#### THE MATURING ITALIAN STYLE IN THE UNITED STATES

A more nuanced appreciation of the Italian Renaissance style developed as garden literature proliferated and Americans traveled to Italy in numbers. With Latin and the classics at the core of their education and the Roman Republic as an inspiration for civil government in the

United States,<sup>60</sup> nineteenth-century Americans felt an affinity for Italy. As early as 1845, one thousand Americans arrived in Rome annually.<sup>61</sup> Wealthy Americans toured in greater numbers after the American Civil War, and, with improved transportation and growing national wealth, a floodtide was crossing the Atlantic by the 1880s.

Travelers of taste learned where to go and what to see from a burgeoning body of literature on travel and the expatriate life. Influential British art critic John Ruskin (1818-1900) produced both erudite books and accessible visitor guides on Italian art and architecture. Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), a leading intellectual and Harvard art historian, made an early contribution with his *Notes of Travel and Study in Italy* (1860). Household names like James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorn, and Mark Twain shared their impressions while living in Italy for months or even years at a time.<sup>62</sup> Author Henry James (1843-1916), along with many other Americans living in England, annually decamped to Italy for the winter. His love of the country stimulated 40 years of published travel writing in which James shared the pleasures and exasperations of Italian life.<sup>63</sup> Collectively, these voices fuelled an increasing American interest in Italy throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in a final decade during which the Italian Renaissance was celebrated in all phases of American visual culture.<sup>64</sup>

Readers of popular literature found travel advice in the mass-market publications that proliferated after 1880. Anyone with the means to travel found abundant instructions on the practicalities of a journey to Italy and the richness of art and architecture to be savored. Americans became great collectors of Europe's cultural patrimony. Classical relics and Italian garden artifacts were prized souvenirs.

The Italian-inspired gardens built in the United States in the latter nineteenth century were compatible with a trend toward greater formalism in design, a direction steered by classically trained architects commissioned to design estates during the 1890 to 1930 Country Place Era (or The Era of Conspicuous Consumption, as owners used their large estates to make a power statement as had the princes and popes who built Italy's Renaissance villas).<sup>65</sup> Yet, many of the "Italian gardens" of the period were merely reductive collections of features associated with the Italian style; a pastiche. In large estates, garden anthologies became popular, with an Italian garden one of several styles. At Green Hill, the Brookline, Massachusetts, country home of Isabella Stewart Gardner (begun in 1885), the grounds included an English lawn, a Japanese garden and an area of vine-covered pergolas, box-edged flower gardens, pools, and fountains that were intended to evoke the spirit

of the Renaissance.<sup>66</sup>

A turning point for the Italian garden in America arrived with the publication of Charles A. Platt's *Italian Gardens*, first as a two-part article in the July and August 1893 issues of *Harper's Magazine*; then in book form the next year. This was the first monographic treatment of the subject of Italian gardens in English. The content consisted of Platt's drawings and photographs of villas visited during two Italian trips (1886 and 1892). Many of the 19 villas Platt included were neglected and overgrown, but Platt was delighted by the profusion of flowers he saw and encouraged by the restoration work at some villas, often under the new ownership of British and American expatriates.

With this book, Platt offered new information and new insight that today are seen as a watershed, though the book did not win universal praise when published.<sup>67</sup> His breakthrough contributions were the "rediscovery of the Italian Renaissance villa garden in its entirety, and his attempts to adapt its scheme to American soil."<sup>68</sup> The scholarship of historian Keith N. Morgan emphasizes the importance of Platt's book. It launched a new American landscape tradition, he states, and it arrived almost a decade before "an avalanche" of other writing on Italian landscape design.<sup>69</sup>

Charles A. Platt (1861-1933)<sup>70</sup> initially worked as a landscape artist and etcher but turned his talents to architecture and garden-making. He applied the Italian Renaissance design approach without invoking all the decorative trappings that had previously defined Italian gardens in the United States. The most important lesson

of the Italian Renaissance villa, Platt believed, was to "take a piece of land and make it habitable." His plans were axial and geometric; they incorporated the landscape as an extension of the architecture with the aim of making the garden "like an apartment included with the house." Terraces were places to live and use.

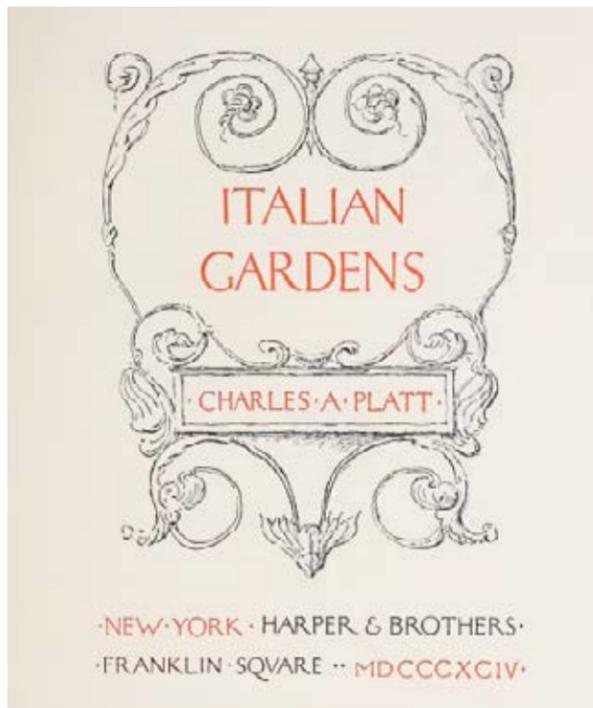
After several projects for friends and neighbors in Cornish, New Hampshire, Platt was commissioned to design the gardens of Faulkner Farm in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1896. The significance of this professional leap cannot be overstated. The prominent Boston owners of Faulkner Farm<sup>71</sup> had previously rejected a plan proposed by the Olmsted firm, but fully implemented Platt's design. This "full restatement . . . of the Italian villa garden" included a woodland grove, a walled flower garden, and a broad terrace overlooking the estate lands.<sup>72</sup> Faulkner Farm received wide publicity and was highly influential. It was published and praised in *Harper's Weekly Magazine* in 1899 and *House and Garden* devoted two articles to it in 1901.<sup>73</sup>

Platt received similar acclaim and further explicated his Italian inspiration with a garden design for the Weld estate,<sup>74</sup> a commission flowing from his work at Faulkner Farm that firmly established him as the new interpreter of the Italian garden in America.<sup>75</sup> Platt's various projects demonstrated the adaptability of the Italian Renaissance design approach to American landscapes. His plans did not rely on individual design elements or ornamentation previously supposed to be the necessary indicia of "Italian."

Opposite: Sarah Coleman Ferrell (about 1894) with her grandchildren. She gardened for sixty years at her Georgia home, Hills and Dales Estate.

Below: Hills and Dales Estate maintains Sarah Ferrell created ornate parterre gardens, the most well-known of which spelled out GOD IS LOVE in boxwood. Photo courtesy Hills and Dales Estate.





Platt went on to win scores of prestigious commissions, notably edging out Frank Lloyd Wright to design the county estate of Harold F. and Edith Rockefeller McCormick at Lake Forest, Illinois. Villa Turicum was built over ten years, beginning in 1908. Siting the house on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan, Platt terraced the hillside down to the waterfront. Villa Turicum was lauded as the finest example of Italian-inspired landscape design in the United States and criticized as a derivative reproduction, rather than an appropriate adaptation of Italian villa design principles.<sup>76</sup>

Meanwhile, landscape architecture was emerging as a profession<sup>77</sup> and writings on gardens and landscape design in the United States was growing in sophistication. A standard was set by the insightful art and architecture critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer (1851-1934). Publishing in *Garden and Forest* from 1888, Van Rensselaer undertook a study of the emerging profession she called landscape gardening. In seven essays she outlined the principles of artistic composition and how they applied to garden design, concluding that the profession could be pursued as a fine art. These essays, along with other writings were collected in her 1893 book, *Art Out-of-Doors: Hints on Good Taste in Gardening*.<sup>78</sup>

Two books analyzing American garden style appeared. *Old Time Gardens*, “the first serious attempt to provide historical notes on American landscape design” was published in 1901. Author Alice Morse Earle commented on the specialty art of the new Italian-style gardens in America.<sup>79</sup>

The next year, exceptionally well-educated architect Guy Lowell (1870-1927), published *American Gardens*. Despite the book’s title,



the work spotlights a geographically limited number of mainly East Coast gardens, with the work of Charles A. Platt liberally represented. Lowell did not invent a national garden history, but his work is a key document in the canon. He presented principles of gardening as an art form (per Van Rensselaer) and showed how large, small, old and new American gardens in the formal style were descendants of the Italian Renaissance garden. Most importantly, Lowell stressed the need to adapt, not copy, foreign garden principles in order “to perfect an American style.” He warned against adherence to dogmatic concepts of formal versus natural landscape design.<sup>80</sup>

These publications, preceded by Charles A. Platt’s writings and extensively publicized commissions, had described a formal garden revival in the United States and its connection to the Italian Renaissance villa. The new formality was being celebrated and analyzed in journals and book-length studies.<sup>81</sup> The march toward formalism was reinforced by increasing numbers of classically trained American architects. In addition to the traditional European centers of study, by 1904, the American Academy in Rome was entering its second decade of classical architectural studies for American fellows.<sup>82</sup> Earlier residents of the Academy were back in the United States, bringing an informed appreciation of classical design to their work.

At the turn of the twentieth century, classical forms, formalism and theories on how to appropriately adapt Italian Renaissance landscapes and architecture were on firm footing in the United States. These subjects were not new and did



not await discovery, but perhaps they did await accessible elucidation. This was accomplished by the publication and wide distribution of *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904)<sup>83</sup> written by the novelist Edith Wharton and illustrated by the much-admired Maxfield Parrish. While Wharton did not discover or originate her subject, she analyzed and explained Italian villa structure with a winning intelligence and clarity. She marveled at what could be done with compositions of stone, water and evergreens. She added historical depth to her writing by incorporating extensive scholarly research on villa architecture. Wharton had traveled in Italy since childhood; her transparent love of the country resonated with readers.

The appearance of new editions of *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* over the past 116 years is an informal means of tracking interest in formal garden-making generally and Italian gardens specifically. As with others who looked to Italy, Wharton never advocated the replication of Italian homes and gardens in the United States. Rather, she attempted to distill the essence of the style, looking not at building shapes and sizes but to the spirit of the Italian villa.

Wharton’s treatment of her subject has generally won praise. Still, her pronouncements on the lack of flowers in Italian villa gardens introduced a fallacy leading to years of misunderstanding and eventually, scholarly refutation. She wrote that the Italian garden did not exist for its flowers and that they “are a late and infrequent adjunct” to the beauties of Italian villas.<sup>84</sup> Wharton’s words achieved an unearned status as fact, curbing the use of flowers in many American adaptations of the

Italian style and suggesting that designers must work in shades of green only.<sup>85</sup>

When Charles A. Platt visited villa gardens just a decade before Wharton, he gloried in the profusion of flowers at nearly every one of the villas discussed in his book. The floriculture displays impressed him and seem to have inspired some of his later garden designs.<sup>86</sup>

As to the use of flowers in earlier centuries, Wharton’s unwarranted assumption was questioned by author Denise Otis<sup>87</sup> and rebutted in the work of Georgina Masson whose research indicated that flowers were important in Renaissance villa gardens. When delving into the subject, Masson was surprised to find so little published research on early Italian floriculture. She devoted seven pages of her *Italian Gardens* book to a list of flowers available in Italy at an early date and she urged the additional study of villa floral décor.<sup>88</sup>

In her book on the cultural history of Italian gardens, Helena Attlee included chapters on Italy’s botanical revolution (1536-1600) and its many early plant collections (1600-1700). Renaissance Italy was very much a part of the expanding horticultural world, she reports. The flourishing horticultural climate throughout Europe also generated passion and excitement in Italy. The garden became something of an outdoor cabinet of curiosities. Italian villa owners, like their counterparts in other countries, became competitive in acquiring unusual plants and flowers and often paid outrageous prices for the latest botanical rarity.<sup>89</sup>

#### AN AVALANCHE OF WRITING ON ITALIAN GARDENS

Scholar Keith N. Morgan described “an avalanche” of new writings in the decades after Charles A. Platt’s *Italian Gardens* book published in 1894.<sup>90</sup> Wharton’s book appeared in 1904. With an eye to its popularity and its use of Maxwell Parrish’s artistic illustrations, rather than a large number of documentary photographs, two books took readers back to first principles. Country Life published *The Gardens of Italy* in 1905, collecting Charles Latham’s exquisite Italian villa photographs with textual explanations by a capable English garden writer, Evelyn March Phillips. The book is a snapshot of Italian villas before two world wars and it preserves the work of Latham, now regarded as one of the twentieth century’s preeminent architectural and landscape photographers. Latham’s photographs were reissued in a 2009 book.<sup>91</sup>

The next year, architectural writer H. Inigo Triggs published *The Art of Garden Design in Italy*, a heavily illustrated work with instructional text. It is noted for Triggs’ meticulously prepared sketch plans drawn to scale. He believed that gardens could best be understood by combining plot plans with photographs.

Opposite, Left: Charles Adams Platt (1861-1933), artist and etcher, became an architect and garden designer after his 1894 publication of the first English-language book on Italian gardens

Left: Charles A. Platt’s architecture and garden design work began with his own home, shown here, and that of several neighbors in Cornish, New Hampshire. Courtesy the Library of Congress.

This scholarly work is an essential source for any serious student of Italian garden architecture. It was reprinted in 2007.<sup>92</sup>

In response to growing professional interest, the journal *Landscape Architecture* published dozens of articles on Italian gardens from 1910 through the 1920s. Guy Lowell, who published *American Gardens* in 1902, made a reappearance. He served with the American Red Cross during World War I in Italy and returned often to gather materials for books on vernacular homes and gardens on a less grand scale than those appearing in earlier publications. Lowell's *Smaller Italian Villas and Farmhouses* appeared in 1916 and his *More Small Italian Villas and Farmhouses* in 1920.<sup>93</sup>

One of the first women to be trained in landscape architecture and to open a practice, Martha Brooks Hutcheson (1871-1959), published *The Spirit of the Garden* in 1923.<sup>94</sup> She had completed more than 50 design commissions before retiring. In the midst of the Country Place Era when large estates were dominating architectural design attention, Hutcheson spoke to middle-class homeowners who at this time were avidly pursuing gardening. Her graceful and informative writing linked good taste to the Italian style. She believed that formal European styles presented a design model for American gardens, albeit with less emphasis on stylized planting patterns. Hutcheson's book was one of the classic works reprinted by the Library of American Landscape History to commemorate the 1999 centennial of the American Society of Landscape Architects.<sup>95</sup>

Two important books on Italian gardens appeared in 1925. J. C. Shepherd and Geoffrey Jellicoe published *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance*.<sup>96</sup> Both were young students at London's Architectural Association. In Italy, they measured and photographed 28 Italian villas and developed brief descriptions. The work's architectural analysis, surveys and elevations were well received and remain in demand; the book has appeared in several editions. An Italian perspective finally reached England and America when art historian Luigi Damis's *Italian Gardens*, was translated into English (New York: Brentano's Inc., [1925]). The work is prized for its wealth of illustrations.

The weighty and scholarly tomes pouring forth were leavened by the 1929 contribution of Rose Standish Nichols, a landscape architect who had studied at MIT, Harvard University, and the École des Beaux-Arts and trained under Charles A. Platt and Inigo Triggs. Her *Italian Pleasure Garden* was a well-received travel guide.<sup>97</sup>

#### ON THE WANE: THE ITALIAN STYLE GOES OUT OF FASHION

By 1930, the Italian formal style was visible in all types of garden-making across the

United States. It was present in small home gardens and had found its way into the Vanderbilt and du Pont estates. Large-scale projects of the Country Place Era celebrated the Italian style in almost every possible variation.<sup>98</sup> At one end of the scale, there was the subtle treatment represented in the work of Beatrix Farrand and Ellen Biddle Shipman (a protégé of Charles A. Platt). At the other, subtlety was set aside in projects like Villa Turicum<sup>99</sup> in Illinois and Villa Vizcaya<sup>100</sup> near Miami. Both tipped toward facsimile.

Between these extremes, almost every permutation of the Italian style was at hand for the observation and education of a new generation of landscape architects born in the 1880s and 90s (Fletcher Steele, Florence Yoch, A. E. Hanson, Charles Gibbs Adams). These practitioners had, in many cases, worked with the first generation who had consciously adapted the Italian style (Platt, Warren H Manning, Paul Thiene, Ferruccio Vitale). Unlike their mentors, they started careers within an established, dominant style of American landscape architecture. The new generation in many instances continued to be influenced by the Italian style but tended to be less slavish and more imaginative in its application. Others edged toward different traditions. The work of many of these practitioners, and others, will be discussed in Part 2 of this article, with attention focused on the Italian style in California.

The Italian style may have been omnipresent in 1930, but rebellion against classical forms of design was fomenting. Decisive change was coming. In 1929 the United States stock market had disastrously crashed, initiating a reduction of private wealth that would spiral downward for years. The golden age of estate building sputtered to an end. Clients faded away and the work of landscape architects changed. Private commissions gave way to government-funded projects.

In this new reality, American interest in Italian precedents was waning. Books on Italian gardens were no longer flying off the press. Politics played a role as well. The rise of fascism made it difficult to idealize Italian civilization. Most Americans turned away in distaste from the bellicose Benito Mussolini, who, in 1925, assumed dictatorial control of Italy. British and American expatriates withdrew from their favored Italian haunts and tourist travel to Italy declined precipitously. The natural affinity that had long existed between Americans and all things Italian was badly frayed.

At some indeterminable time in the early 1930s, after four decades of prominence, the Italian landscape style lost its luster and fell out of fashion.<sup>101</sup> Some interest in colonial precedents flickered and Modernism gained ground.



Opposite: Charles A. Platt's 1896 design at Faulkner Farm in Brookline, Massachusetts, was called a "full restatement of the Italian villa garden." Photo courtesy The Downeast Dilettante.



Above: Charles A. Platt further explored the Italian style in 1908 at "Guinn," built for industrialist William G. Mather in Cleveland. The gardens and house were equally celebrated. Photo courtesy Gwinn Archives, Cleveland.

Opposite: "Weld," the Larz Anderson estate garden built in 1901 at Brookline, Massachusetts, was one of Charles A. Platt's most celebrated and influential works. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture, 1st, 1971. *The Italian Garden*, ed. David R. Coffin. Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Trustees for Harvard University, 1972, vii.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard G. Kenworthy, "Published Records of Italianate Gardens in America," *Journal of Garden History*, 10:1 (1990) 10-11. The most intense period of Italian influence is generally dated from 1890 to 1930. Kenworthy does not explain his use of the term "Italianate," but another scholar, Rebecca Warren Davidson, specifically avoids the term, thinking that "it denotes the Italian model without also having some essential relationship to its principles." In this paper the terms "Italian garden" and "Italianate garden" are used interchangeably.
- <sup>3</sup> Benjamin West (1738-1820) was a promising artist of the American colonies who spent three years in Italy before settling in London where he gained fame as the painter of historical subjects for King George III. Margherita Azzi Visentini, "The Italian Garden in America: 1890-1920s," in *The Italian Presence in American Art 1860-1920*, ed. Irma B. Jaffe. New York: Fordham University Press, 1992, 240-265, vii.
- <sup>4</sup> Davidson, Deborah Warren. "Images and Ideas of the Italian Garden in American Landscape Architecture." PhD diss., Cornell University, 1994, 1, 235.
- <sup>5</sup> Keith N. Morgan, "Al Fresco: An Overview of Charles A. Platt's Italian Gardens," in Charles A. Platt, *Italian Gardens* [Reissue]. Portland, OR: Sagapress/Timber Press, 1993, 95-142.
- <sup>6</sup> This illuminating essay identifies the "stages of evolution" for evaluating the influence of Italy on American gardens. Keith N. Morgan, "The Rise and Fall of the Italian Garden in America," in Robin Karson, ed., *Masters of American Garden Design IV: Influence on American Garden Design: 1895 to 1940. Proceedings of the Garden Conservancy Symposium held March 11, 1994*, New York: The Garden Conservancy; Paine Webber, [1995], 7-16.
- <sup>7</sup> Keith N. Morgan, *Shaping an American Landscape: The Art and Architecture of Charles A. Platt*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995. [A collection of six essays, this is the published version of a catalog for a 1995 Platt exhibition at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College.]
- <sup>8</sup> Morgan, "Rise and Fall of the Italian Garden," 7.
- <sup>9</sup> Georgina Masson, *Italian Gardens*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1961, 279-280. Masson studied early Italian floriculture and

- urged additional research into the subject.
- <sup>10</sup> Helena Atlee, *Italian Gardens: A Cultural History*. London: Frances Lincoln, 2006, 117-19. Perhaps heeding Georgina Masson's call for additional study of early Italian floriculture (Endnote 9), Atlee includes a section on the sizeable number of plant imports to Italy in the 1600s and observes that English writers on the Italian garden have overlooked a rapt Italian interest in horticulture.
- <sup>11</sup> A textbook explanation of the Italian Renaissance garden style is presented in Gordon T. Millichap and J. Gordon Millichap, *The School in a Garden: Foundations and Founders of Landscape Architecture*. Chicago: PNB Publishers, 2000, 39-44.
- <sup>12</sup> The evolution of hydraulic technology is described in "Watering the Guests," in Atlee, *Italian Gardens: A Cultural History*, 131-152.
- <sup>13</sup> John Hanson Mitchell, *The Wildest Place on Earth: Italian Gardens and the Invention of Wilderness*. Washington, D.C., Counterpoint, 2001, 65.
- <sup>14</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination, 1600-1750*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, 1996, 83-89, 97.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii-xix, 180. With this assertion, Hunt contradicts other English garden theorists, including Horace Walpole who believed that William Kent's naturalistic stylings were a fundamental change of direction. Hunt also stands on the other side of Georgina Masson's earlier writings that downplay the influence of Renaissance gardens in England, a place "where the cult of gardens has always flourished." Masson, *Italian Gardens*, 276.
- <sup>16</sup> Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979, 10-14. A softcover edition of this work with a new introduction was published in London by Thames and Hudson, 1998. While regarded as a classic text, it is suggested that Strong's work would be more valuable had his research extended into the next century. The English Civil War drove many into exile in Italy where they were exposed to the Renaissance villa for the first time. A strong Italian influence thus was still seen in English gardens well after 1642 (the termination of Strong's period of study).
- <sup>17</sup> Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, 104.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-107; Strong, *The Renaissance Garden*, 63-66.
- <sup>19</sup> Strong, *The Renaissance Garden*, 58; an illustration of Wolaton is published at 168-69. John Dixon Hunt concluded that the Italian tenet of the garden as an extension of the



architecture of the house, and integral to it, appears in England after the return of Inigo Jones from Italy. *Hunt, Garden and Grove*, 169.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, 105, 139.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, 90-97, 126.

<sup>22</sup> Roy Strong writes that Sir John Danvers "first taught us the way of Italian gardens," but that none of the Danvers gardens are well-described. Strong, *The Renaissance Garden*, 176.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Bisgrove, *The National Trust Book of the English Garden*. London: Penguin, 1990, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Hunt, *Garden and Grove* 205, 216.

<sup>25</sup> The Kensington Italian Gardens were fully renovated in 2011. They are deemed to be of special importance and are protected as a "listed" site. *Royal Parks*, accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/kensington-gardens/things-to-see-and-do/gardens-and-landscapes/italian-gardens>.

<sup>26</sup> "Belton's Italian Garden Restoration," accessed January 18, 2020, [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/belton-house/features/beltons-italian-garden-restoration](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/belton-house/features/beltons-italian-garden-restoration).

<sup>27</sup> Among many publications, Reginald Blomfield wrote *A History of Renaissance Architecture in England 1500-1800* (London: George Bell and Son, 1897) and a book that encouraged a classical approach to garden design that harmonizes a house and its surroundings, *Formal Gardens in England*. London: Macmillan, 1892.

<sup>28</sup> William Robinson's most influential books are *The Wild Garden* (1870) and *The English Flower Garden* (1883) both published in numerous editions over many years.

<sup>29</sup> In a 1918 book preface, Jekyll played down the distinction between garden styles and reminded readers that "the principle of the Italian garden [has been] recognized as desirable" for almost a century. Her book is replete with ornamentation associated with the Italian style. Gertrude Jekyll, *Garden Ornament*. London: Offices of Country Life; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1918, xi.

<sup>30</sup> Harold Peto specialized in the romantic Italianate style that was fashionable from 1900-1920 but was also influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. He worked in both England and the South of France. See generally, *The Great Edwardian Gardens of Harold Peto: From the Archives of Country Life*. London: Aurum, 2007; Peto's design of his own garden at Iford Manor and the water garden at Buscot Park are described in Janet Waymark, *Modern Garden Design*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003, 13-15.

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, *The Wildest Place on Earth*, 132-34.

<sup>32</sup> Sedgwick's collected "Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home" were published in two volumes.

<sup>33</sup> In addition to the *Treatise*, A. J. Downing published *Cottage Residences* (1842) and *Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), both of which included Italianate styles. With his brother, Downing wrote *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* (1843) an achievement leading to his appointment as editor of *The Horticulturist*, a post he held until his untimely 1852 death in a steamship accident.

<sup>34</sup> Morgan, "Rise and Fall of the Italian Garden," 7-9.

<sup>35</sup> A cousin of Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum director Charles Sprague Sargent, Henry Winthrop Sargent (1810-1882) was guided by the ideas of A. J. Downing as he developed his Hudson Valley estate Wodeneth into a model of rural perfection and planted it with a wide variety of imported trees, including the most complete collection of conifers in the United States. Sargent was the first American to use a lawn mower, a model imported from England in 1855. Joel Elias Spingarn, "Henry Winthrop Sargent and the Early History of Landscape Gardening and Ornamental Horticulture in Dutchess County, New York, [Address Made at the Annual Luncheon, May 21, 1937]," *1937 Yearbook Dutchess County Historical Society* (Reprint). Poughkeepsie, NY, 1937, 36-63. Hathitrust, accessed July 2, 2019, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924002803793&view=1up&seq=5>

<sup>36</sup> Denise Otis, *Grounds for Pleasure: Four Centuries of the American Garden*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002, 39.

<sup>37</sup> "Gardens of the Italian Renaissance," in Penelope Hobhouse, *Gardening Through the Ages: An Illustrated History of Plants and Their Influence on Garden Styles—from Ancient Egypt to the Present Day*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1992, 137-162, 148. Hobhouse also includes Hunnewell's garden in her book at page 265.

<sup>38</sup> Otis, *Grounds for Pleasure*, 39.

<sup>39</sup> Morgan, "Al Fresco: An Overview," 121.

<sup>40</sup> "The Terrace Garden at Wellesley," *Garden and Forest* 2:53 (February 27, 1889), 98.

<sup>41</sup> M. C. Robbins, "The Gardens at Wellesley, Massachusetts," *Garden and Forest* 5:230 (July 20, 1892), 338-39.

<sup>42</sup> M. Barker, "The Wellesley Gardens," *Garden and Forest* 5:226 (June 22, 1892), 298.

<sup>43</sup> W. N. Craig, "Gardens in Wellesley, Massachusetts," *Garden and Forest* 7:327 (May 30, 1894), 218.

<sup>44</sup> "Notes from Wellesley," *Garden and Forest* 8:379 (May 29, 1895), 217-18.

<sup>45</sup> Otis, *Grounds for Pleasure*, 174.

<sup>46</sup> "Digging Deeper: A Walking Tour of Hunnewell Estate, June 24, 2017" The Garden Conservancy, accessed February 1, 2020, [www.gardenconservancy.org/open-days](http://www.gardenconservancy.org/open-days).

<sup>47</sup> A passing mention was made in one national publication: "Among the best known old gardens in the South which are still kept up in the original style is the Ferrell Garden at La Grange, Ga. This covers ten acres and abounds in clipped and shaped hedges of various kinds and rare plants from all

quarters of the globe. It was established in the nineteenth century." Corine Horton, "Camden Gardens," *House and Garden* 6:3 (September 1904), 105-112, 111.

<sup>48</sup> Sarah Coleman was formally educated before marrying her cousin Blount C. Ferrell in 1835. After a few years in Florida, the couple returned to La Grange, Georgia, settling on 80 acres of family land. Ferrell started her garden in 1841. Catherine M. Howett, "A Southern Lady's Legacy: The Italian 'Terraces' of La Grange, Georgia," *Journal of Garden History* 2:4 (October-December 1982), 341, 344, 347.

<sup>49</sup> Carleton Wood, "Cotton Farming, Mill Villages and Fancy Parterres: The Woven Landscapes of La Grange, Georgia," *Magnolia* 22:1 (Summer-Fall 2008), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Christine Donhardt, "Ferrell Gardens: A Designed Landscape of the 19th Century" (MA thesis, University of Georgia, 2007), 4. Donhardt states that the design was not symmetrical, however other accounts and photographic evidence indicates a degree of symmetry in the garden layout. The Ferrell garden was "the most beautiful spot in the South," according to an 1895 regional magazine. "Western-Middle Georgia," *Southern Cultivator and Industrial Journal* (February 1895), 261.

<sup>51</sup> No researcher has uncovered the source of Ferrell's knowledge of Italian garden design.

<sup>52</sup> Donhardt, "Ferrell Gardens," 350. After 1851 Sarah Ferrell had access to one of the great plant nurseries of the South, Fruitland Nursery in Augusta, Georgia, operated by Belgian father and son Louis M. E. and Prosper J. A. Berckmans. (The grounds of this renowned nursery became the site of the Augusta National Golf Club.)

<sup>53</sup> One of the most detailed descriptions of the Ferrell garden is provided in Elaine Ware, "Formal Ornamental Gardens in the Ante-Bellum South," *Popular Culture* 19:2 (October 1996), 59-61.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-59.

<sup>55</sup> Howett, "A Southern Lady's Legacy," 350, 395.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 353, 358. The new owner was leading Southern businessman Fuller E. Callaway, Sr. (1870-1928) a wealthy textile manufacturer.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 358, citing E. S. Draper, "The Garden at Hills and Dales," *House Beautiful* 71 (1932), 372-378.

<sup>58</sup> Contemporary information on the Hills & Dales Estate is at: [www.hillsanddales.org](http://www.hillsanddales.org).

<sup>59</sup> Revolutionary and post-revolutionary Americans with any education were perfectly familiar with the history of the Roman Republic and the heroic efforts to preserve it. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* and Livy's *History of Rome* were familiar and inspirational reading.

<sup>60</sup> Otis, *Grounds for Pleasure*, 207, citing Paul R. Baker, *The Fortunate Pilgrims: Americans in Italy 1800-1860*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, *Wildest Place on Earth*, 128-132.

<sup>62</sup> The Italian garden, William James wrote, "contained within itself all the past as well as the present, balancing art and nature." His best-known travel work is *Italian Hours*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909.

<sup>63</sup> Morgan, "Rise and Fall of the Italian Garden," 10.

<sup>64</sup> Philip Pregill and Nancy Volkman, *Landscapes in History: Design and Planning in the Eastern and Western Traditions*, 2nd ed., New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999, 632. On the Country Place Era see generally, Robin S. Karson, *A Genius for Place: American Landscapes of the Country Place Era*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; Library of American Landscape History, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Morgan, "Al Fresco: An Overview of Charles A. Platt's Italian Gardens," 121.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-119. *Garden and Forest* published a lukewarm review and Charles Eliot of the Olmsted practice attacked Platt's book. The negativity was partially based on a general resistance to formalism.

<sup>67</sup> Visentini, "The Italian Garden in America," 240.

<sup>68</sup> Morgan, "As Fresco: An Overview of Charles A. Platt's Italian Gardens," 113, 136.

<sup>69</sup> The definitive book on Platt is: Keith N. Morgan, *Charles A. Platt: The Artist as Architect*, New York: Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985.

<sup>70</sup> Mary (Pratt) and Charles F. Sprague were Boston Brahmins. After Charles died, Mary Sprague married the prominent politician Edward Brandegee. Faulkner Farm was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 as the "Brandegee Estate."

<sup>71</sup> Keith N. Morgan, "Gwinn: The Creation of a New American Landscape," in Morgan, *Shaping an American Landscape*, 121-142.

<sup>72</sup> Otis, *Grounds for Pleasure*, 176.

<sup>73</sup> The Brookline, Massachusetts, estate of and Isabel Weld Perkins Anderson. The estate grounds are now Larz Anderson Park, the largest public park in Brookline.

<sup>74</sup> Morgan, "Gwinn," 7. His professional reputation was enhanced by a personal interview probing his project approach and methodology. Charles Downing Lay, "An Interview with Charles A. Platt," *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 2:3 (April 1912), 127-131. He was later profiled in a leading art publication: Royal Cortissoz, "Charles A. Platt," *American Magazine of Art* 27:7 (July 1934), 383-389.

<sup>75</sup> "Villa Turicum," (blog), accessed February 1, 2020, ; Davidson, "Images and Ideas of the Italian Garden," 132-144.

<sup>76</sup> In 1893, the nation's first professional course in landscape architecture was offered at Harvard University. The American Society of Landscape Architects was founded on January 4, 1899, in New York City. MIT admitted women and men to its landscape architecture program running from 1900-10. The American Academy in Rome welcomed the first landscape

architect as a fellow, Edward Lawson in 1915.

<sup>77</sup> Mariana Van Rensselaer, *Art Out-of-Doors: Hints on Good Taste in Gardening*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893. Rensselaer's study of landscape gardening as art is analysed in Judith K. Major, "Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer's Landscape Gardening Manifesto," *Landscape Journal* 26:2 (January 1, 2007), 183-200.

<sup>78</sup> Davidson, "Images and Ideas of the Italian Garden," 75-76, describing Alice Morse Earle, *Old Time Gardens*, New York: Macmillan, 1901. Earle made specific mention of the Hunnewell garden at Wellesley on pages 78 and 407-09.

<sup>79</sup> Guy Lowell, *American Gardens*. Boston: Bates & Guild, 1902, unpaginated introduction, 210, 214. Lowell held degrees from Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and a diploma from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris. He established and taught in the co-educational landscape architecture program at MIT during its decade of existence, 1900-1910. Sketch plans of the gardens are a unique aspect of Lowell's book. Rebecca Warren Davidson describes Lowell's book as a key document that educated readers with its unique presentation. The book extended the sphere of Italian garden influence by helping people understand that large and small gardens alike could incorporate Italian influences. Davidson, "Images and Ideas of the Italian Garden," 236, 305.

<sup>80</sup> Notably, the previously cited books of Alice Morse Earle and Guy Lowell. One scholar writes that even the great English interpreter of the Italian style, Harold Peto, who visited the United States in 1887, was influenced by Platt's designs. Morgan, "Al Fresco: An Overview of Charles A. Platt's Italian Gardens," 120.

<sup>81</sup> Charles A. Birnbaum of the Cultural Landscape Foundation has called special attention to the influence of the returning Americans who studied at the American Academy in Rome. "The Influence of the Italian Villa Landscape on Garden Design and Landscape Architecture in America," Lecture (summary), Washington, D.C., May 11, 2012, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://tclf.org/event/italian-garden-lecture>.

<sup>82</sup> Wharton knew that the term "Italian villa" encompassed both the house and garden, but apparently her publisher did not count on the book-buying public to share this understanding.

<sup>83</sup> Edith Wharton, *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*. New York: The Century Co., 1904, 5.

<sup>84</sup> Georgia Masson offers reasons for misunderstandings about floriculture in early Italian gardens, including the fact that most of the sources and scholarship are in Italian and have simply been overlooked or ignored. Masson, "Italian Flower Collectors' Gardens in Seventeenth Century Italy," in *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium*, 63-80. It should be noted that Harold Peto, the great English interpreter of Italian style, preferred to design with few flowers. Waymark, *Modern Garden Design*, 12-14.

<sup>85</sup> Platt's special interest in villa flower displays was noted in Morgan, *Shaping an American Landscape*, 179.

<sup>86</sup> Otis, *Grounds for Pleasure*, 175.

<sup>87</sup> Masson, *Italian Gardens*, 279-280.

<sup>88</sup> Atlee, *Italian Gardens: A Cultural History*, 41-49, 117-129, 118-19.

<sup>89</sup> Morgan, "Al Fresco: An Overview of Charles A. Platt's Italian Gardens," 113, 136.

<sup>90</sup> Charles Latham, *The Gardens of Italy*, descriptions by Evelyn March Phillipps. London: Country Life, Ltd., 1905; Latham's photographs were republished with new descriptive information in Helena Atlee, *Italian Gardens: Romantic Splendor in the Edwardian Age*, New York: Monacelli Press, 2009.

<sup>91</sup> H. Inigo Triggs, *The Art of Garden Design in Italy*. London: Longmans, Green, 1906. Reprinted in 2007 by Schiffer Publishing, London and Atglen, Pennsylvania.

<sup>92</sup> Guy Lowell, *Smaller Italian Villas and Farmhouses*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1916; Guy Lowell, *More Small Italian Villas and Farmhouses*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1920.

<sup>93</sup> Martha Brooks Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1923. She was able to supply her own photography for the work. Rebecca Warren Davidson, "Camera Bella: The Printed Photograph and the Perception of the Italian Garden in America," in *Foreign Trends in American Gardens*, ed. Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018, 140-161, 156.

<sup>94</sup> Martha Brookes Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden*, intro. Rebecca Warren Davidson (ASLA Centennial Reprint Series). Amhurst: Massachusetts University Press in association with Library of American Landscape History, 2001. "Hutcheson," Library of American Landscape History, accessed February 1, 2020, [http://lah.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/HUTCHESON\\_Intro.pdf](http://lah.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/HUTCHESON_Intro.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> J. C. Shepherd and Geoffrey Jellicoe, *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance*. London: Benn, 1925.

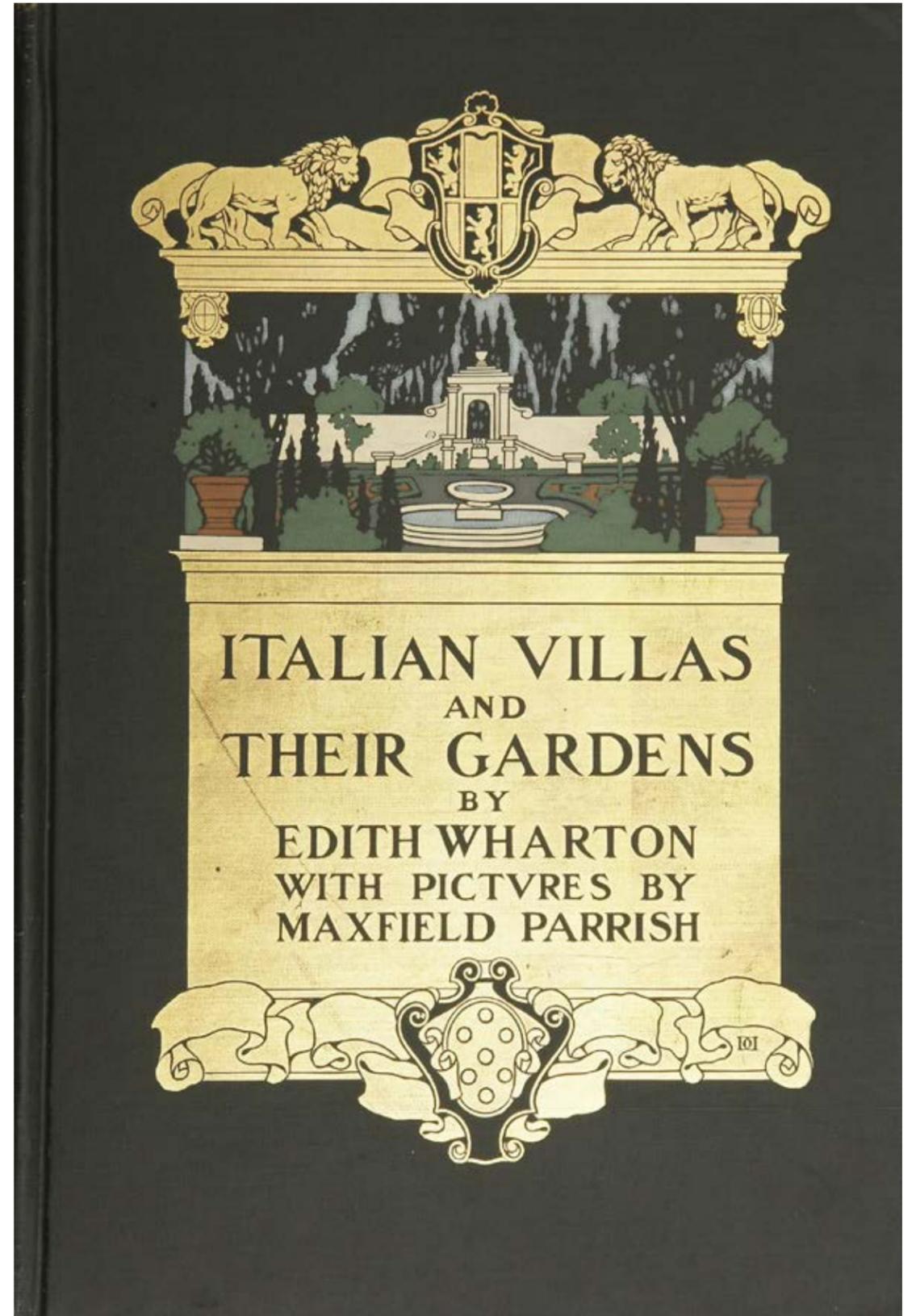
<sup>96</sup> Rose Standish Nichols, *Italian Pleasure Gardens*, s. NY: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1928. She also studied at Harvard University and in Paris. She wrote other garden travel guides and published scores of articles in popular magazines.

<sup>97</sup> An entertaining source for varieties of the "Italian" garden is Mac Griswold and Eleanor Weller, *The Golden Age of American Gardens: Proud Owners, Private Estates, 1890-1940*. New York: Abrams, 1991.

<sup>98</sup> A previously discussed project of Charles A. Platt.

<sup>99</sup> The complications of coordinating the work of three different designers is told in: Witold Rybczynski, Laurie Olin, and Steven Brooke, *Viczaya: An American Villa and Its Makers*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

<sup>100</sup> See generally, Morgan, "Rise and Fall of the Italian Garden," 7-14.



The cover of Edith Wharton's *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, 1904.

# Members In The News

## CGLHS AT MODERNISM WEEK

STEVEN KEYLON, *EDEN* EDITOR



Above: Kelly Comras signs copies of her book "Ruth Shellhorn." Photo by Steven Keylon

Opposite: JC Miller lecturing on the work of landscape architect Robert Royston. Photo by Steven Keylon



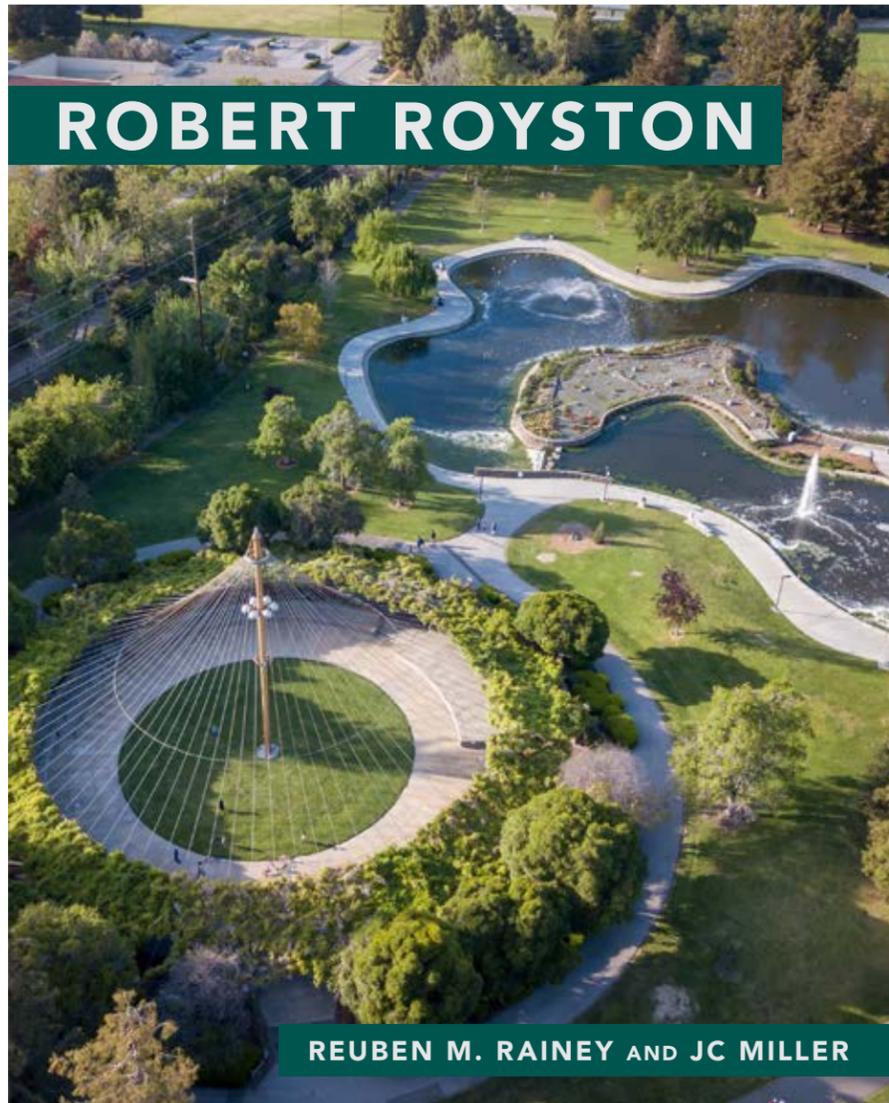
**M**odernism Week in Palm Springs provides twice-a-year programming to foster knowledge and appreciation of the architecture, landscape architecture, design, and culture of the mid-century modern movement. The primary event is an eleven-day festival each February, with programming that includes lectures, films, symposia, tours, and parties. The money raised by Modernism Week, a non-profit organization, provides support to both local and state organizations' efforts to preserve the region's modern architecture. In addition, the organization offers annual scholarships to local students who choose to pursue college educations in the fields of architecture and design.

In addition to the primary event held each February, Modernism Week offers a "Mini-Modernism," a four-day "Fall Preview" each October. Modernism Week also provides a platform to explore contemporary considerations

surrounding historic preservation, cultural heritage, adaptive reuse, and sustainable architecture.

Modernism Week began in 2006 as a

three-day weekend known as "Modernism Weekend." That first year saw 1,000 attendees and just a handful of events. Lisa Vossler Smith, executive director of Modernism Week, said that in that first year, "... the goal was to raise awareness for the incredible archive of modernism in Palm Springs and to help reinforce preservation." Modernism Week has dramatically expanded over the years: at this year's event, attendance was estimated at 162,000, with over 375 different events offered. This generated an economic impact of \$61 million for local hotels, restaurants, shops, and other businesses throughout the Coachella Valley. Attendees came from twenty different countries, and every single state in the United States was represented, along with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Worldwide media coverage generated more than 3.7 billion media impressions, a new record for Modernism Week. According to Vossler Smith: "We aren't just looking at trends, we are examining what role midcentury modernism played in design and how it's informing current designers; we're looking at the future as well."



### THE LANDSCAPE PROGRAMMING AT MODERNISM WEEK

Though Modernism Week now has a very robust program of landscape-related lectures, tours, and other events, the landscape category did not always exist. According to William Kopelk, landscape architect as well as Modernism Week's Chairman: "It began with my suggesting and organizing and captaining the Modern Garden Tours probably ten years ago."<sup>1</sup> Kopelk, who got his BLA from the University of Oregon, later worked for Harvard University as their landscape architect and also served as the landscape architect for Walter Gropius' "The Architect's Collaborative." Because of this, he says it was, "ingrained in me early on how very vital and important landscape architecture and the outdoor environment is. The history of landscape design is as interesting and influential as architectural design."<sup>2</sup>

Kopelk called upon landscape designer Paul Ortega, who recalls, "ten years ago William Kopelk contacted me about adding a landscape tour as a part of Modernism Week. My role then, as a volunteer, was to produce our Modern Garden Tour. We held these several years, in the afternoon, and it was successful. Then, we decided to add a speaker the morning before the tour—the idea that people might come for the presentation and then enjoy the tour. The addition of a speaker to the tour was the start of the landscape program's expansion. We began getting feedback from our guests that they would like to see even more in terms of landscape and outdoor living programming. In the past four years, it has taken off, with a range of presentations and panels, exhibitions, and even a Saturday of one-on-one sessions with landscape designers. The Modern Garden Tour is still the crowning event, but now it's surrounded by about a dozen jewels every year."<sup>2</sup>



Ortega says that after Modernism Week is over, "... we contact our guests with a survey about their experiences and what they'd like to see. We receive continued support and enthusiasm for our landscape and outdoor living programming in these surveys, to the point now that landscape programming continues to rank in the top three topics of what people come for, and for what they want to see more of as well. Our tour always sells out, even as we continue to add more and more capacity. Our recent panel on *Sunset* magazine's impact on all aspects of modern design, including landscape, in the post-war period, was probably our most popular event that took place in a theater setting in 2020. At the same time, our Saturday of one-on-ones with landscape designers is also extremely popular."

Some other highlights of past years include a panel led by Charles Birnbaum, president and

CEO of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF), in conversation with landscape architects Cornelia Oberlander and Harriet Pattison, which took place in 2017. The following year, TCLF presented "The Landscape Architecture Legacy of Dan Kiley," a photography exhibition that celebrated the work of the artist.

### CGLHS AT MODERNISM WEEK

CGLHS members have participated at Modernism Week for the last several years. In 2018, CGLHS past president Kelly Comras, FASLA and the biographer of landscape architect Ruth Shellhorn, presented "Designing the Disneyland Landscape." Her lecture included a short film and rare photographs, which documented the creation of the landscape at Disneyland, which, besides Shellhorn, included the involvement of Jack and Bill Evans and architect Welton Beckett. Steven Keylon, CGLHS past president, and *Eden* editor presented his lecture from the 2017

Opposite: Book cover: *Robert Royston*, written by Reuben M. Rainey and JC Miller, the latest volume in the Library of American Landscape History's "Masters of Modern Landscape Design" series.

Above: Attendees gather in the circular-themed garden of the Hefferlin House, to hear the conversation with landscape architect JC Miller, and owner Brent Harris. Photo by Steven Keylon.



Above: Guests had ample time to explore the gardens. Photo by Steven Keylon.

Opposite, top: The site plan of both gardens was on display as guests entered. Photo by Steven Keylon

Opposite, bottom: Jonathan Lippincott, assistant director at LALH, Robin Karson, founder and executive director of LALH, and Kelly Comras enjoy the Royston gardens. Photo by Steven Keylon

CGLHS conference in Palm Springs, “Landscapes for Leisure,” wherein he discussed the landscapes designed for the Coachella Valley from the 1920s through the 1960s. In 2019, Keylon presented “The Glamorous Gardens of Tommy Tomson,” a subject he has written about for *Eden*. Comras participated in a panel discussion, “The Midcentury Modern Campus of UC Riverside” discussing the initial design of the campus, created by Fred Barlow, Jr., and the subsequent design by Ruth Shellhorn. Shellhorn served as the campus landscape architect at UC Riverside for many years.

In 2020, there were a variety of Modernism Week activities with the involvement of CGLHS members:

- Kelly Comras, FASLA, gave a lecture “Welton Becket & Ruth Shellhorn: The Commercial & Retail Projects.” Her talk explored

the collaboration of architect Welton Becket and landscape architect Ruth Shellhorn on fifteen projects that helped put post-war Los Angeles on the map. After the lecture, she signed copies of her book *Ruth Shellhorn*, published by the Library of American Landscape History (LALH).

- Steven Keylon participated in a panel discussion organized by the Pacific Horticultural Society titled “Desertscaping: Past, Present and the Future.” The panelists discussed climate-appropriate desert gardening, which, in the face of severe climate change, will become even more critical. Some of the benefits discussed were the retention of water during drought, habitat support for struggling migratory birds, and other benefits such as smart planting and soil management. The other panelists were Pamela Berstler, Executive Director of Pacific





Above: The circular landscape of the Hefferlin House is inspired by a painting by Wassily Kandinsky. Photo by Steven Keylon.

Opposite: Brent Harris and Kurt Royston, Robert Royston's son. Photo by Kelly Comras.

Horticulture Society, landscape designer Paul Ortega, and biologist Clayton Tschudy.

- Robin Karson, Honorary ASLA and founder and executive director of the Library of American Landscape History (LALH), lectured on landscape architect Lockwood de Forest Jr., calling him a “Santa Barbara Proto-Modernist.” Karson focused primarily on Lockwood de Forest Jr.’s c. 1926 design for his own house and garden in Santa Barbara.

- Jonathan D. Lippincott, LALH assistant director, presented “The American Garden at Midcentury,” which covered some of the important American landscape architects of the midcentury modern period, including Thomas Church, Garrett Eckbo and Dan Kiley.

- JC Miller, landscape architect and author of the new LALH book *Robert Royston*, presented a lecture about Royston’s landscape design, with an emphasis on his residential

projects. The final portion of Miller’s talk focused on Royston’s last commission, a series of gardens for the Palm Springs homes of CGLHS members and donors Brent R. Harris and Lisa Meulbroek. Miller discussed the experience of working directly with Royston on the design of the project, and his continued collaboration with the owners through the years as they finished the project.

One of the highlights of this year’s landscape programming followed Miller’s lecture. “Robert Royston in Palm Springs: A Book Signing and Tour of the Circle and Becket House Gardens” offered attendees a very rare visit to Royston’s final project, two contiguous gardens designed by Royston in 2007 and implemented at the direction of landscape architect and author JC Miller after Royston’s death in 2008. CGLHS members who received *View*, LALH’s annual journal, will recall the house featured prominently on its cover (with gorgeous photography by CGLHS member Millicent



Harvey). The garden is located on a one-acre site with two architecturally significant modern homes. The first, built in 1957, was designed by Welton Becket and Associates. A second larger house, known as the Hefferlin House for its first owners, was designed a few years later by San Diego architect Richard George Wheeler (with later additions by the architect Albert Frey). The event offered ample time to tour the gardens and linger on the many unique spaces carved out of the large site. Then, a conversation between JC Miller garden owner Brent Harris illuminated the fascinating years-long process to implement Royston’s final design. Guests received an advance copy of Miller’s book about Royston, and the author was around to sign books at the end of a beautiful evening.

#### THE FUTURE OF LANDSCAPE AT MODERNISM WEEK

According to Paul Ortega, “with this year’s

Modernism Week behind us, we are already planning for the coming year. Right now, we are looking for more new and interesting presenters and panelists. I strive to have a balance between topics related to the history of modern landscape design and its practitioners, those practicing today with an eye toward contemporary concepts, and on topics that appeal to a more do-it-yourself audience. I am also planning to include more about sustainable design and practices, a trend we see in our other parts of Modernism Week offerings, such as architecture and interior design. We would also like to increase our landscape tour offerings, perhaps outside of Palm Springs and on different days. The primary challenge is capacity, both in our theater setting, as well as finding appropriate garden locations with owners that are open to hosting large groups. But it is a challenge we are excited to meet.”



CALIFORNIA GARDEN  
& LANDSCAPE  
HISTORY SOCIETY

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Front Cover:  
Winter dramatic clouds and end of day  
light capture the beauty of an elder  
Smoke Tree in Araby Wash, Palm Springs.

Back Cover:  
Detail of a Smoke Tree in Bloom -  
Cathedral City Cove - Cathedral City.  
Photos by Millicent Harvey.