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Wealthy film star Harold Lloyd hired landscape architect A.E. Hanson to design the gardens of his 16-acre property in Benedict Canyon. No expense was spared in creating a grand Golden Age estate. Postcard from the author’s collection.

Above: Agapanthus bloom in a Thomas Church-designed
garden from 1956. Photo by Harley Jessup.
Architect Guy Lowell designed an unusual half-moon pool with Roman columns at Ca’ di Sopra, built in Montecito in 1916.
Part 2: Origins and Adaptations of the Italian Style in California

Introduction

This is the second part of an article exploring the origins and adaptations of the Italian landscape style in the United States. Part 1, published in the Spring 2020 issue of Eden, describes the long-term and wide influence of Italian Renaissance villa design, its early adaptation in England and the arrival and maturing of the Italian style in the United States. Leading scholarship on the British and American reception of Italian landscape design was reviewed and the earliest Italian gardens in the United States were identified.

Part 2 focuses the story on California, where the Italian style found a natural home. The terrain and growing conditions in some parts of the state could support its pure form. Italian design was introduced to California alongside an existing vernacular design tradition. By the time California became a state in 1850, three hundred years of Spanish and Mexican influence had been present. That heritage was largely undervalued in the earliest decades of statehood, but a late nineteenth-early twentieth century reassessment and romanticization brought the Spanish style to the fore in California. Interest in Old California and its cultural legacy burst forth at the same time that Charles A. Platt and other East Coast practitioners were successfully adapting the Italian style of estate-scale landscape design (along with its northern European Renaissance French and English counterparts) to the United States and propelling geometric neoclassical villa design toward its American zenith.

Californians were not design purists. Rather than being forced to a choose among appealing and appropriate styles, owners, and designers happily fused Italian, Spanish and Near Eastern design elements into the “Mediterranean style.” The Montecito home of James Waldron Gillespie, El Fureidis, designed by Bertram Goodhue and built in 1905-06, is identified as the first example of a Mediterranean-style estate in California. It features a mix of Italian, Persian and Spanish elements. Architectural historian David Gebhard suggests that even the Spanish Colonial Revival period of 1910 to 1930 “could be properly called Mediterranean” because architectural elements from different traditions were readily combined.”

Jere Stuart French diagrams Californias garden ancestry in his garden history, tracing two lines of descent. One begins in Mesopotamia, moving to Persia, then to Moorish-Spain, then to Old California. With origins in the modern Middle East, this tradition perceived the garden as an earthly paradise where greenery and precious water could be enjoyed within sheltering walls. Islamic colonists carried Persian garden influences to North Africa, and then to Spain which was occupied by the Moors from 711 until 1492. Moorish garden design was a high art reliant on Islamic symbolism and advanced water engineering. In the classic Moorish garden, geometric symmetry was achieved with a cruciform dividing the garden into four equal sections representing life, growth, death and rebirth. The Moorish-Spanish garden traditions that came to the Americas with the Spanish colonists evolved over more than 300 years into the gardens of Old California.

The second line of descent in French’s diagram is a simpler one, starting with the Visigoths and Romans and moving to the Italian Renaissance. The western Roman Empire, extending into Spain and Britain, declined under pressure from nomadic tribes. The Germanic Visigoths pressed in, eventually sacking Rome in 410. The cultural and artistic influence of classical antiquity was slowly arrested; the medieval Middle Ages began. Centuries later Italy became the center of a rebirth of classical culture and knowledge. Fully blossoming in the 1400s, this Renaissance influenced education, culture, art, architecture, economics and politics, leading Europe into the modern era. In Part 1 of this article, notable characteristics of the Italian Renaissance gardens are identified, including a wholeness in the composition of house and garden, a formal axial design, an emphasis on outdoor living, and moving water. In French’s “family tree” of garden lineage, the marriage of Old California and Italian Renaissance
influences produces the California garden. Yet, amidst the mix of design traditions and the domination of Mediterranean style, a few owners, architects, and landscape designers continued to look to the Italian Renaissance villa as a model for the ideal California home and garden. This article recounts the history of “California as the American Italy” and traces the Italian style into twentieth-century California.

California: Our Italy

When explorer John Charles Frémont (1813–1890), made an enthusiastic report to the United States Senate in 1848 on one of his expeditions to the American West, he drew analogies between the size, climate and topography of California and that of Italy. He is believed to have originated this comparison, having previously commented on the Mediterranean cast of the California mission gardens. Frémont went on to produce popular books on the American West and became an influential politician. In 1848, prior to statehood, he and his accomplished wife, Jesse, built one of the earliest Italian villa-style dwellings in California. The home was a rustic, Sierra gold-country construction, but it was artistically nestled into the contours of the Las Mariposas hills and surrounded by a protected formal garden created as one with the house. “In the design of his house and grounds,” a biographer observed, Jesse and John Frémont “sought to architecturally underscore John’s vision of California as a New World Mediterranean province.”

The similarities between Italy and California were reinforced throughout the nineteenth century. Historian Kevin Starr noted the influence of California’s immigrant Italian wine colonies, which added to an already strong Catholic presence, evoking in some minds an “ecclesiastical aspect” to California-as-Italy. After his American tour in 1882, Oscar Wilde brought an often-quoted comparison to his readers with the observation: “California is an Italy without its coastline or Apennine hill in sight.” Three increasingly important California observants was seemingly inexhaustible. Millions of homes were built and gardens made.

California's Mediterranean kinship in this 1895 promotional pamphlet. Courtesy San Diego Public Library.

In his social history of California architecture, Harold Krier describes how frontier California differed from the frontier lines emanating from the eastern United States. California was not colonized by the westward pressure of farmers and ranchers seeking new land. Rather, it was a coastal frontier, made important by the port of San Francisco, the

Italian Villas on the California Frontier

In his social history of California architecture, Harold Krier describes how frontier California differed from the frontier lines emanating from the eastern United States. California was not colonized by the westward pressure of farmers and ranchers seeking new land. Rather, it was a coastal frontier, made important by the port of San Francisco, the
China trade, and eventually the discovery of gold. California’s frontier also differed in its cultural and economic diversity. The cosmopolitan population of early statehood introduced almost every kind of design and building tradition with little or no attention to the existing Spanish and Mexican precedents. Moreover, construction in rapidly growing California achieved a level of sophistication surpassing that seen on the frontier lines east of the Rocky Mountains. Shortly after statehood in 1850, “Italianate” was the first of the imported styles to become noticeably more popular than others. California architects were partial to the Italian style largely because it was popular in the eastern United States and had won the approval of national tastemaker Andrew Jackson Downing.22

Not to be outdone, affluent East Coast entrepreneurs and acolyte of Downing, became a leading national tastemaker Andrew Jackson Downing. Completed in 1867-68, the splendor and opulent mansion and showplace garden. Over three years, the villa was expanded into an opulent mansion and showplace garden. Completed in 1867-68, the splendor and size of the Italianate Ralston Hall dazzled San Francisco high society and visitors like Mark Twain. Today the mansion is part of Notre Dame de Namur University. Not to be outdone, affluent East Coast banker and philanthropist Darius Ogden Mills purchased 1,500 acres on the peninsula and commissioned Henry W. Cleaveland to design what became the most elaborate county house in its cultural and economic diversity.22 The Millbrae Estate was completed in 1868. The 42-room house was surrounded by manicured gardens with a conservatory and three artificial lakes. The house was destroyed by fire in 1954, the San Francisco Airport stands on land that was once part of the estate.

Further south, on the San Francisco Peninsula, wealthy San Franciscans built lavish country houses, introducing the first large houses and their gardens as Italian Renaissance style would mandate, although at these large estates, a European formality was imposed on the landscape. From the 1870s, California gardens became more elaborate and the naturalistic garden style favored by the Arts and Crafts Movement vied with a growing interest in formalism. Knowledge and appreciation of California as a horticultural paradise also grew during this period as growers and gardeners experimented with an exception-ally wide variety of plants from around the world. Despite the limited water supply, this was the time when gardeners in largely frost-free Southern California developed a taste for exotic tropicaIs.

In Search of a California Style

Toward the end of the nineteenth century California architects began to reassess the use of popular imported styles. It was time, many believed, for California architecture to mature into a style that reflected regional, rather than alien traditions. When architects began looking closer to home for inspiration, they studied the oldest buildings to be found: the Spanish missions and Mexican adobes originally dismissed as primitive relics. Several cultural threads fed into this architectural reassessment. A few scholars were looking closer to home for inspiration, they studied the oldest buildings to be found: the Spanish missions and Mexican adobes originally dismissed as primitive relics. Several cultural threads fed into this architectural reassessment. A few scholars were looking closer to home for inspiration, they studied the oldest buildings to be found: the Spanish missions and Mexican adobes originally dismissed as primitive relics. Several cultural threads fed into this architectural reassessment. A few scholars were looking closer to home for inspiration, they studied the oldest buildings to be found: the Spanish missions and Mexican adobes originally dismissed as primitive relics.

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Mission Revival architecture, with its curvilinear parapets and deeply set window and door openings, began to appear in the mid-1880s. Names associated with early Mission Revival architecture include Arthur B. Benton, Irving Gill, Sumner Hunt, and Lester S. Moore.22 Hunt and Benton were both founding board members of Luminos’ Landmarks Club and Benton worked on stabilizing the mission buildings of San Diego and San
Juan Capistrano. In San Francisco, Willis Polk (architect of Filoli) ran long articles on the California missions in his short-lived 1890s publication Architectural News.38 The Mission Revival style came to national attention with the California Building at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, designed by San Francisco architect A. Page Brown (remembered today for the San Francisco Ferry Building).39 By 1903, Architect & Builders Magazine was able to run a long article on Mission Revival architecture with numerous photographs of representative buildings.40 The gradual embrace of California’s past in the last quarter of the nineteenth century heavily rested on a mythologized, rather than a factual, understanding of earlier times. However, the growing celebration of olden days brought design preferences to what historian David C. Streetfield identifies as a colonial settlement’s “regionalism” phase. In this phase, cultural choices shift to recapturing the local past and looking to design traditions of similar or analogous regions.41 Thus the early Mission Revival movement was soon enlarged to a broader exploration of the Native American and colonial architecture of New Mexico and Arizona, and later still, to a Spanish Colonial Revival style rich with Moorish influences.

The ripening of interest in Spanish-style variants received a mighty boost from the admiring reception of Bertram Goodhue’s 1915 Panama-California Exposition buildings. At the San Diego exposition, Spanish Colonial Revival was enhanced with Goodhue’s heavy flourish of plateresque and churrigueresque decoration. This adaptation propelled Spanish Colonial Revival to the forefront of popular taste, particularly in the architecture of the Southland.42 As Spanish style became prevalent in California, there was a strain of dissent, voices that did not accept the inevitable “rightness” of a California architecture inspired by Spanish colonial structures. This narrative championed the Italian style as more refined and fitting for California. As early as 1906 Herbert C. Croly, editor of the Architectural Record, argued that the Mission Style had failed. California needed a “single good and appropriate style,” he wrote, and that style should be associated with “the most complete embodiment of the classical spirit in domestic architecture,” that is, “the Italian villa and garden.” California’s opportunity to employ this superior architectural aesthetics was “rare and unique in the United States.”43 In 1910 journalist Horatio F. Stoll crankily editorialized that the Italian villa “was a welcome change from the Spanish patios, Persian gardens and Moorish courts that have been so extensively introduced in pretentious summer homes in California.”44 The observation was in an appreciative article about the Villa Pompeii built in Sonoma County in 1902.

Seeking inspiration for the design of a planned vacation home in Sonoma County, San Francisco financial virtuoso Andrea Sbarbaro (1839-1923) traveled back to his native Italy. While there, he visited Pompeii and was captivated by the recently excavated Casa dei Vettii, an elegant townhouse. He returned to California with drawings of the ancient villa. Architect Thomas John Welsh (1848-1918) was hired to translate the Casa dei Vettii into a Spanish Colonial villa.45 Horatio F. Stoll published an article in each journal, Roman Doric columns and a folly-like castle tower marked the entrance to the grounds of Villa Pompeii. A long drive, densely bordered with eucalyptus and acacia trees, led to a tropical setting near the house of palms, orange and olive trees and bamboo thickets with roses, heliotrope, and jasmine scenting the air. A large round fountain was centered at the front entrance to the villa. Upon stepping into the villa vestibule, Stoll described “an enchanting vision” that extended 70 feet into the planted and decorated peristyle and garden. A fountain played in this garden, and at the open end of the peristyle, two towering native oak trees, festooned with wild grapevines, were silhouetted against the sky.

The villa was at Asti, the community established by Andrea Sbarbaro in Sonoma’s Alexander Valley in 1881. Asti was home to his Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony, a cooperative wine-making business intended to provide employment and an economic stake for recent immigrants to the San Francisco area. The winemaking operation developed into a picturesque showplace that, along with the Villa Pompeii, attracted throngs of visitors. Now owned by a large winery, the villa has been incorporated into the city of Cloverdale. "Asti Villa Pompeii" was designated a Sonoma County Historic Landmark in 2004.46 While not very well known, Villa Pompeii proved to be a significant watershed in the history of the Italian style in California. It was a break from Italianate as a default architectural fashion. It marked a return to first cases. It was followed in the first two decades
Finding Italian Style Landscapes (Not Spanish, Not Mediterranean)

When historian Richard G. Kenworthy wanted to understand the chronological span of Italian influence on American gardens, he undertook a state-by-state survey to learn where and when Italian gardens of consequence had been built. In deciding which landscapes to include as Italianate, he researched whether a garden was directly described as being in the Italian taste or otherwise clearly identified with Italy. Gardens thought to have some Italian features were excluded from Kenworthy’s survey (1) if the garden was perceived by its owners or creators as belonging to another tradition; or (2) if the garden was described as being of the nebulous ‘Mediterranean.’

While fully acknowledging the hazards of this research model, Kenworthy’s documentation is impressive and useful. Under his strict criteria, just twenty California landscape designs made his list. With the long dominance of the Italian style in mind, this may look like an undercount. However, Kenworthy’s statistic is less suspect when his exclusion of Mediterranean landscapes is considered. As earlier discussed, Californians have long embraced an eclectic design blend in their homes and gardens. Not too many residential landscapes are created with adherence to the prescribed principles of a single landscape tradition.

With Kenworthy’s list as a guide, this article concludes by following the influence of the Italian Renaissance villa into seven individual California gardens (one is an addition to Kenworthy’s survey). These gardens are attributed to the most prominent creators of Italian-influenced American landscape design.

Opposite: Charles Greene’s inspiration for the Roman Pool at “Green Gables,” the San Francisco Peninsula estate of Mortimer Fleishhacker, Sr., was the Tivoli villa of Hadrian. Photo from the Historic American Buildings Survey, courtesy Library of Congress.

Italian gardens in California. They were architects and landscape designers working in a tradition extending back hundreds of years. They honored the weighty principles of Italian design with varying degrees of fidelity. Some had visited Italy; others had never seen an authentic Italian garden. Some had studied the Renaissance villa in college courses, others lacked any formal education in landscape history. Some were conversant with the clarifying work of Charles A. Platt in his American adaptation of the Italian style, others may not have heard of him. Despite the different starting points, the six remarkable practitioners of the landscape art discussed below produced gardens respectful of one of the world’s greatest design traditions and they created gardens entirely appropriate to California.

The Greens designed II Paradiso, the Cordelia A. Culbertson House in Pasadena’s Oak Knoll district, as a home for three unmarried sisters. With its injection of Chinese flavor, the house remains famous as a recognized departure in style for Greene & Greene. The house was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

Along with the house, an elaborate Italian garden was created for the Culbertsons. The best description appeared in 1919, after the property had passed to new owners. On the building site, land drops away behind the house. “Very much in the Renaissance villa tradition, the Greens made this awkward space useful by terracing the garden into distinct and usable levels. The Upper Garden near the house was gently terraced and had axially designed formal gardens with box hedging, rose beds and a pergola supporting climbing roses. The Middle Terrace was kept relatively simple. The Lower Garden was a showy area with a large round pool, statuary, an inviting poolside loggia, and lush plantings more characteristic of California than Italy. A long stairway, entered through a vine-covered arch, connected all garden levels. Italian cypress trees lined the stairway from the Middle Terrace to the Lower Garden, and other large trees were present, some native to the site. This Italian garden, said one chronicler, exhibits the dignity and grace of Old World villas.

The Culbertson garden was razed in the 1960s.

II Paradiso, Cordelia A. Culbertson House, Greene & Greene, Pasadena 1911

Gamble House, the celebrated Arts and Crafts building in Pasadena, is the work most closely associated with the architectural firm of Greene & Greene. But Charles and Henry Greene also did notable landscape work in and around their major commissions. Two of their most important Italian-influenced projects, II Paradiso and “Green Gables,” were initiated in 1911.

Charles Greene was commissioned in 1911 by banker and businessman Mortimer Fleishhacker, Sr. to design a house and garden near Woodside, south of San Francisco. Work on the 7.5-acre Green Gable estate continued over many years. It was the largest project completed by Greene & Greene.

The Fleishhackers wanted and got an English-inspired country house, but the over-all project and some specific features make Green Gables one of Northern California’s most important Italian-influenced designs. It reflects the Italian Renaissance lessons of unity in the design of home and garden, and it stands in a harmonious relationship with the natural site. Italian antecedents are most noticeably seen in the terraced lawn in front of the house and, on a lower level, in the design of a large Roman pool inspired by Hadrian’s Trevi pool. The pool is reached via symmetrical double staircases and wrapped at one end with a tall, arched hemicycle recalling the appearance of a Roman aqueduct.

The several formal gardens near the house have been maintained along with the natural woodlands and old-growth trees. Towering redwoods, blue spruce, Monterey pines, Atlas cedars, oaks, and eucalyptus are in the mix. East of the house, on a lower terrace, a brick walkway passes through an alley of Camperdown elm trees, an uncommon draping elm with decorative bark and artistically contorted branches. The estate has natural springs and a large reservoir for irrigation.

The collaboration of owner, designer, and garden theory is praised by landscape historian David C. Sneathfield in “Echoes of England and Italy . Green Gables and Charles Greene.” Further analysis of the design process—as the estate was built out over a number of years— is provided by Anne Bloomfield based on her study of the original documents used to prepare a nomination of Green Gables as a historic site.

Green Gables was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. The Garden Conservancy was granted a conservation easement at Green Gables in 2004. This property has remained intact and in the private ownership of the Fleishhacker family since 1911. News sources began in 2018 to report a possible sale of the property.

"Green Gables,” Greene & Greene, San Francisco Peninsula, 1911

"Ca’ di Sopra “House Above the Clouds,” Guy Lowell, Montecito, 1916

Success in the manufacturing of heavy machinery allowed Robert G. McGann and his wife Grace to retire to a seasonal life divided between Southern California and Lake Forest, Illinois. After first leasing a winter home, the McGanns purchased a property near Woodside and began building their sea view home, "Ca’ di Sopra" in 1916-17. The exceptional part of this story is their choice of architect.

Guy Lowell (1870-1927) was engaged for his first and only West Coast commission. By any measure, Lowell’s credentials were superior. His brick Boston architectural practice included high-end residential work, but he was best known for large business and civic buildings. He designed the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the New York State Supreme Court building. More than a busy architect, Lowell also had extensive training as a landscape architect and was an academic. He founded the MIT landscape architectural program and directed it from 1900 until 1910.

Italian architecture and landscapes were Lowell’s special interests. In 1902 he published American Gardens, one of the earliest efforts to capture garden history in the United States. He explored the rising popularity of formalism in American landscape design, with particular attention to the projects of Charles A. Platt, a recognized interpreter of the Italian style. Lowell spent a great deal of time in Italy and published two books on Italian villas in 1916.

Their two most notable Italian-inspired projects in the United States shared Guy Lowell’s nuanced understanding of Italian villa architecture and
Lowell designed a striking Tuscan-style villa with rooms surrounding an inner atrium. The house was set at the high point of a lot with an unusual half-moon pool framed by the available space, but Lowell designed the adaptation of the Italian style to America.

The McGanns lived quietly in their Montecito home. Grace McGann died in March 1940 and Robert followed her in death four years later. The estate has changed hands several times and has been altered. One owner installed a funicular between the house and the lower garden. A 2006 renovation reportedly was undertaken with attention to Guy Lowell’s original intentions.

Il Brolino, Florence Yoch and Lucile Council, Montecito, 1922

Not pigeonholed as an Italian landscape designer, Florence Yoch did occasionally work in the Italian style and her gardens usually contained an underpinning of classical formality; relieved by exuberant use of plants. She “painted formal elements with unbridled nature.” Her outstanding contribution to the Italian canon was Il Brolino, the Montecito home of Mary E. Stewart. Stewart was the daughter of a Wisconsin lumber baron who had served in the United States Congress. She purchased property in Montecito after a brief marriage ended. Retaining an existing stone cottage as an art studio, Stewart hired architect George Washington Smith to design a Tuscan-inspired villa and commissioned the firm of Yoch and Council to landscape six acres of the grounds.

Yoch worked with the architect on the overall plan and included in the landscape design separate garden rooms and many standard features of the Italian Renaissance villa (rosary, citrus in pots, parterres with elaborate box hedge designs, a bosco, secret garden, pergola, sunken garden, loggia and rose garden). A fountain was directly inspired by one at Rome’s Villa Medici. Great care was taken to create a landscape that framed the monumental views from Il Brolino.

Florencce Yoch (1890-1972) lived in California from a young age. She was born into comfortable circumstances and within a family that valued education. The youngest of five girls, she followed her older sisters in pursuing a college degree. She enrolled in landscape architecture studies at UC Berkeley, transferred to Cornell, and eventually earned a degree at the University of Illinois in 1915. She was intelligent and discerning, and her early travels inspired a lifetime admiration of the Italian villa.

Upon returning to Southern California after college, she began to take on landscape design projects through family contacts, eventually opening an office in 1918. Three years later she brought in an apprentice, Lucile Council (1898-1964), who had studied at the Cambridge School of Domestic and Landscape Architecture in Massachusetts. They formed a lifetime professional partnership and, in 1923, formalized a landscape architecture business partnership. Yoch was the primary designer while Council contributed her knowledge of plants and managed the business.

Yoch and Council worked chiefly on residential projects, but their hundreds of jobs also included public parks and college grounds. They worked primarily in Pasadena and in greater Los Angeles and Santa Barbara until 1968 when they relocated and worked in the Carmel-Monterey area.

Yoch’s other Italian design work includes the Italian Roof Garden on the Los Angeles Athletic Club and a Roman garden on a rocky hillside for pioneer woman film director and prominent lesbian Dorothy Arzner. Delighted by her garden, Arzner introduced Yoch to Hollywood film moguls who were building large estates. Yoch’s garden for George Caloer was described as a “voluptuous Pompeian setting” with evocations of classical antiquity. Jack Warner and David O. Selznick also became clients. These connections led to a lucrative sub-specialty: Yoch designed and supervised construction of sets for five films, including Gone with the Wind, The Good Earth and Romeo and Juliet, the latter calling on her knowledge of Italian Renaissance style. Some of these Hollywood projects stretched well into the 1930s, sustaining the Great Depression economic downturn that stunted many other landscape practices.

Yoch found inspiration in the works of English Arts and Crafts garden writer Gertrude Jekyll and Edith Wharton’s Italian Villas and Their Gardens was a favorite reference. Travel was a respite and an inspiration. Yoch and Council toured the Mediterranean, North Africa and Mexico and tried to visit Europe annually. New sights and new gardens were recorded in notebooks and photographs, refreshing the store of ideas that kept Yoch and Council in demand for decades.

“Westwood,” the John L. Severance Estate, Paul G. Thiene, Pasadena, 1922

John L. Severance was born to wealth and added to his fortune with his own canny business ventures. He and his wife were leading art and music philanthropists in Cleveland. When the couple decided to build a winter home in California, they purchased land in Pasadena and hired a newly fashionable design pairing: the architecture firm of John, Kaufmann and Coate with landscape architect Paul Thiene.

Early approaches to the Severance project won praise in The Building Review. Unlike “the old custom of leveling a plot, cutting down all existing trees and plants and beginning with a bald bare house,” the design team worked to preserve existing features of the site. In a then uncommon arrangement, landscape architect Paul Thiene was brought into the project at the beginning to work with the architects on a site plan that salvaged existing plantings and old-growth trees. This approach added to the challenge of imposing an orderly and formal design onto the final plan for the estate, but, fittingly or not, conformed to the design lessons of the Italian Renaissance villa.

Paul Thiene (1880-1971) appears on every list of leading California interpreters of the Italian style. At the Severance Estate he created elaborate design features ranging from a highly formal rectangular pool with twin pergolas and sturdy Roman columns to an inviting, fern-laden woodland pond fed by a cascading stream. The house and formal gardens stood in a strong axial “L” shape with the house on the shorter axis. A long panel of lawn extended from the house and was planted on each side with a deep border and lined with clipped hedges. The cross axis extended down the longest side of the “L.”
was a series of lavishly planted formal gardens terraced down to a pool pavilion at the butt end, a feature inspired by the Pazzi Chapel in Florence. Garden art and careful stonework enhanced the formal areas, with paved walkways giving way to winding paths through an old live oak forest. Azaleas, tree fern, cycads, and other underplanting, particularly around the woodland pond, added color and texture and other underplanting, particularly around the woodland pond, added color and texture to the landscape. **Paul Thiene won a Southern California architectural award for his work on the Severance estate, and he published a series of lavishly planted formal gardens in Montecito to existing large trees and terraced levels. Photo from Landscaping the American Dream by James J. Yoch.**

The former Severance estate has retained a large footprint and a dense grove of trees. A replacement house was apparently erected a large footprint and a dense grove of trees. A replacement house was apparently erected during the early 1920s. The Harvey Mudd estate has changed hands many times and gained fame through its association with some famous owners, including a Rothschild and actor-director Martin Landau. The houses of the original garden are preserved, but some decorative alterations have been made. **Canadian-born Edward Huntsman-Trout (1889-1974)** had substantial experience in landscaping the American Dream. By 1910 he was designing gardens for the Los Angeles Balboa Park exposition grounds was a triumphant—the “Garden Fair” was celebrated for its beautiful landscaping. Two people Thiene met in San Diego aided his post-exposition transition to private practice. He partnered with Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr. (an Olmsted employee who also worked at the expositions chief architect Bertram Goodhue. In 1915 Wright’s famous name helped the new firm attract clients. A separate boost came from the exposition’s chief architect Bertram Goodhue. His new firm had offices in Los Angeles and Goodhue was designing for Herbert Coppell. After an amicable parting with Wright, Thiene moved his practice to Pasadena. He worked with most of the leading architects of the period and made a great success of his business during the golden age of estate building. When commissions dried up after the 1929 financial collapse, Thiene settled into a comfortable retirement.

The Harvey Mudd estate is considered Huntsman-Trout’s finest residential garden of the 1920s. He created an elaborate series of formal gardens on the steep slopes of the site, tying them together with the Renaissance villa device of decorative flights of stairs. Huntsman-Trout’s skill with retaining walls was particularly on in the design site and the walls built at the Mudd garden show "consummate craftsmanship." One area of the garden emphasized the Italian ethic with a balustraded terrace, urns, and topiary Pools, sculpture, brick paving, and geometrically clipped hedges add to the effect. The Harvey Mudd estate has changed hands many times and gained fame through its association with some famous owners, including a Rothschild and actor-director Martin Landau. The houses of the original garden are preserved, but some decorative alterations have been made.

Huntsman-Trout re-landscaped Pershing Square immediately after attending the University of California, Berkeley. He did not complete a Harvard degree, reportedly because he was dissatisfied with the program’s emphasis on the English landscape gardening style. His first professional work was in 1916 at the Boston offices of Fletcher Steele. He then worked with A.D. Taylor in Cleveland until moving to Los Angeles in the early 1920s. First employed by the Rodeo Land and Water Company and in designing gardens for the Beverly Hills Nursery, he established a private landscape practice in 1923. In addition to residential gardens, Huntsman-Trout re-landscaped Pershing Square in Los Angeles, worked on the design of the upscale Lafayette Park neighborhood, and contributed several designs to the Los Angeles
County Arboretum & Botanic Garden. His most highly regarded work is his collaboration with architect Gordon Kaufmann on the campus of Scripps College in Claremont, completed between 1927 and 1939. He was credited with achieving a “tremendous result” with a strongly unified design that used “a variety of material and spaces that are pleasing and exciting to walk through.” The Scripps College campus is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a uniquely Southern Californian historic landscape.

“Greenacres,” Harold Lloyd Estate, A.E. Hanson, Beverly Hills 1925-1929

California native A.E. Hanson (1893-1986) grew up in a family nursery business at Chino. Leaving high school after two years, he found work with a Canadian property developer through a family connection. Hanson hired on at the Theodore Payne nursery in Los Angeles after returning to California. During 1915 he visited the two California expositions mounted to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. The showy displays of San Francisco’s “landscape magician” John McLaren and San Diego’s “Garden Fair” gave him a new appreciation of landscape architecture. He secured an apprenticeship in the office of landscape architect Paul J. Howard.

Army service during the First World War took Hanson to France where he was able to follow the advice of Theodore Payne to visit Versailles and other classical gardens. Once back in California, Hanson felt ready to strike out on his own as a landscape architect. He started with small design-build work and developed an ability to quickly size up jobs and interact smoothly with clients. He knew plants and could expertly evaluate new species and imports for their usefulness in the California garden.

By 1925 Hanson was securing the substantial and lucrative commissions for which he is best known. Although Hanson was called a “natural designer,” by one observer, his employee Geraldine Knight Scott, who had recently earned a degree in landscape architecture, saw it differently. “I soon learned that A.E. Hanson was no designer,” she said. “He had never had any design training at all, but he was a super businessman and super promoter. He landed most of the big landscape jobs and had his own construction company.” Scott attributed the design work in A.E. Hanson’s office to the brilliant Lee Rombotis.

In 1927 Hanson returned to Europe for a careful look at the gardens of Spain and Italy. He thought the gardens of Andalusia were good models for Southern California. Yet he was entranced by the gardens of Italy. Although perhaps not totally “converted” to the Italian style, as one author suggests, he created celebrated Italian gardens and fused Italian influences into others.

Hanson’s European trip occurred during work on his largest undertaking. In the 1920s silent film comedian Harold Lloyd acquired 16 acres in Benedict Canyon and engaged Hanson to create one of the most elaborate gardens of the time. The project began in 1925 and generated a torrent of free publicity for Hanson. One full page article with Hanson’s photograph imposed over the plot plan read: “Gorgeous Fairyland Playground Being Created by Landscape Architect for Harold Lloyd. . . Will Be Modern Eden of Groves and Gardens.”

The Lloyd property had a challenging change of elevation, leading inevitably to the placement of the house, designed by architect Sumner Spaulding (of Webber, Staunton, and Opposite, top: Paul Thiene’s long lawn at the John L. Severance Estate in Pasadena led to a series of landscaped terraces stepping down to a Roman pool. Photo from California Gardens, 1931.

Opposite, bottom left and right: On the John L. Severance estates, a series of terraces led to a pool with rose-entwined matching pergolas at each side. Photo from California Gardens, 1931.

Above: At the John L. Severance Estate, amid a grove of old oak trees, Paul G. Thiene created a woodland pond with cascading stream and surrounded it with a rich variety of plants. Photo from California Gardens, 1931.
Spaulding), on the crest of the hill and the need for a landscape design that connected the house to the rest of the estate. Seven formal gardens of different designs surrounded the house and gardens, more examples of the style, and gardens, more notable landscape architects who were inspired by Italian design. More than can be included in a contribution to this issue. There is a rich and evolving literature available to readers who want to delve deeper into the Italian style and its California interpretations. An annotated bibliography of sources has been made available on the CalGOH website.

End Notes
2. The influence and work of Charles A. Plan (1801-1913) is described in Part 1 of this article. He published the first English language book on Italian gardens in 1848 and his work was successful in adapting the principles of Italian garden design to homes and gardens in the United States.
4. The line of influence of the Italian, Italian and Oriental design.
5. More than 200 species found west of the Rocky Mountains are named ‘tuscania’ or ‘petrini’ in his honor and are currently in cultivation. Additional notes and descriptions of species and named isolates throughout the country compiled by the San Diego Chapter of the American Society for the Cultivation of Plants.’
6. The San Diego Facades Committee has been important in connecting the porch and the exterior of the house through the facades committee.
7. John Charles Fremont remodeled Old California in his weekly newspaper ‘The Spirit of the Times’ (1857) and ‘The Golden Age of Alta California.’
8. The Bowers Museum is located at 2001 E. James Ford Road, Santa Ana, CA 92701. Additional information about the museum can be found at https://www.bowers.org/en.
10. ‘Parempatas’ in the 2018 CC/CHS conference video was by the Bicentennial Museum on the Bicentennial Museum: HBO No. 1717. [1717]. HBO’s Bicentennial Guide to the United States, 1776-1876. Additional information about this project can be found at https://www.bicentennialmuseum.com.
12. Bowers Hall had 50,000 square feet of living space and was four stories high. National Historic Landscape designation for Bowers Hall was listed as one of the 20 low-mass examples of a mid-19th century Italian Victorian Villa, accessed May 3, 2020. https://www.ccdc.ca/ site-content/cultural-landscape-design/utah-collections/bowers.).
designed the first phase of the Mussolini Inn. Riverside, Gifford’s spacious apartments were first seen in San Diego. There was one of the architects for the Museum, and Moore is credited with promoting the Mission Revival style. He has been described in the context of a significant influence from Spanish Colonial architecture.

In addition to the gardens described below, Remenar quotes that Italian gardens and landscapes include Beverly Hills, which was planned by Paul Thiene (author of “The Building of the House” in California Garden as a Regional Expression.”

Through a long history of plant introduction, the native species of the American West have been influenced by a variety of European and Asian gardens. As the gardens of “Greenacres,” and the main residence of Captain John Slater House in Berkeley are extant. Thomas John Welsh (1848-1918) (Author’s file of information provided by Sonoma State University Library.) Croly (1869-1930) was a New York journalist who was not an introduction of the Spanish Colonial style. The position was not an introduction of the Spanish Colonial style. The position was not an introduction of the Spanish Colonial style.

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Though he is mostly forgotten today, landscape architect Arthur G. Barton was a renowned and respected professional in his field during his lifetime. Working on over 2,000 projects throughout his long career, Barton also helped develop the first licensure process for landscape architects, succeeding in 1953. The Arthur G. Barton Papers are housed at the Special Collections and Archives department at Robert E. Kennedy Library, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo [SLO]. The collection consists of forty-two boxes, 262 flat files, nineteen tubes, and 500 rolls, and spans approximately 850 linear feet. The archive was donated by Lucile Barton and Larry G. Tison & Associates in 1982 and 1984. Though it was largely unprocessed until recently, Arthur G. Barton’s portfolio is the most extensive collection of landscape architecture at Cal Poly SLO.

I was first introduced to Arthur G. Barton’s collection while working as a student assistant for the Special Collections and Archives department. As an environmental management major, I was intrigued by the idea of using geographic information systems as a spatial database for historical data. With an interest in landscape architecture and planning, I was immediately drawn to the architectural collections in the archives.

Cal Poly SLO’s College of Architecture and Environmental Design (CAED) consistently ranks as one of the top environmental design programs in the United States. In support of this program, Special Collections and Archives holds many collections related to the built environment and landscape of California, as well as a collection of books on the history of architecture and landscape architecture, design, and city and regional planning. Students from the College of Architecture frequently utilize the archives for their classes and research projects. Prominent collections include those of architects Julia Morgan, William F. Cody, and Mark Mills. Laura Sorvetti, Reference and Instruction Specialist, writes, “CAED students often study the drawings of Morgan, Cody, and Mills, who have beautifully drawn, exquisite plans. Students are struck by the detail and artistry of the hand-drawn drawings. The students are often inspired...
by their artistry and detail, because in their classes they learn digital tools and do not have many opportunities to practice drawing by hand." Cal Poly SLO's Special Collections and Archives is best known for its extensive collection of Julia Morgan's work, including photographs, drawings, sketches, and ephemera donated by Morgan's heirs, clients, and colleagues. A portion of the collection focuses on the design and development of Hearst Castle, which is located just thirty miles north of the campus. This valuable collection is a focal point of architectural research on the Central Coast and served as a catalyst for my own research into California architects.

As a student assistant, I often work with the architectural collections before and after they are processed. I prepare requested materials for students and researchers, replace drawings after they've been digitized, transcribe notes and relevant text to be uploaded with the images into the Online Archive, and ensure that all the documents belonging to a specific person or collection are searchable in the Online Archive. Along with architecture and landscape architecture collections, the Special Collections and Archives specializes in local and California family and organization's collections and artists' books. A majority of collections in Special Collections and Archives were donated by Morgan's heirs, clients, and colleagues. A portion of the collection is a focal point of architectural research on the Central Coast.

A few months after the digital story map represented Dodger Stadium, the department's oversized materials, including photographs, drawings, sketches, and master planting plans, currently an inventory to Barton's drawings, and materials. The Barton Papers are considered a "partially processed" collection. There is currently an inventory to Barton's drawings, and a general inventory to the forty-two boxes of additional materials, such as correspondence and photographs. A future project will be to create a folder-level inventory of the boxes of materials. Processing archivist Berlin Loa created an inventory of all the available drawings, which I was able to access while developing the project.

The department's oversized materials, which include architectural plans, currently cannot be digitized using in-house scanning equipment, so Special Collections works with a local photographer to make high-resolution scans of each document. Scans can be made at the request of researchers who wish to obtain a copy of the work. Other times, library funds allow the archives staff to select materials to digitize, which was the case with the Barton Papers.

Despite being an influential landscape architect in Southern California and proponent of the landscape architect licensure process in California, relatively little is known about Arthur G. Barton. I came across his work while organizing flat files in the archives and was struck by how fervently he must have been working during the height of his career. My estimate is that Barton designed landscapes for approximately twenty churches; twenty-four parks, ninety-five schools, 110 commercial buildings, and over 400 residences. I even saw a preliminary design of Dodger Stadium. Yet he had virtually no online record—no newspaper clipping, no announcements, no notice of awards, not even an obituary. I did not find a single photograph of him until a month later when I looked through several boxes in his collection. However, seeing Barton's work convinced me that his was a story worth telling. By creating a digital map and story using geographic information systems (GIS) to visually represent Barton's body of work, I have made it more accessible to students and researchers who may also be curious about his designs and their scope. I color-coded each project to represent his work on schools, parks, commercial buildings, churches, and residences. When viewing the map, it's easy to see that a majority of Barton's projects are concentrated in Los Angeles County, which isn't surprising (his office was located in Glendale); what is notable is the proximity of each project to the other. Many are within a block of each other, and there are a handful of streets with multiple Barton designs. Arthur Barton designed the landscapes for ten residences along West Kenneth Road in Glendale between 1940 and 1977. One may speculate that it was Barton's reputation that earned him business in the area.

A few months after the digital story map was published, I was contacted by Steven Keylon, editor of *Eden*, and asked if I would be interested in expanding the article for *Eden*. Keylon, editor of *Eden*, and asked if I would be interested in expanding the article for *Eden*.

**THE IDEA**

Despite being an influential landscape architect in Southern California and proponent of the landscape architect licensure process in California, relatively little is known about Arthur G. Barton. I came across his work while organizing flat files in the archives and was struck by how fervently he must have been working during the height of his career. My estimate is that Barton designed landscapes for approximately twenty churches; twenty-four parks, ninety-five schools, 110 commercial buildings, and over 400 residences. I even saw a preliminary design of Dodger Stadium. Yet he had virtually no online record—no newspaper clipping, no announcements, no notice of awards, not even an obituary. I did not find a single photograph of him until a month later when I looked through several boxes in his collection. However, seeing Barton's work convinced me that his was a story worth telling. By creating a digital map and story using geographic information systems (GIS) to visually represent Barton's body of work, I have made it more accessible to students and researchers who may also be curious about his designs and their scope. I color-coded each project to represent his work on schools, parks, commercial buildings, churches, and residences. When viewing the map, it's easy to see that a majority of Barton's projects are concentrated in Los Angeles County, which isn't surprising (his office was located in Glendale); what is notable is the proximity of each project to the other. Many are within a block of each other, and there are a handful of streets with multiple Barton designs. Arthur Barton designed the landscapes for eleven residences along West Kenneth Road in Glendale between 1940 and 1977. One may speculate that it was Barton's reputation that earned him business in the area.

A few months after the digital story map was published, I was contacted by Steven Keylon, editor of *Eden*, and asked if I would be interested in expanding the article for *Eden*. Steven had written about the construction of Dodger Stadium in a 2014 edition of *Eden,* which discussed Barton and his relatively short-lived role as landscape architect for the design team. Steven's article gave me insight into the trajectory of Barton's career in the 1960s and helped with identifying key features of his design style. Having influenced by an early experience with a California nursery, Barton used primarily native and drought-resistant vegetation in his designs.
Payne was among the first horticulturalists to develop private, native plant gardens in southern California. During the Great Depression, Barton worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps as an environmental planner for the National Park Service at the San Francisco office. He later served as Assistant Superintendent of Parks for Los Angeles County. Besides Dodger Stadium, Barton’s most famous projects include the East Wing of the California State Capitol, Camp Pendleton, and the campus at the University of Southern California (USC). Throughout his career, he was known as a versatile and respected member of the profession.

Barton opened a private practice in Glendale in 1940, but was forced to put the company on hold two years later to serve in World War II, first, in the Camouflage Division of the War Department (1942) and later as a Farm Advisor for the County of Los Angeles (1943-46). He resumed the practice in 1946, designing landscapes for residences, parks, public buildings, libraries, schools, and corporate campuses, primarily in the greater Los Angeles area.

**Licensure Process**

Barton worked hard to establish a licensure process for landscape architects in California. In the early 1950s, Barton, along with fellow landscape architects Raymond Page, Harry Sheppard, Lynn Harris, and George Huntington raised money to begin the licensure process. At this time, few took the practice of landscape architecture seriously. In 1953, the Bill for Professional Registration of Landscape Architects was enacted. Barton himself earned license number #362 one year later.

Barton continued to have strong professional and civic engagement even after the licensure process was complete. He was an active member of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), serving as the president of the Southern California Chapter of ASLA as well as a Trustee and Vice President for the National ASLA from 1955 to 1959. During his term, he met Gilmore D. Clarke, a fellow landscape architect who would one day recommend Barton for one of the most prestigious projects of his career.

**Dodger Stadium**

In 1959, he was offered the job of landscape architect for Dodger Stadium. His original vision for the stadium was soon extended into a 5-year general plan, following the changes of the seasons. Drawing from his experience with Theodore Payne, Barton was determined to incorporate various native and non-native plants into his design. He envisioned something that was not only an icon of Los Angeles but also an homage to the natural landscape of California. His work stalled, however, due to poor weather conditions, and Barton and his team still were still feverishly planting trees in the days leading up to the grand opening of the stadium. Walter O’Malley soon grew impatient with Barton’s progress, and after two years, Barton was fired from the project.

**Later Years**

Later in his career, Barton was honored with the fellowship award by the
American Society of Landscape Architects in three categories - "excellence in executed works of Landscape Architecture," "direct Service to the Society," and "contributions in the field of education."

In 1938, Barton designed the landscape for the Glendale Municipal County building along with renowned architect Arthur Wolfe. The pair would continue to work on municipal projects together, including the Superior Court of Los Angeles in 1959, and the redesign of Maple Park in 1967. Barton founded Arthur G. Barton & Associates in Glendale in 1963. His primary partners were Tracy Abel (F.A.S.L.A., Harvard, License #71) and Peter Weisbrod (Cal Poly, License #1252). Their work included projects in Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada. Barton worked on projects for notable clientele, which included composer Henry Mancini, the Ambassador Hotel, Boys Scouts and Girls Scouts of America, and the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission in Los Alamos, New Mexico. He designed for over eighty schools in the Greater Los Angeles area, including Pasadena high school, as well as sixteen parks, and twelve churches.

He wrote several pieces for Landscape Architecture Magazine that focused on development in residential and industrial settings. Barton emphasized inclusion of the landscape design in master site plans from the beginning of any design and vouched for the necessity of landscaping budgets to be protected independently of general project funds. Arthur Gibson Barton died January 28, 1980, in Los Angeles, after almost 50 years of work. A prolific and respected member of the profession, his contributions helped shape and define the role of the landscape architect in California.

The archivists and I in Special Collections have started to process through the rest of his collection. When researchers request access to the collection, our archivists work with them to identify a selection of boxes, folders, or drawings to examine during their visit. I hope that this project illustrates his story and allows his work to be accessible to those interested in learning more about his life and achievements. Barton's story may change as we uncover more about his life and achievements, but no longer is he a long lost landscape architect.

About the author:
Ella is currently a senior at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, earning a bachelor of science in environmental management and protection with a minor in ethics and public policy. She has worked with Cal Poly's Special Collections for over a year and is passionate about writing and conducting research in architecture, planning, and policy design.

SOURCES:
INTRODUCTION
Landscape architect Mabel Symmes (1875-1962) was forty-seven years old when she prepared her first known design in 1922. The project was for the adjoining Blake estates in Kensington, California, and covered twenty-two difficult acres. Although she had taken classes at the University of California in 1914, our knowledge of her design training is thin. Professional designers rarely emerge so rapidly, with so little preparation. How was she able to suddenly prepare plans for this hilly and complex property?

Symmes was also a rare female landscape architect practicing in the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1920s and 1930s. Consistent with many other women designers of the period, Symmes did not promote her work. She was described as a modest and quiet person by various people in the Blake Estate Oral History Project, as well as in condolence notes her sister Anita Blake received after Symmes’ death in 1962. Women landscape architects and designers often practiced with no much notice, and this would have been particularly true for self-effacing women like Mabel.

She went on to work with prominent San Francisco Bay Area architects, but details of her life and work have remained obscure, and she has been underestimated for decades. Only a handful of her gardens have come to light, and all are residential. Most of her papers and drawings were destroyed after her death, and we know little about Symmes’ skills.

Symmes employed landscape design ideas of the time, but also created a new expression of design, particularly for self-effacing women like Mabel. As a young lady in society, Symmes was described as a modest and quiet person by various people in the Blake Estate Oral History Project. In her sorority, the University of California in 1896. Both Mabel and her older sister, Anita, were members of Kappa Alpha Theta. In her sorority photo, a pretty and slight young Mabel directly faces the camera while a young Julia Morgan sits behind her (To date, no evidence has surfaced about an ongoing relationship between Symmes and Morgan.) The Symmes sisters were members of the Czada Club while in college, with Mabel strumming on the mandolin and Anita playing guitar. Music remained an interest, and Symmes played in concerts in the 1910s.

Following her undergraduate career, Symmes’ name appeared regularly in the society pages, which reported on the various events and activities one would expect involving a young lady in society. Anita married Harold Blake in 1894, and Mabel maintained a close relationship with both of them throughout their lives. Symmes and her mother were members of the Century Club, a private San Francisco women’s literary club formed in 1888 with Phoebe Apperson Hearst, its first president. Many Century Club members were wealthy and well-educated. Symmes traveled, spending time at warm-weather resorts. Restful stays in warm climates were advised for those who had the financial means, and she and her brother, Harold, may have had tuberculosis. In a letter to a friend in 1906, Symmes wrote about her poor health and wondered if she would ever feel energetic again. She wrote in 1914 that Mabel was suffering from health issues, expressing great concern over her sister’s ongoing exhaustion. Condolence letters to Anita after Symmes’ death often refer to Mabel as gentle, and one letter described her bravery as inspirational. These few references suggest that Symmes was perceived as fragile and may have spent time over the years in a state of quiet recuperation.

Harold was a published poet who had studied at the Sorbonne and taught at Columbia University. Perhaps Harold encouraged Mabel to try her hand at writing during their extended stays in Redlands. A search revealed a short story written by Mabel Symmes in 1908, titled A Mystery of Faith. The tale is a study of trust and charlatans, set in Redlands, and was published in a periodical called The Scrap Book. In what must have been a crushing blow to the family, Harold died in Redlands in 1910. Harold and Mabel seem to have been close, and she held copyrights to his poetry collections.

In 1911, Symmes and her sister added their names to a plea against women’s suffrage, with Symmes serving on the executive committee of the Northern California Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. Mabel Symmes is in the back row, second from the right and in the same row her sister, Anita, seated from the left. Julia Morgan is in the lower right corner. Morgan’s sister, Emma, is in the woman gazing away, furthest to the left near the top row. Julia Morgan and Emma Morgan with Kappa Alpha Theta sorority sisters. California Polytechnic State University.
Symmes continued to live at the house until her death at age sixty-six in 1936. Some accounts contradict its reputation for a home garden was acceptable, it being a combination of craft, art, and science. Training in architecture, horticulture, topographic manipulation, engineering, and the arts were all needed. There was no one who could accept the profession, and the possibilities included a formal education, perhaps in one of the few professional programs of the time, followed by an internship, an apprenticeship, a willing mentor, or a combination thereof. Women were thought wholly unsuited to the work of a professional designer. Maintaining a home garden was acceptable, it being the "incidental" experience of working as a landscape architect who began her profession in 1895 under the guidance of tutors and mentors. She worked on the East Coast and later in California in the San Marino area. She designed estates for wealthy patrons such as the Rockefellers, Pierpont Morgan, and others, and she prepared plans for the National Cathedral in 1899; she designed parts of the landscape architecture program under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture. Although she was among the first women in the land- scape design program, Mabel was not the first woman to take classes in the Agriculture school at Berkeley since the university began admitting women in 1871. 

Symmes did not complete a Bachelor of Science degree, and this may have been due to her health, to the uncertainty and reduction in classes during WWI, the death of her father in 1916, or other matters. In 1921 she and her mother traveled for several months in Europe, visiting the British Isles, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy. Posing to begin design work for the Blake estates, Symmes would have studied the landscapes she saw with great attention. Symmes lived with her mother until 1922. Around the time of her mother’s death that year, Mabel moved to the new home of Anita and Anson Blake, in Kensington. Symmes continued to live at the house until her death at age sixty-six in 1936. Some accounts contradict its reputation for

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Women were thought wholly unsuited to the work of a professional designer. Maintaining a home garden was acceptable, it being the "incidental" experience of working as a landscape architect who began her profession in 1895 under the guidance of tutors and mentors. She worked on the East Coast and later in California in the San Marino area. She designed estates for wealthy patrons such as the Rockefellers, Pierpont Morgan, and others, and she prepared plans for the National Cathedral in 1899; she designed parts of the landscape architecture program under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture. Although she was among the first women in the landscape design program, Mabel was not the first woman to take classes in the Agriculture school at Berkeley since the university began admitting women in 1871. 

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women who completed their training during that era were opening offices. Florence Yoch started her career with classes at UC Berkeley in 1910, transferring to Cornell, then to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1915, where she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Landscape Gardening. She opened an office in Southern California in 1917. There were only a handful of women in the profession in California and even fewer in the Bay Area. Willa Clare Cloys Carmack was one of the first women to complete the University of California Bachelor of Science degree in landscape gardening, in 1916. She began practicing professionally in 1917. Cloys prepared plans for several properties, including estates, but her career remains largely undocumented. Women horticulturists, such as Isabella Worn from Marin County, were preparing planting plans and performing garden maintenance. Worn worked on the planting plan for Piloli, but did not develop master plans, grading plans, and construction details, as did Symmes. There were other female designers, such as Adeline Frederick and Cicely Christie, mentioned in the Thornhill Estates Oral History Project about whom even less is known.34

As noted by scholar Thaisa Way, in the early years of landscape design, it was gauche for women to openly seek work, meaning that social connections played an especially important role in attaining design opportunities. Home offices were most common, and sometimes, although rarely, women operated offices with staff.35 Symmes worked from her bedroom at the Blake home in Kensington. Her social connections seem to have been the source of her work - Symmes' first known commission was for family. Both the Symmes and Blake families were deeply engaged in the local University all their lives, and Mabel's clients often had associations with it. Others came from her family's extensive connections to the mining industry.36

THE GARDENS OF MABEL SYMMES

Until recently, it was not understood that Mabel Symmes' body of work extended much beyond the Blake Estates or that she had prepared detailed plans. She had been described as little more than a dabbler in landscape design. Noted landscape architect Mai Arbergast, who surveyed and inventoried the garden between 1958 and 1961, encountered Mabel and Anita in their last years. In the Blake Estate Oral History Project, Arbergast made more observations of Anita than Mabel. She believed that Symmes didn't earn money as a designer and worked only on a minimal basis for friends.

Geraldine Knight Scott, a landscape architect teaching at UC Berkeley and representing the Blake Garden between 1958 and 1969, also believed that Symmes was able to "lay out" a garden but did not practice as a landscape architect.37 Scott did not meet Symmes and based her impressions on whatever information she gathered from others. Scott's view may have been a commonly accepted assessment of that time, unfortunately, this interpretation and others in the Blake Estate Oral History Project have colored contemporary impressions of Symmes. Perhaps the few known works were her only projects, however, more landscapes may come to light. Whether Symmes accepted payment for her work or not, she described herself as a landscape architect, and her professional standing should not be questioned. What is clear is that Symmes' talents and experience received little attention in the final years of her life, and for some decades afterward.

Historic European styles heavily influenced garden designs of the 1920s. In particular, Italian Garden styles were in vogue, in which symmetry and restraint were prized. Symmes had an exceptional understanding of the style, and she also explored Spanish garden styles. From what I can gather, a Symmes design displayed a sophisticated sense of scale and composition. She addressed grade changes with confidence. Garden areas near the house were formal and designed to complement and reflect the structure's architectural form, becoming less formal and more pastoral and naturalistic at a distance from the house. Symmes incorporated native and climate-appropriate plants into her gardens.

ANSON AND ANITA DAY BLAKE GARDEN

RINCON RD, KENSINGTON. WALTER BLISS, ARCHITECT, 1922

In 1922 Symmes had prepared a master plan for the Blake brothers and their two adjoining estates on land acquired from their mother. One property was owned by Anson S. Blake and Mabel's sister, Anita D. Blake; Edwin T. and Harriet W. Blake owned the adjoining property. Walter Bliss designed the Anson and Anita Blake home (built between 1922 and 1924). From the beginning, the house was intended to accommodate both Mabel and mother Anna. The plans for the two estates appear to have been Symmes' first commission, the success of the design led to several more commissions.38

Below: Symmes' 1922 plan for the adjoining Blake estates shows the complexity of both the topography and the Symmes design. “Quinta de las Lilas,” on the left, was for Edwin and Harriet Blake. Anson and Anita Blake’s property, and the home of Mabel for most of her adult life, was called “La Casa Adelante.” Note the reflecting pool and the use of forced perspective in the paired lines of retreating trees behind the pool. Anson and Anita Blake's property is now the UC Berkeley-owned Blake Garden and is open to the public on most weekdays. Courtesy Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley.
Today, the Blake Garden is open to the public and is used as a learning and teaching environment. A Symmes plan drawing of the landscape is in the possession of UC Berkeley.

EDWIN T. AND HARRIET WHITNEY CARLSON BLAKE GARDEN
RINCON RD, KENSINGTON. WALTER BLISS, ARCHITECT, 1922

Originally designed in combination with the Anson and Anita Blake property, the gardens shared the entry road and a pathway system through the informal parts of the property, including a “Ceanothus Woods” and a walk along a creek. Symmes designed formal garden areas with axial arrangements in close proximity to the house. These were generously proportioned but slightly less extensive than those on the adjoining property. There is a reference to the Edwards and Harriet Blake garden having a very different feel from the Anson and Anita Blake garden. Edwards and Harrit’s relatives described them as less formal than Anson and Ansa, and the character of the planting design may also have been less formal. In 1923, a visit to this garden was part of the UC Berkeley curriculum of Katherine D. Jones’ “Landscape Gardening” class.77

The paired landscapes were severed after Edwards’ death in 1940 (Harriet died in 1937) when the property was purchased as a gift for Carmelita nuns and was converted to a monastery. The two landscapes had been tightly fitted in place, and the division cut through one of the creeks and its associated landscapes as well as a large rose garden. Later accounts indicated that the rose garden had been shared by the two families. In the 1950s, a lower portion of the property was sold.

RINCON RD, KENSINGTON. WALTER BLISS, ARCHITECT, 1922

Evelyn and Tochi Domoto described Symmes as being passive in the presence of her sister.39 We’ll likely never know if Symmes was a frustrated teacher, but it was impossible to talk to Mabel if Anita was there.39 Arbergast said she learned a lot about plants from Symmes, who learned a lot about plants from Symmes, that Mabel Symmes was an accomplished horticulturist and her sister, Anita, was passionate about collecting novel plants. The Blake estate was important both for its design as well as the pioneering use of, and experimentation with, a variety of plants.35 At least one observer thought that it was Symmes’ hand at work in balancing the aesthetic quality of the landscape with an extensive and ever-changing collection of plants.

Symmes was described as an eager and patient teacher by those who worked with her at the Blake Estate but was restrained by her more dominant sister.36 Walter Vodden was hired as the head gardener during the period when the Blakes deeded the property to UC Berkeley in the 1950s. The Blakes and Mabel were still living at the house (Anson Blake died in 1959). Vodden said that the elderly sisters would have vigorous arguments over division of the landscape were not satisfactory cutting off paths and views. The results of the division of the landscape were not satisfactory and caused the sister’s consternation.

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In the Blake Estate Oral History Project, horticulturist Linda Haymaker noted that Symmes exercised authority over the Blake designs, creating a landscape that was scaled to the site. Construction details were carefully worked out. The Italian stonemasons on the project have influenced the quality of the work, but Haymaker makes it clear that Symmes deserves recognition for her technical and design abilities.35

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Formal elements near the house appear to persist in views on Google Maps.

MARSH-SPERRY GARDENS
HAWTHORNE TERRACE, BERKELEY. HENRY H. GUTTERSON, ARCHITECT, 1925

James Sperry, a wealthy man who developed the property as residences for his immediate and extended family, could have chosen any designer, and he chose Symmes. The architect, Henry H. Gutterson, was a highly regarded and prolific architect. Like the Blake Garden, the single parcel had two
The current owner of one of the properties was subsequently split into two, cutting the shared garden space between them. The property around 30 years ago. The garden was in an unkempt state, and several features were already gone by that time. It was exciting to see the extensive drawings, graciously shared blueprints for this garden. The current owners supplemented one another.” The current owners were friends since college.52 Ratcliff worked closely with landscape architect Mabel Symmes to fashion a setting that joined the residence with its rustic hillside setting. In this way, house and grounds complement one another.”53 The current owners graciously shared blueprints for this garden. This intensively planted garden featured a wide variety of plants that required significant upkeep. It was designed when Sarah was 26 years old. Sarah posed for a photo in the garden, with a happy smile on her face. It is impossible to know how much influence she or her father had over the design that resulted in this garden.

The Charles W. Merrill Garden is the latest known work by Symmes and dates to 1939. Symmes produced detailed drawings for this property. The house was also designed by Walter H. Ratcliff. Charles Merrill and Edwin Blake had been friends since college.54 The 2005 National Register nomination for the Merrill Garden includes the statement that “Ratcliff worked closely with landscape architect Mabel Symmes to fashion a setting that joined the residence with its rustic hillside setting. In this way, house and grounds were designed from the beginning to complement one another.” The current owners graciously shared blueprints for this garden. It was exciting to see the extensive drawings, as I am not aware of other plans by Symmes that show the same level of detail. The ten sheets of blueprints are not complete but are the most thorough known record of Symmes’ abilities. There is a planting plan, but no key and some pages are numbered, but some numbered pages are missing.

The hilly and wooded property is narrow and roughly trapezoidal, covering a little more than three-quarters of an acre. The house is located near the street, with the rear landscape sloping away from the house. The Merrills purchased part of an adjacent lot in the design process, bringing the property to 1.27 acres. The additional land accommodated a driveway and parking area, the rest of the property was planted as an orchard for which Symmes provided a plan. (In 1958, a section of land containing the orchard was sold.) Simple rock-lined paths and stairs wound through oaks, giving access to the front entries. A pair of large metal and glass French doors at the back of the house opened onto a level terrace and lawn that featured a circular ornamental pond. Beyond the lawn, on axis with the wall of French doors, a path and stairway descended into the lower garden, passing through a flower garden.

East of the kitchen and cook’s quarters was a service yard. Adjacent to it and opening from the dining room was a large, linear-cutting garden, also laid out on axis with a doorway. Symmes maximized these adjoining garden spaces in a small area to maximum effect. A series of paths connected garden areas with the orchard. The National Register nomination described the orchard:

By July 1939 Symmes had developed a similarly detailed proposal for the orchard that envisioned a grove of almost fifty trees, selected for the color of their flowers or the edibility of their fruit, surrounded by a hedge of olive trees.

THE CHARLES W. MERRILL GARDEN
CAMINO SOBRANTE, ORINDA, WALTER RATCLIFF, ARCHITECT, 1939

The Charles W. Merrill garden, in Orinda, is the latest known work by Symmes and dates to 1939. Symmes produced detailed drawings for this property. The house was also designed by Walter H. Ratcliff. Charles Merrill and Edwin Blake had been friends since college.54 The 2005 National Register nomination for the Merrill Garden includes the statement that “Ratcliff worked closely with landscape architect Mabel Symmes to fashion a setting that joined the residence with its rustic hillside setting. In this way, house and grounds were designed from the beginning to complement one another.” The current owners graciously shared blueprints for this garden. It was exciting to see the extensive drawings, as I am not aware of other plans by Symmes that show the same level of detail. The ten sheets of blueprints are not complete but are the most thorough known record of Symmes’ abilities. There is a planting plan, but no key and some pages are numbered, but some numbered pages are missing.

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was involved in the Rose Society, the California Garden Club, and the California Horticultural Society. She was a Friend of James West of the UC Botanical Gardens, as well as an avid gardener. Berkeley professor Katherine D. Jones, among other botanists, horticulturists, and landscape architects, knew of Mabel S. Symmes. She was titled “Adelante” and revealed Symmes to be an avoidable princess and pinecone quis. Lilies and yellow-brown trees were included for their color and fragrance.

The “Garden Plan” dated 07/28/1927 shows topographic manipulations indicating that Symmes could prepare grading plans. Other drawings show detail stone walls and walls that were a combination of concrete and stone. Symmes also detailed stone-faced stairs, subdued with stone walls.

Today only small portions of the original garden are extant—what remains are parts of the original topographic and design and some stone steps and retaining walls.

**OTHER SYMMES GARDENS**

Little is known about other Symmes gardens.

- **Martha Ellen Landscapes**
  - Landscapes in the Bay Area. She grew up in Ogden, Utah, and came to California in 1910, quickly falling in love with California’s landscape and history.
  - After receiving her undergraduate degree in art, she married and took her name into garden design. She became a landscape architect. The University of California, Berkeley, while still a student, she authored and studies on several historic landscapes.

Janet prepared a report for Carolyn McNichols for a landscape on Howarth Terrace, in Berkeley, when a Symmes-designed garden was threatened. Only bits of information had emerged about her gardens, and much of her work has been underappreciated. In the 1980s, the American Society of Landscape Architects created a list of the “LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS in 1900s” and among the names on that list is Mabel Symmes. Janet was able to access the detailed efforts of CSLGS member and dedicated sleuth Mari F. Graham, who generously shared her research results. It turned out that Symmes had been underestimated. Janet determined to learn more about her, then to write this biography. She hopes the article will spur more revelations about Symmes’ life and accomplishments.

**End Notes**

1. The school was known simply as the University of California before being renamed in 1899. It was then the University of California, Berkeley.

2. The paper on Anna and Anna Blake are in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Anna Blake received several letters of condolence in her name.


8. Bibliography, within wars and the dyke, Roubell, and then for those following her father.

**About the author:**

Janet Gracyk is a recently retired landscape designer who was highly regarded within the professional circle of clients and friends who came to know her. She had a short career, however, and she adhered to the mores of her time, working from her bedroom and not promoting her work until recently. Because only one garden was known, she was disguised as a hobbyist. The softness of her work suggests that the few known gardens are not her only examples. Now we have enough information to understand her importance. First, she pursued a career that was quite uncommon in her place and time.

Second, she was an assured and accomplished designer who was highly regarded within the circle of clients and friends who came to know her and her work.

**CONCLUSION**

At the age of 70, Symmes authored a six-part series of articles describing the Blake estate, a property she designed for a landscape on Hawthorne Terrace, in Berkeley, when a Symmes-designed garden was threatened. Only bits of information had emerged about her gardens, and much of her work has been underappreciated. In the 1980s, the American Society of Landscape Architects created a list of the “LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS in 1900s” and among the names on that list is Mabel Symmes. Janet was able to access the detailed efforts of CSLGS member and dedicated sleuth Mari F. Graham, who generously shared her research results. It turned out that Symmes had been underestimated. Janet determined to learn more about her, then to write this biography. She hopes the article will spur more revelations about Symmes’ life and accomplishments.
For the last sixty years, my family has had the pleasure of enjoying a garden designed by Mabel Symmes in Berkeley. Symmes' unique way of combining formal landscapes modeled on Italianate designs with more wild California nature-scapes is apparent in the Berkeley garden that she designed for our house's prior owners. We, together with our longtime neighbors Donald and Sylvia McLaughlin, have shared a magical wisteria-covered patio and central lawn area with sweeping views of the San Francisco Bay for many years. Indeed, it is said that the view from this garden of the Bay being filled in inspired Sylvia McLaughlin to establish “Save the Bay” with two of her dear friends. This article describes the design of the garden and our efforts to preserve it in the face of recent development efforts.

THE GARDEN COMES INTO BEING

On September 17, 1923, fire tore through the Berkeley Hills to the north of the University of California campus. This primarily residential area consisted mostly of wood-frame houses covered in wood shakes set amongst the typical California coastal forests and meadows. As may be expected, the houses were hardly fireproof. Once the fires were put out, almost nothing but the chimneys and a few hardy redwoods remained in the area. Elinor Carlisle, a staunch suffragist and Berkeley’s first elected female school board member, owned a house and cottage at the corner of Hawthorne Terrace and Vine Lane. After the fire, all that was left was the original Berkeley rhyolite stone perimeter wall facing Vine and groves of redwoods. The now-empty lot featured a gently downward sloping hill with a magnificent view of San Francisco Bay. Carlisle, who had lost a priceless collection of Oriental artifacts in the fire in addition to her house, sold her Berkeley property and decamped to San Francisco.

The property was quickly snapped up by James C. Sperry, a Magnavox executive, who, with his family, was displaced when the University announced its plans to raze houses in Berkeley’s Strawberry Creek area to make way for a new stadium. Sperry’s roots in California were deep. He was born and raised amongst the “Big Trees” (Sequoiadendron giganteum) in Calaveras County, where his father owned acres of land and operated the renowned Sperry and Perry Hotel in Murphys. Sperry moved to Berkeley to attend University and never left. He had a large extended family and planned to construct a family compound where he could live with his wife and children in one house and dedicate the other for his widowed sister, Marion Marsh, and other relatives.

Sperry hired well-known Berkeley architect Henry H. Gutterson to design the family compound. As conceived by Sperry and drawn by Gutterson, the design featured two fraternal twin houses with a shared arbor-covered patio with a fountain and a garden between the two houses that could accommodate large family get-togethers. The materials were fire-resistant tile and stucco—a departure from the then typical Berkeley shingle-style house. Sperry’s plans to build the compound were reported in the local newspaper as evidence of large-scale residential rebuilding efforts after the devastating fire.

Sperry hired local landscape architect (and fellow U.C. alum) Mabel Symmes to design the compound’s shared gardens. Sperry likely met Symmes through her sister and brother-in-law, Anita and Anson Blake, who had lived near Sperry and his family in the Strawberry Creek area. The Blakes, incidentally, were also displaced by the stadium, and ultimately moved to Kensington to build the fabled Blake Estate, for which Symmes also designed the gardens.

Gutterson, a protege of Berkeley architect Bernard Maybeck, was particularly well-suited to the task. A graduate of Berkeley High School and U.C. Berkeley, Gutterson had studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Upon returning to the San Francisco Bay Area, he was associated with several City Beautiful Movement projects, amongst them St. Francis Woods in San Francisco. He became known for skillfully integrating his houses into their natural surroundings, for carefully placing windows to maximize views, and for integrating hardscaping to create easy indoor-outdoor access.

Gutterson applied these skills in his design for the Sperry houses. He sited the two houses...
along a north-south axis, parallel to the Bay, and “uphill” on the property so that their primary rooms faced the magnificent bay view. He carefully preserved the existing redwood groves along the southern edge of the property. This was no doubt at the insistence of Sperry, who not only grew up amongst redwoods but also became an essential member of the fledgling Save the Redwoods League. Sperry is also credited with saving the famous Bull Creek-Dyererville old-growth groves in what became Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

Both houses feature large French doors and windows that open onto a shared concrete patio. This rectangular patio is enclosed on its north and south sides by the walls of the Marsh and Sperry houses, respectively. Its eastern side is enclosed by a stucco retaining wall, which features a fountain designed by Gutterson as its focal point. The “spout” of the fountain is a Chinese roof tile in the shape of a fish (likely a carp). A large wooden pergola extends over this shared space, covered by the original (now over 90-year-old) wisteria (Wisteria sinensis), reminiscent of the wisteria that so famously covers the Maybeck-designed First Unitarian Church in Berkeley (for which Gutterson contributed some design work).

Gutterson concealed the utilitarian laundry yards to the east behind a wooden lattice atop the stucco wall. In this way, the shared center area, a beautifully designed formal garden that she designed is organized around a central focal point, a square within a square. From this central point, pathways defined geometric beds of flowering color, enclosed by clipped boxwood hedges. Viewed from the house one level above, the rectilinear arrangement below had great charm.

Gutterson’s plan for the arbor for the shared central garden between the 1440 and 1460 Hawthorne Terrace Houses features a fountain and pergola that the dining rooms of both houses access via French doors. H.H. Gutterson Plans for 1440 Hawthorne Terrace, McNiven Family Collection.

Although Gutterson’s plans for the Sperry houses included a proposed landscape scheme, only the hardscape features were constructed. Instead, Sperry hired Mabel Symmes to create a detailed landscape plan, which the two houses would share. Symmes’ design solution addressed the difficulties of the sloping parcel, while also accounting for the individual needs of each family. Her elegant plan created three unique, distinct garden spaces, which worked together to form a cohesive whole. Each family would have a private space behind their house for interaction with the landscape. The key features of each semi-private area would be visible down common paths connecting the three areas – north, center, and south. These view corridors served to link the distinct sections, which were bordered by low rhyolite walls. The most crucial feature of Symmes’ tripartite plan is the center area, a beautifully designed formal garden and a shared space with a “four-way-crossing” that connected the two more private gardens to the north and south.

The house located at the highest point on the slope at the North-Eastern portion of the lot was occupied by James Sperry’s widowed sister Marion Marsh and, eventually, other family members. Large bay windows along the house’s Western facade looked directly towards the Bay and down into the rear yard a level below the home’s first floor. The house’s vantage point above this area of the landscape made it the perfect place for a formal garden, which is what Symmes created. The formal garden that she designed is organized around a central focal point, a square within a square. From this central point, pathways defined geometric beds of flowering color, enclosed by clipped boxwood hedges. Viewed from the house one level above, the rectilinear arrangement below had great charm.
As noted, a low stone wall separated this semi-private space from the central garden. Symmes added a holly hedge along the demarcation wall running east-west between the properties for an added level of separation and definition. A specimen cedar (Cedrus deodara, now sadly removed due to disease and decay) was planted to the north, while Brazilian soap bark trees (Quillajna saponaria) defined the western edge. Symmes handled the slope in this north garden area by effectively flattening it. Using retaining walls along the southwest and west edge, Symmes was able to achieve a flat plane out from the central circle.

The roses were planted in quarter circles radiating out from the central circle. A path from the area’s so-called Redwood Canyon area of the Blake Wilderness Area designed by Symmes was lost in the famous Berkeley Fire. Gutterson, as noted above, had explored much of South America and Possessed of a keen appreciation for California’s environmental movement in the United States. Sylvia McLaughlin was a vocal advocate for the preservation and rehabilitation of California's wilderness and rock paths, reminiscent of the so-called Redwood Canyon area of the Blake Gardens. The gate and stairs to the old Carlisle Garden to the north and south areas), with symmetrical planting beds for flowering color. Adjacent to the lawn, and completing the oval was another formal space, a sunken parterre garden, enclosed by rhododendron retaining walls. From this annular space, three pathways defined boxwood-lined planting beds (Buxus sempervirens), filled with mixed borders. The roses were planted in quarter circles radiating out from the central circle. A path from the area’s so-called Redwood Canyon area of the Blake Wilderness Area designed by Symmes was lost in the famous Berkeley Fire. Gutterson, as noted above, had explored much of South America and Possessed of a keen appreciation for California’s environmental movement in the United States. Sylvia McLaughlin was a vocal advocate for the preservation and rehabilitation of California's wilderness and rock paths, reminiscent of the so-called Redwood Canyon area of the Blake Gardens. The gate and stairs to the old Carlisle house remain, a poignant reminder of what was lost in the famous Berkeley Fire.

EFFORTS TO PRESERVE THE GARDEN

The second owners of the Sperry House were Donald and Sylvia McLaughlin. Donald McLaughlin, a Berkeley native, returned to Berkeley after graduating from Harvard. A mining engineer involved in a variety of mining ventures, McLaughlin was the youngest Dean of Mining at U.C. Berkeley and eventually became a prominent chair of the U.C. Board of Regents, helping to establish both U.C. Santa Cruz and U.C. Irvine. A protegé of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, McLaughlin was an avid outdoorsman who had explored much of South America and California on horseback in his younger years. Possessed of a keen appreciation for California's unique qualities, he served on the board of the Save the Redwoods League, as had Sperry before him. Thus, it was hardly surprising that he preserved both the redwoods on his property and the overall Symmes design. Sylvia McLaughlin is possibly even more well-known than her husband. She was she who, together with her friends Kay Kerr and Esther Gulick, founded "Save the Bay," thereby helping to initiate the nascent environmental movement in the United States. Sylvia McLaughlin was a vocal advocate for the preservation and rehabilitation of California's wilderness and rock paths, reminiscent of the so-called Redwood Canyon area of the Blake Gardens. The gate and stairs to the old Carlisle house remain, a poignant reminder of what was lost in the famous Berkeley Fire.

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natural environment and historic structures and landscapes. She was a board member of many environmental and preservation organizations over the years, including Save the Redwoods League, the Audubon Society, the Trust for Public Lands, and Citizens for Eastshore State Parks, as well as Save the Bay. When her mother, Marion McNiven (who had purchased the Marsh house in 1959), worked to preserve the family compound in North Berkeley, both Sylvia McLaughlin and Marion McNiven gardened regularly. Marion McNiven, who graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in architecture, was there virtually every day, weeding, watering and attending to garden chores. Sylvia McLaughlin loved tending to her roses. As they aged, Sylvia and Marion made provisions to preserve the unique shared central yard area with its 90-year-old wisteria arbor. In 2015 they executed a Declaration of Restrictive Covenants aimed at preserving the extant character-defining features of Symmes’ and Gutterson’s designs for the shared gardens. Individual distinctive features such as the wisteria were called out specifically for preservation. Since Sylvia McLaughlin’s death in 2016 and the subsequent sale of the McLaughlin-Sperry House, the status of the preservation of the Symmes-designed garden has been uncertain. The new owners obtained permits in 2019 to demolish features of the shared garden, and to construct a sizable exterior terrace partially within it. They also announced their desire to demolish features of the garden, she did not qualify as a landscape professional (although, of course, no similar evidence was required for Gutterson, a male). This line of argument, while ostensibly rejected by individual Commission members, was effectively adopted by the Commission when it excluded mention of Symmes in the statement supporting landmark designation. This dismissal of a female landscape architect’s significance is reminiscent of the early scholar-writer Margaretta H. Wright’s dismissal of Symmes when it excluded mention of Symmes in the statement supporting landmark designation.

Given Sylvia McLaughlin’s love of nature, she took great delight in the Symmes-designed garden and, together with her neighbors, Hugh and Marion McNiven (who had purchased March house in 1959), worked to preserve the garden’s unique features. The shared yard area was used regularly by both families, including for weddings and other receptions. The families maintained the key elements of the shared landscape and added new plantings in keeping with the original design. For example, on the original pond behind the McLaughlin-Sperry House, there grew a lark that was difficult to care, so Sylvia McLaughlin directed that it be filled in with dirt and planted with compatible flow- ering shrubs rather than destroy it. She kept the original appurtenances surrounding the western edge of the pond and ensured the pond fishy walls remained.

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Legacy of a Thomas Church Garden

HARLEY JESSUP

Our home garden, designed by Thomas Church in 1956, continues to be a living source of joy. Sheltering in place during this unbelievable spring, I've found comfort and hope while photographing our garden before work every morning. I'm astounded to see the changes that occur daily, observing the garden in all kinds of light and weather, now with a focus and appreciation I've never experienced before.

I'm a production designer at Pixar Animation Studios and, in 1992, my wife Ann and I chose our house in Kentfield because of the Thomas Church garden. Back then, the modest garden on a sloping lot looked a little forlorn, but still sculpturally beautiful with a wonderful layout and towering oaks creating the illusion that we were living in a tree house. It is a garden designed for a family with children, and our kids immediately discovered features like the circular planter in the courtyard that Church often included as an infinite path for tricycles to circumnavigate.

The first phase of restoration started 28 years ago with the expert construction work of Roger Fiske Landscaping and then more recently Bertotti Landscaping. In all we've replaced the deck, benches, and other wooden structures (the garden stairways twice), restored the exposed aggregate terraces and planted trees, all carefully following the original design.

From the beginning, we've tried to learn all we could about Thomas Church's work, and I treasure our first edition of Gardens Are for People that has become the guide for us. In his book Church clearly analyzes why a place is naturally attractive to people. He pays attention to the pattern of dappled light on pavement, the easy transition from garden to house, the proportions of a graceful stairway and the position of the garden in relation to the sun - all keys to creating a garden that is inviting to people. Church's thoughtful ideas about environments have helped me in my work at Pixar, where I strive to design appealing worlds for the screen. Gardens Are for People sums up Church's approach to landscape architecture, illustrated with photographs from over a hundred classic gardens representing a golden age of residential landscape architecture in California.
“What famous landscape architect are you bothering today, dear?” my wife would ask each weekend. In my research on Church’s work and influence, I talked with Robert Royston, Lawrence Halprin and Garrett Eckbo, all of whom had worked with Church early in their careers. I was touched by how each of these great designers encouraged and supported us in our effort to bring our small garden back to life. To start, they all said that finding the original plans was essential. But we didn’t have them.

Eckbo pointed out that while I might never become an expert on all gardens, I could learn to be an expert on this garden. He suggested that I take the county survey map and draw a plan of my own. With my six-year-old daughter Alice holding the end of the tape measure, we measured the garden and I drew a plan of the garden as it existed in 1994. That was the
first step towards understanding the concept behind the design of our garden, for it clearly showed the diagonal grid of the paving in the front courtyard corresponds to the angle of the deck in back.

Responding to my polite but persistent requests, the family of the original owners finally sent the Thomas Church plans—sheets of beautifully drawn studies, planting plans, and detailed construction drawings. Opening that package was a revelation; when I overlaid the plan I had drawn, it was breathtaking to immediately understand how the original garden had evolved—what was intended by Church and what was not. The fiberglass ‘70s hot tub had to go; an oak tree that originally grew up through the deck stairwell was missing, and a Japanese maple had far outgrown its place on the middle terrace (it stayed). The nature of the garden had changed from a sunny hillside landscape, to a shady garden distinguished by the patterns of light cast through mature trees. That was an alteration we could embrace.

The original plans were initialled “J.M.” and June Meehan’s name was listed with Jack Stafford’s in the title block. At first I couldn’t locate June, but Jack Stafford was still practicing in 1994. He was very helpful and slightly amused, suggesting that we talk with June, now retired and living in Oakmont near Santa Rosa. I called June and asked if I could send her copies of the plans she had drawn 39 years earlier. Intrigued by the plans, June agreed to come to lunch with her friend Jane and see the garden. This led to a 14-year friendship that lasted until her death in 2009. At that first meeting, June admitted that she couldn’t remember our garden, but she definitely recalled working on several projects here in Kent Woodlands.

As we toured the garden, she offered thoughtful suggestions and told great stories about her days working in the Church office. June spoke fondly of Church’s tradition of having morning coffee at 10:00 with visiting architects and artists. She told how she and Lawrence Halprin shared the same birthday, and she would call him every year on that day. She talked about how Church helped her plan her first trip to Europe, and how he readily agreed when she asked to extend her stay. She was charming and described “Tommy” as naturally connecting with clients in a way that made them friends. June clearly admired Church’s belief that “gardens are for people” and was pleased that we were the respectful stewards of one of their designs.

Above: June Meehan Campbell and her friend Dr. Jane Meade when they visited our garden on August 5th, 1995.

Middle: June Meehan Campbell’s kind inscription on our copy of Gardens are for People and her initials on the plans she drew in 1956.

Below: Looking up from the lower garden, the steps and retaining walls add geometric contrast to soft landscape. Azaleas and agapanthus replace the original juniper. The Japanese maple puts on a brilliant red display in both the spring and the fall.
Right: June Meahan Campbell remarked, “That tree doesn’t belong there!” in reaction to the large Japanese maple that stretches out from under the deck. We decided to keep the very healthy tree, pruning it to accentuate its unusual shape and welcoming the color it brings in both spring and fall.

Below: The towering oak trees were here before the house was built and their sculptural shapes and leafy canopies are the most important natural element of our garden. The exposed aggregate path leads to another seating area and loops back up to a second stairway.

Opposite page: A collage of photos by Harley Jessup of his Thomas Church-designed garden.

Over the years I’ve tried to be an advocate for the mid-century houses and gardens here in Kent Woodlands. I’ve even given the real estate agents reprints of books and magazine articles that feature the endangered designs. It’s a sad fact that we continue to lose classic gardens every year. Recalling Garrett Eckbo’s suggestion to focus on our own backyard, I hope this story will inspire others to take the rewarding journey of preservation. Gardens truly are for people and, walking through our sixty-three-year-old garden today, we feel connected to Thomas Church and that remarkable period of California landscape design. We are grateful for the friendships, the hope, and the beauty that our garden continues to bring.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Harley Jessup is a production designer whose films at Pixar Animation Studios include Coco, Ratatouille, and Monsters, Inc. He began his career designing Sesame Street animation, followed by work as a visual effects art director at Industrial Light and Magic, imagining fantasy worlds for the films Hook, Fire in the Sky, and Innerspace, for which he won an Academy Award. Harley lives with his wife Ann, in Kentfield, California.
Front Cover:

Back Cover:
Landscape architect Arthur G. Barton's concrete "champagne bowl" planters cascade down the hillside at Dodger Stadium. Courtesy of walteromalley.com