Fulton Mall, a historic pedestrians-only shopping area in downtown Fresno that has become an urban park filled with trees, shrubs, fountains, and sculptures, is under threat. The city’s current administration is strenuously attempting to eliminate it, despite a deficiency of parkland and green space in Fresno. No matter that in rankings by the Trust for Public Lands of the park systems of the 40 largest American cities on the basis of acreage, services, investment, and access, Fresno comes in last, while San Francisco, Sacramento, and New York were the top three. (parkscore.tpl.org)

The origin and fate of Fulton Mall are closely linked with Fresno’s growth over the past several decades. As its population rapidly increased, reaching 100,000 in 1958, Fresno was expanding in many areas. Education, health, and retail services began to follow Fresno State College’s relocation from central Fresno to a site several miles to the northeast. Manchester Center, Fresno’s first regional shopping center, was built to the north of the downtown area. The Chamber of Commerce, City Hall, and business property owners became concerned about the downtown’s viability as the center of retail shopping, health care, and government. The Fresno Redevelopment Agency was created and began to lay the groundwork to clear blight from downtown with the cooperation of merchants and property owners. An organization called the “100 Percenters” formed to collaborate with the city in the search for a solution, and
in 1958 Victor Gruen was hired for his expertise in retail shopping and downtown revitalization.

Already known for his plan for Fort Worth, Texas, Gruen was asked to apply similar design concepts to Fresno. In less than two years, the Central Area Plan emerged. The plan consisted of three elements: an auto-free core retail superblock surrounded by a one-way street loop, a freeway loop around the central area, and dense housing to support the commercial base.

The centerpiece of the central core was to be the transformation of six blocks of Fulton Street, the city’s traditional retail center, into a pedestrian mall. Gruen’s plan was approved in 1960 and reconstruction work began.

Gruen had the foresight to engage Garrett Eckbo, a world-renowned landscape architect, to design the pedestrian mall. Born in California and educated at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Eckbo had become a leading practitioner and theoretician of modernist mid-twentieth-century landscape architecture after the publication in 1950 of his first book, Landscape for Living. Simon Swaffield, in the preface to his compilation of important theoretical texts on landscape architecture, asserts that Landscape for Living “underpinned education and practice for much of the latter part of the twentieth century” (Theory in Landscape Architecture: a Reader, p. xi).

After designing gardens for private homes in Southern California for a number of years, Eckbo had been receiving commissions for larger projects—planned communities, college campuses, and parks. Beginning with his student years at Harvard, Eckbo had been developing an untraditional design aesthetic that rejected the usual opposition between informal

Front Cover: Fulton Mall scene in 2004
Right: By including water features like this fountain by Stan Bitters in his plan for Fulton Mall, Garrett Eckbo’s intention was to suggest the irrigation standpipes commonly found in the San Joaquin Valley’s fields and orchards. In this 2004 photo, the fountain is being maintained and the water is flowing (photos by Harold Tokmakian)
Opposite Top: Stan Bitters’ fountain Dancing Waters, as found in 2013
Opposite Bottom: La Grand Laveuse by Pierre Auguste Renoir, one of 19 sculptures donated by citizens to Fulton Mall (photos by Virginia Kean).
garden style and the symmetry of Beaux Arts style. Two basic components of Eckbo’s aesthetic can be summarized as “the organic principle” and “the social principle.” The organic principle rejected the notion that design begins with a preconceived concept and arrangement. Instead, design and arrangement should grow out of a place, capturing its “genius loci.”

Eckbo’s organic vision for Fulton Mall was to capture various aspects of the San Joaquin Valley, especially its topography and agriculture. The Mall’s concrete pavement is stained an adobe color to suggest the soil of the San Joaquin Valley. Ribbons of unstained concrete aggregate 8.5 inches wide, sometimes gently curving and sometimes angular, run across the pavement at frequent intervals, suggesting the contours of the Valley floor while also contributing to the rhythmic unity of the Mall.

A variety of water features throughout the Mall symbolize the importance of water in the San Joaquin Valley. Water falling from one level to another in multilevel pools and into curving streams or straight channels suggests the movement of water from the Sierra into the valley’s rivers and irrigation canals. The 26 sculpted ceramic pipes that are part of the water features represent the standpipes that are common to agricultural irrigation systems. And interspersed throughout the Mall are 144 trees and a large number of shrubs and flowers in planting beds of many shapes, sizes, and elevations.

Inspired by the art of Joan Miró, Jean Arp, and Wassily Kandinsky, Eckbo gave the planters and water features curving, biomorphic forms—shapes that reflected the organic principle. He chose the original plantings from a list of plant materials appropriate for the Valley that the Fresno Parks and Recreation Department compiled at his request.

Eckbo completed his vision of a harmonious whole by integrating sculpture into the landscape design, creating an outdoor museum. Civic-minded citizens donated the 19 sculptures by renowned artists that enhance the beauty of the Mall.

Charles Birnbaum, founder and president of the Cultural Landscape Foundation, has written that these features of Fulton Mall comprise “an early, if not the first, large-scale display of contemporary art by both internationally recognized and local artists...not physically attached to a museum as a sculpture garden. Therefore, the placement of the work and their integrity of setting are of great significance.”

(continued)
1000 Friends of Fresno, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of all the citizens of Fresno, is engaged in efforts to save Fulton Mall. To learn more, visit www.1000friendsoffresno.org
The Fulton Mall’s success in maintaining downtown Fresno as a retail center, however, was short-lived. Beginning in 1974 the City of Fresno began to follow a General Plan policy of decentralization that allowed the creation of one regional shopping center after another as part of a residential sprawl northward. The City failed to create a concentration of housing in the central area, an important component of the Gruen Plan. Another component of the Gruen Plan—building a freeway loop around the central area—was delayed for many years.

As retail business declined in the downtown, there were some who chose not to recognize unfortunate planning decisions as the cause, but instead made the Fulton Mall the scapegoat. Their solution was to return auto traffic to the pedestrian mall. In 2002, in the first concerted effort to achieve this goal, a design firm chosen by the Redevelopment Agency presented a plan to the City Council. Their scheme would have removed most of the trees and fountains and forced the relocation or destruction of most of the sculptures, thus destroying the Fulton Mall as a quiet meeting place and urban park. The large outpouring of public opposition, supported by many business owners, persuaded the City Council to abandon the plan.

Leading the opposition to the proposal to destroy the Mall was the Downtown Fresno Coalition, a group of citizens who had organized for the express purpose of maintaining and preserving the Fulton Mall and other open space in the downtown area. The group determined that since the Fulton Mall was a unique landscape designed by a master landscape architect, and a place of national and global significance, it must be considered for the National Register of Historic Places. On their initiative, without any support from the City administration, the group prepared the nomination.

After learning that the National Register nomination was being given serious consideration by the California Office of Historic Preservation, the City of Fresno asked for a delay. Enlisting the opposition of most of the owners of properties adjacent to the Mall, the City administration made a concerted effort to prevent the listing of the Mall in the National Register.

In August 2010 the National Park Service determined the Fulton Mall eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, which automatically placed the Mall in the California Register of Historical Resources. The announcement of the National Park Service summed up the significance of the Mall:

A collaborative effort of the respected urban planner Victor Gruen and celebrated twentieth-century landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, the Fulton Mall was completed in 1964 during the early, defining era of the discipline known as modern urban design and planning. A clear expression of many of the evolving theories of contemporary landscape design, including the removal of vehicular traffic from downtown areas and the creation of pedestrian-friendly urban spaces, the Fulton Mall represents a well-preserved example of the work of master landscape architect, Garrett Eckbo, whose career as both teacher and practitioner helped transform the field of post-war landscape architecture.

Rejecting the opportunity to capitalize on this recognition of the Fulton Mall as an historical resource worthy of promotion, the current City administration appears determined to tear up the Mall to make way for automobiles, claiming that this will magically turn the downtown into a shopping mecca. This view ignores the fact that Fulton Street was beginning to fail as a retail center in the early 1960s as businesses moved north to Manchester Center and elsewhere. Perhaps more importantly, it is a view that refuses to acknowledge the broad support among citizens for preserving the Fulton Mall.

The strong opposition to vehicularizing the Mall shown in 2002 has been demonstrated at various times since then. In 2006 the City Council called for a study of the Fulton Mall so that a decision could be made about its future. A study group consisting mostly of city employees was chosen, and two professional facilitators conducted a series of public meetings to garner citizen opinion. The facilitators compiled a list of themes that emerged from the meetings, and at the head of that list was “No traffic on the Mall.” This clear expression of support for saving the Mall was the probable reason for the shelving of the study group’s report.

More recently a “Save the Fulton Mall!” Facebook page has attracted more than a thousand supporters.

During the years of ongoing debate about the fate of Fulton Mall, the City has not consistently maintained it, and the neglect is acutely observable today. Some (continued)
Fulton Mall (continued)

water features are empty. The once lush and beautiful flowerbeds have lost much of their luster. Pavement cleaning and repair are increasingly infrequent. Fulton Mall shows a shameful lack of municipal stewardship.

The latest effort to put traffic on the Mall is reaching a critical juncture. For the last three years the City of Fresno has been conducting yet another study, this time to produce a Fulton Corridor Specific Plan (FCSP) as part of an effort to revitalize Fresno’s downtown. A citizens’ committee was appointed to propose a draft FCSP to be presented to the City Council, including three options for Fulton Mall.

The committee’s options include two versions of returning vehicular traffic to the Mall, and the main difference between the two is the degree to which Eckbo’s design will be destroyed. The first option would leave little or nothing of Eckbo’s design. The second option, energetically advocated by the City as the mayor’s choice, claims to include an effort to save portions of the Mall—words like “vignette” are frequently used—but would nevertheless shatter the integrity of Eckbo’s design.

The survival of the Mall as designed by Garrett Eckbo provided the basis for its recognition as a historical resource by the National Park Service and the California Office of Historic Preservation. It is the third option—to preserve and maintain the Mall—that the City Council must choose if Fresno is to hold onto a masterpiece of modernist landscape architecture that can be promoted as a destination point and an urban park that provides a tree-filled place of refuge from the fumes and noise of vehicular traffic.

Now in its 50th year, Fulton Mall is an established historic resource. When it opened, the Mall was emblematic of the free-flowing creativity and optimism of 1960s urban design, and of a city that valued its residents. The question today for the City Council members is this: Do they have the foresight and good sense to celebrate and restore Garrett Eckbo’s gift to the people of Fresno—a true landscape for living?

Harold Tokmakian, AICP, retired after 25 years from California State University, Fresno, in 1992 as Professor Emeritus of Regional and City Planning. Prior to that he served as Fresno County Planning Director, working closely with the City of Fresno on local and regional planning issues. Between 1970 and 1975, he served on the Fresno City Planning Commission. Since 1992, Professor Tokmakian has volunteered with many civic public policy organizations, including the Fresno County Planning Commission, the Fresno Arts Council, the Downtown Fresno Coalition, and the League of Women Voters. He graduated from Stanford University with a BA and MA in architecture and earned a Master of Regional Planning degree from Cornell University.

H. Ray McKnight, Ph.D., is a Professor Emeritus of English at California State University, Fresno, and holds degrees from Harvard and the University of North Carolina. From 2002 through 2012 he was chair of the Downtown Fresno Coalition. He grew up in Charleston, West Virginia, where his first gardening experience was being compelled to hoe his father’s Victory Garden.
President’s Message

Often I am so busy just doing what is in front of me I forget to take a breath, step back, and see the joy of the bigger picture. It’s easy for all of us to get so caught up in the day-to-day operations of life that the question of the big idea seems, if not forgotten, then hidden somewhere behind a cloud.

Thousands of volunteer hours go into the business of running CGLHS—getting Eden out on time; planning and hosting events; maintaining our website; collecting dues and raising money; recruiting new members.

Why do we do this? Our founders and subsequent CGLHS boards crafted a mission statement to guide us. CGLHS is “devoted to celebrating the beauty and diversity of California’s historic gardens and landscapes.”

We have been doing a lot of celebrating (and thinking) this spring:

• Frolicking in Fresno
• Visiting an exhibit to see how artists have painted our native plants
• Learning about our plant heritage from street trees to roses
• Reading Marlea Graham on one of our leading landscape architects and his now historic gardens
• Reading Paula Panich on writer and farmer David Mas Masumoto, thinking about the disappearance of family farms and regional fruit
• Revisiting, through words and photographs, Garrett Eckbo’s Fulton Mall, an icon of modernist civic design faced with a threatened future

I hope to see many of you in the fall when we will explore the landscape and gardens of Fremont, incorporated in 1956 gathering in five small towns, on San Francisco’s East Bay.

—Judy Horton, President, CGLHS
president@cglhs.org

SAVE THE DATE!

CGLHS Annual Membership Meeting and Tour & Talk

Fremont’s Hidden Historic Gardens

September 28, 2013

Come tour two off-the-beaten-path historic gardens in the City of Fremont as we explore the gardens of the Meyers sisters in Garin/Dry Creek Pioneer Regional Park and of the Shinn family at the Shinn Historic Park and Arboretum. Guest speakers will discuss the influence of Edith, Mildred, and Jeanette Meyers on the Bay Area School of Gardening, the processes of researching and designing the restoration of a historic garden, and of documenting a landscape for the Historic American Landscape Survey.

With its remnants of an early 20th-century cottage garden, the Meyers’ garden charms. And the Shinn garden surprises with its exquisite Japanese garden and century-old trees. A box lunch will be included and the day will end with a social happy hour to catch up with CGLHS friends old and new. Rooms will be reserved at the Sheraton Four Points in Pleasanton.

Detailed information will be emailed to members in August and posted on www.cglhs.org.

—Sarah Raube

Below: Shinn House (photo by David Laws, courtesy of northerncaliforniagardens.sutromedia.com)

Above: Linoleum block print of a California poppy by Henry Evans, 1918-1990 (photo by John McCoy, courtesy of Daily News Los Angeles)
Do you dare eat a peach? Yes, yes. Especially if it’s from the Masumoto Family Farm.

If such a luscious fruit is not at hand, well, then, don’t despair. The pleasures of mind and palate (can you imagine one without the other?) await when you pick up a book by David Mas Masumoto, the organic peach farmer who plows his stories on 80 hard-worked acres in Del Rey, California.

The Masumoto Family Farm in the San Joaquin Valley was founded by Mas Masumoto’s grandfather after World War II, when the family was liberated from its internment camp in Arizona.

The San Joaquin Valley was a very different place then.

In April the writer Verlyn Klinkenborg, a member of the editorial board of the New York Times, drove Interstate 5 through this valley but couldn’t see the Masumoto Family Farm or any of the other farms on the intimate Masumoto scale, as they are east of this mighty freeway. What Klinkenborg did see:

Every human imperfection linked to the word ‘farming’ has been erased. The rows are machined. The earth is molded…. This is no longer soil. It is infrastructure…. The vast regiments of nut and fruit trees… seem to defy the word ‘orchard’…. The entire valley has sunk in on itself over the years as the aquifer beneath it has been siphoned off.

No wonder that Mas Masumoto titled his 2009 book Wisdom of the Last Farmer (the first was Epitaph for a Peach, HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). He often feels he will be the last, and not only the last on his few acres.

The three Masumoto books I have read for this review are about the same “things” that life and work on 80 acres brings forth: trees, vines, weeds, tractors, shovels, storms, heat, cold, water, frost, sweat, dust, physical pain, labor, laborers, sunlight, starlight, soil, junk, plows, wildflowers, manure, mud, pruners, pruning, pests, perfectly timed harvests, plummeting prices, fruit brokers, the produce aisles, the lifelong search for the perfect peach.

Ten minutes of hail: destruction of the year’s labor.

So what would you do?

The Masumoto books are also about the other “things” that bear fruit on the farm: hope, luck, family, love, risk, faith, pleasure, awareness, gratitude, fear, the exquisite calibration of the five senses, and, most of all, intimacy. Intimacy with the physical world, intimacy with family and neighbors, intimacy I would venture to guess that few of his American readers have ever known.

David Mas Masumoto is often described by his reviewers and readers as a lyrical writer, as a poet-philosopher, and as “zen-like.” All of these are true, I suppose, although “zen-like” (without the bother of the capital letter) is troubling, as in this country the word Zen is applied equally to uncluttered decor, whitewashed walls, cucumber face cream, and restaurants trafficking in raw fish.

The Masumoto family is Buddhist, but to label the Mas Masumoto mind is to constrain it and in consequence limit our own experience of it as his sensibility unfolds through his writing.

He can see. It’s as simple as that. He can see himself seeing, and can see when he’s not seeing. From Four Seasons in Five Senses: “Panning the field, I can identify the familiar: trees, limbs, leaves, grasses, weeds, bare soil, wildflowers. I know I’m biased and at first see what I expect. I quickly want to assign names, limiting what I see to what I can identify.”

This is the mark of a contemplative mind.

But a realistic one: “The things we valued on the farm—hard work, right effort, simple honesty—didn’t seem to be worth much and didn’t help sell peaches or raisins.”

Of a summer in the early 1980s, he writes, “We all suffered terrible prices. I was angry and broken, wanting to get our damn peaches out of my sight. If I picked ripe—ten cents a pound to me. If I picked green—ten cents a pound to me. That summer I worked hard just to cover harvest expenses and offset a portion of the production costs of pruning, thinning, fertilizing, controlling pests, and irrigating. My year’s labor was donated…. I did learn that at times you had to accept market conditions and move on, because the most important thing was to survive so that you could have another harvest.”

Four Seasons in Five Senses is about the careful calibration, the fine-tuning of a life spent very much alive and laboring. Laboring. The greatest works of art in any medium change us. This book is no exception. Peaches, like great art, don’t meet the demands of “fast farming, fast turnover, fast profits and results.”

Wisdom of the Last Farmer is in the deepest human traditions of storytelling, the elevation of the what-happened to reveal meaning and love. Its main storyline revolves around the strokes of Mas Masumoto’s father, the lifelong farmer. His illnesses bring to the forefront questions of Mas Masumoto’s own survival and the survival of the farm.

How well can one know and love the land, one’s most intimate place? And how well can one know and love the father, one’s second most intimate starting place?

Mas Masumoto was writing of his sansei generation of Japanese Americans when he wrote this—but isn’t it the story of many other Americans? “We created our own diaspora. We [have] lost the language of home and heritage,” he writes.

However, it appears that Nikiko Masumoto, coauthor with her parents of the latest written labor of the Masumoto family, The Perfect Peach: Recipes and Stories from the Masumoto Family Farm (Ten Speed Press, June 2013), may well be the fourth-generation Masumoto farmer on their 80 acres.

Now in her late twenties, Nikiko labors with her father, who has written about her inheritance: “In spite of the financial uncertainties and insecurities, it seems she has also inherited our love—love of the farm, love of work, love of peaches, and even the real price of their perfection.”

Photos by Staci Valentine from The Perfect Peach: Recipes and Stories from the Masumoto Family Farm (courtesy of 10 Speed Press, 2013)

Notes:

Verlyn Klinkenborg’s editorial essay on the San Joaquin Valley: www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/opinion/sunday/lost-in-the-geometry-of-california-farms.html

To read the U.S. Geological Survey’s study “San Joaquin Valley, California: Largest Human Alteration of the Earth’s Surface”: pubs.usgs.gov/circ/circ1182/pdfl06SanJoaquinValley.pdf
An Interview with Mas Masumoto

Paula Panich
Paula M. Panich: “I farm stories; my main story is about trying to grow the perfect peach,” you write in *Wisdom of the Last Farmer*.

Mas Masumoto: It’s almost a mantra for small, sustainable organic farmers. We don’t do it for money. Farming stories means you bring in the entire complex—working with nature, the land, the family, the larger social issue of the history of the farmworkers, their wages, and one’s own personal legacy, the history of my grandparents coming from Japan.

Q. Was it difficult to publish your first book (Epitaph for a Peach)? That is, making an essentially private act of writing in a journal suddenly public?

A. It was a huge decision. Farmers work independently, individually, privately. You’re surrounded by hundreds of plants, not people. To allow a personal and private life to go public was a big decision for me and the family. We are, after all, a family farm.

As a writer, though, you want to strike a nerve with personal thoughts and interests, and you do that by revealing yourself. You want to connect with your audience, your readers.

As farmers, you don’t really connect except vicariously through your produce…but the whole story of farming has evolved. There’s transparency now. People are interested in food safety. More and more consumers are interested in the backstory of food. The small family farm is well positioned for this.

Q. You have written in *Wisdom of the Last Farmer*: “[Our farm] stands for the relationship between good food, good stewardship of the land, great love for the natural world and the continuity of life.” And I would add great generosity.

A. There’s a constant and terrifying and wonderful dichotomy in our world: the notion of change. Part of me wants to keep this land exactly the same as it has come down to me. But, for example, the path of the high-speed rail line will cut through the heart of the Central Valley. This will happen. Accepting this is a part of change. The high-speed rail will connect rural and urban California, for good and for bad. It’s good to have this pair of opposites.

People will see a very different kind of agriculture from what they see on Interstate 5. They’ll see smaller farms and far more diverse agriculture. The train will provide a window with a new view of the work we do.

The train will be about ten miles west of those of us in Del Rey. Of course if the path of the train was proposed to cross through the heart of my farm, I would feel differently! But it will come close enough.

It was interesting two years ago when I went to Japan. A high-speed rail line now connects its southernmost island, Kyushu, a very agrarian place not unlike the Central Valley of California, to the mainland. It creates an interesting dynamic, this island now connected to the rest of Japan.

Now we will have rural California—this “other” California—connected by train.

Q. A sad, poignant note from your book *Four Seasons in Five Senses* describes how you remember a twenty-pound box of peaches selling for two dollars in 1961 and for two dollars in 2001.

A. We must recognize the challenges of the economic forces of what we do. At the same time, that’s not why we do it. It’s a paradox, a dilemma, two forces not working together. But it’s this very interface of life that brings action. If I farmed just for money, or just for aesthetics—that would be one thing. But it’s the median point—the in-between place—that brings the most flavor to life, the dynamic. And from this place I get energy and passion. It’s a challenge and a curse, but at the same time, it brings fantastic joy.

Q. Please tell us about your latest book, *The Perfect Peach: Recipes and Stories from the Masumoto Family Farm*, written with your wife, Marcy Masumoto, and your daughter, Nikiko Masumoto.

A. It’s a peach cookbook, with 20 essays and 50 recipes, along with photographs. My wife and daughter wrote the headnotes and so forth to the recipes, and I wrote the essays.

It’s a literary cookbook about the farm and our peaches connected to recipes. So it’s not just about peaches in recipes, but also about the relationship of the recipes to death, sweat—and much else. How will all of that add flavor to a recipe for peach preserves?

We make all sides come together. We cannot separate the flavors: They are in all of our stories.

Note: David Mas Masumoto’s replies to questions in this May 7, 2013, telephone interview are not direct quotations. Rather, they are summarized responses, as per Mr. Masumoto’s request.
FRESNO FROLIC RECAP

Two-and-a-half-days, six gardens, an underground aerie, two parks (Hanford's Square as well as Kearney Park), a gallery, two receptions, and the chaotic A.J.'s Restaurant—we have been privileged to experience just a few of the Central Valley's inimitable riches.

Phoebe Cutler

1. An improvement over the Penney's, Denny's, and Taco Bells that led us here, but, still, not exactly promising (photo of the entrance to the Forestiere Gardens by Leslie Comras Aiken).
2. Then the heat, the noise, the clamor...dis-sipate as we descend (photo by Virginia Kean).
3. With the peace, the fragrance of orange blossoms, one begins to understand how Baldassare Forestiere could have abandoned his aboveground abode to move fulltime to his ever-expanding, subterranean labyrinth (photo by Leslie Comras Aiken).
4 & 5. Upon his death in 1943, Baldassare's large Sicilian family warred over his 10 acres both above and below ground, causing the site to be shut for many years. But today it is open and two guides are going to show us a small but select portion of the more than 100 chambers. Louise Sampson (partially hidden), Victoria Dillon, Norma Frey, Nancy Cope-land, Leslie Aiken, Phoebe Cutler, and (behind) Joyce Marlier, and Cindy Jelinek wait to see his bedroom, kitchen, bath, and his multi-variety citrus and grape vines, all ascending to the light (photos by Virginia Kean and Leslie Comras Aiken).
6. It is equally possible to live well above ground in Fresno. Wines, fruits and nuts of the locale and gracious living in the Fig Garden area have a salubrious effect on Louise Sampson, Bea Pixa, and Rosemarie Farrant (photo by Leslie Comras Aiken).
7. In kind with Leslie Comras Aiken, we immediately bond with landscape architect and third-generation Fresno native Bob Boro, our host for the evening and for the next two days (photo by Jean Von Berg).
8. Bob's friends and clients John and Jolene
Telles have trustingly left him and us their house and grounds for the evening (photo by Jean Von Berg).

9. Our host at work on dessert in his own house in the 1920s and ’30s Tower District (photo by Leslie Comras Aiken).

10 & 11. We caravan 20 miles south to the Kings County seat of Hanford and the Clark Center for Japanese Art, founded by Elizabeth and Willard G. “Bill” Clark, for a private tour of their garden and fabled art collection (photos by Leslie Comras Aiken).

12. Exiting the stroll garden designed by Mr. Kodo Matsubara, we just catch sight of Mrs. Clark in her golf cart disappearing through one of the two Torii gates. A passing freight train completes this scene of cultural fusion in the Central Valley (photo by Jean Von Berg).

13. The promotional material for this tour promised a century-old olive allée. Amidst a scene of picnickers, ballplayers, and a wedding, Fresno’s 19th-century Kearney Park delivers (photo by Leslie Comras Aiken).

14. Back in the Fig Garden, Peggy Darnall, Marlea Graham, and Bob have discovered a resident hermit, apparently inspired by the Orient, lurking behind a variegated tobira in the Levy/Perrachi garden designed by Helen Van Pelt (photo by Leslie Comras Aiken).

15. With its clipped hedges and five signature Italian cypress, Helen Van Pelt’s bold c. 1935 design for Bob’s aunt and uncle inspires us all, as if they were newlyweds (photo by Jean Von Berg).

16. Bob carried Van Pelt’s Franco-Italian style into his plan for the garden of John and Rebecca McGregor, our last stop for the day before a rousing meal at one of Fresno’s most popular (but, it has to be conceded, not one of its most organized) Armenian eateries. All is forgiven when, fortuitously, the house wine is “Cutler Creek,” one of Central Valley’s haut labels (photo by Leslie Comras Aiken).

17 & 18. As impressive as they are, the homes of Fresno’s most elegant residential neighborhood did not prepare us for the wonder of Bill and Lyse Van Beurdens’ intensively gardened 9 acres in neighboring Clovis. Not one, but several allées, shrubbery, a redwood glade, a pool, a pond, a wine cellar, a stream, and fully blooming tulips and azaleas emerge, miraculously, out of dusty ranchland. Best of all, its chief creator narrates the tale of how he, via the Netherlands, Indonesia, and a Japanese prison-of-war camp, happened to fall decades ago in this unlikely corner of the world (photos by Leslie Comras Aiken and Jean Von Berg).
San Francisco landscape architect Horace Cotton's most famous work, Brookdale Lodge in the Santa Cruz Mountains, was unique for its time. Despite this, aspects of his life and work are shrouded in mystery. One of many Californians whose careers were blighted by two World Wars and the Great Depression, Cotton wrote only a few articles for professional publications, and most of his commissions were for private residences.

Cotton was born in 1891 in Portuguese West Africa. His missionary parents, the Reverend Henry A. and Gertrude Jacobs Cotton, left Chicago for West Africa the day after their marriage, but returned to the United States after Horace's birth. By 1900 the couple was divorced. Horace, his older brother William, and younger sister Helen lived with their mother in Wisconsin, where Horace attended Ripon College Preparatory School. In 1910 Mrs. Cotton and the children were living in Pullman, Washington, and Horace was studying horticulture at Washington State College. Cotton transferred in 1913 to the newly formed Division of Landscape Gardening and Floriculture at the University of California, Berkeley, where he graduated in 1915. His thesis was titled "The Landscape Development of the Panama Pacific International Exposition at San Francisco and the Panama California Exposition at San Diego."

According to his 1917 draft card, Cotton was working as a farm superintendent for the Curtis Construction Company in Diablo, Contra Costa County. But in 1918 he enrolled as a lieutenant in the fledgling Army Air Service and was wounded in France, losing the sight in one eye. Immediately following his discharge, Cotton established the firm of Cotton & Company, Landscape Architects, with an office in San Francisco and a branch in Fresno. In Fresno, he was hired as the landscape architect for Edison Technical School and Theodore Roosevelt High School and worked on the Fig Garden tract, a large residential subdivision.

Cotton entered a competition with architect George M. Cantrell for the landscape design of San Francisco's Aquatic Park in 1920. Theirs was one of two winning designs, but neither was ever executed as drawn. Instead, the committee decided to merge the best-liked aspects of each into one new plan. In 1923 Cotton returned to the San Joaquin Valley, where he designed the landscape for Hanford High School and collaborated on the design of Merced's Bear Creek Park with UC Berkeley Professor John W. Gregg as consulting engineer.

In May 1927, Cotton was completing the estate of William Cavalier in Piedmont. Architect & Engineer reported that that “large old olive trees, and twenty-five and thirty-year-old specimens from an old estate in Oakland are being used to produce a mature and mellow effect.” In that same year, however, the San Francisco telephone directory no longer had a listing for Cotton & Company, only for “Horace G. Cotton, landscape architect,” so the firm may not have been prospering. At the time, Cotton was married to Verne E. Sheppach, and by 1930 they were living with her mother and sister at the latter’s Berkeley residence. In 1932 Cotton completed plans for a Memorial Park in Petaluma, and in 1933 he landscaped the home of W.E. Jason Jr. in Hillsborough.

The creation of the first landscape plan for Marin Junior College (later College of Marin) was perhaps Cotton's most important public work. Since 1928, the college had been located on the grounds of the former Butler estate in Kentfield, which was famous for its view of Mount Tamalpais and an arboretum-like collection of trees. However, this commission seems to have received little publicity. Around this time Cotton moved to Hillsborough where he lived and worked until his death, but no further documentation of his professional work has been found. He served again in World War II as commanding officer of the Hamilton Field sub-depot. Horace Cotton died in San Mateo, California, on December 8, 1972.

Cotton's idiosyncratic design for Brookdale Lodge, with its employment of rustic landscape elements as interior design, was novel for its day. In "Unique Lodge in Santa Cruz Mountains," a 1924 article in Architect & Engineer, Frederick Jennings wrote:

The outstanding feature is the mountain stream running through the dining room...taking advantage of the naturally beautiful fern covering banks, mossy boulders and running water...The terraces are held in place by huge granite boulders...A tree was pulled up by the roots and thrown across the creek just below the bridge, thus damming the water and creating a fall of about five feet. For a stretch of seventy feet through the middle of the room the creek passes in its natural state, six feet wide with...
In Rockhaven, his own home on the San Francisco Peninsula, Cotton incorporated trees and rough rock walls into the rooms and actually dynamited a hole in a rock cliff so that one entire room could be built inside it. Both Rockhaven and Brookdale reflected Cotton’s intense love of nature and a belief that nature should be an essential part of one’s daily existence.

Endnotes:
1. Brookdale Lodge was remodeled in 1956 following a fire that destroyed the dining room. In 1993, a ‘sympathetic restoration’ was reportedly under way, but the lodge is currently closed to the public.
2. Cotton employed at least two women as draftsmen in his San Francisco office in 1920. Both were Berkeley graduates: Willa Clair Cloys (1916) and Theodosia Todd (1920).
3. The Cottons had no children and divorced c. 1934. Horace remarried c. 1940 but had no children.
4. Peninsula Life published an article about Cotton’s home in 1947. In “Burlingame Cliff Dweller,” Myrtle Cook Gillespie wrote: “After Mr. Cotton built Brookdale, he wasn’t satisfied to live in an ordinary dwelling with four plaster or wood walls. He wanted a home built in a rock… wanted the trees, the earth and the sky brought right into his living room.”

In 1910 James Clayton Forkner acquired an option to purchase 6,000 acres of land in Fresno County for agricultural and residential development, aiming to create “not simply a place to live, but a place to live better.” By 1912, Forkner owned 12,000 acres and set to work leveling the land, laying out streets, and bringing water to the area with a series of canals and irrigation ditches. After consulting with Edward J. Wickson, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station program at the University of California, Berkeley, Forkner planted orchards of the Kadota fig to provide a good living for his potential clients.

In 1919 Forkner hired Horace Cotton to create a landscape plan for the Forkner-Giffen Fig Garden Estates #1, now known as “Old Fig.” Forkner promised Cotton that for every 10 fig trees he planted, one ornamental tree or shrub would be planted on the tract’s avenues or in its parks. Thus Old Fig was eventually planted with 600,000 fig trees and some 60,000 landscape plants. In a letter to the editor of the Fresno Bee (March 13, 1944), Cotton gave Forkner full credit for his vision and tenacity: “If it were not for Forkner’s… wholehearted cooperation with regard to the beautification plans I prepared, the project would have become just another quick turnover real estate deal.”

In his plans for Old Fig’s boulevards, Cotton selected four varieties of non-native trees for their hardiness under conditions similar to Fresno’s: the cork oak (Quercus suber) from Spain; the olive (Olea europaea) from the Mediterranean; the pink flowering gum (Corymbia ficifolia) from Australia; and deodar cedars (Cedrus deodora) from the Himalayan mountains. The most famous of Old Fig’s tree-lined streets is Van Ness Boulevard, which is planted with deodars. A year after they were planted, Mrs. W.P. Winning began decorating hers at Christmas as a memorial to her deceased son. Others took up the practice and by 1930 the tradition of Fresno’s Christmas Tree Lane was firmly established. Today more than 300 decorated trees extend for over 1.5 miles.

Most of Old Fig’s original street trees are doing well, according to a 2012 survey by the Davey Resource Group. Olive trees were not mentioned in the report, and may not have survived in enough numbers to be considered significant. Deodar cedars line not only Van Ness Boulevard, but also Garland, Fedora, and Daytona Avenues. The cork oak is found on Gettysburg Avenue and Buckingham Way. On Rialto, Saginaw, and Pontiac Avenues, the manna gum (Eucalyptus viminalis) predominates; however, since this is not a “pink-flowering gum” (Cotton’s plan specifies Eucalyptus leucoxylon rosea), it may not be one of the originally planted species. Plantings of a single specimen were continued in other parts of the district: the Arizona cypress on Sussex Way, camphor trees (Cinnamomum camphora) on Swift Avenue, and the California pepper tree (Schinus molle) on Indianapolis Avenue. And, of course, many fig trees still flourish in streets and backyards.

Old Fig, one of the oldest of Fresno’s residential districts, is still largely intact and was designated a historic district in 2010. With its large lots (the minimum was 12,500 square feet) and tree-lined streets, it was meant to enhance the “Garden Home” life style. A county moratorium on split lots has helped maintain the neighborhood’s integrity, and the homeowners association has resisted commercial rezoning and any street widening that would entail destruction of the street trees.

—Marlea Graham
National treasures sometimes come in small packages. They're delightful... but oh so easy to lose. So it is with a private garden of antique roses that colors and scents a gentle 2.5-acre slope in Sebastopol, California.

Some 3,500 different rose varieties are collected here on a plot with a sweeping vista of the Coast Range. They span the entire history of the rose. One finds many of the ancient wild or "species" roses here, as well as old Albas, Gallicas, Damasks and Moss roses, some of which Caesar and Shakespeare knew. The collection is especially rich in China, Tea roses and Hybrid Perpetuals, which bear romantic and mysterious names that reflect the French 19th-century mania for roses grown by Empress Josephine at her chateau at Malmaison. Finally, of course, there are Hybrid Teas bred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—many of them impossible to buy or even find today.

Gregg Lowery and his partner, Phillip Robinson, painstakingly gathered this collection over 30 years. They hunted for roses in old cemeteries, farms, homesteads, and nurseries. Then they undertook the painstaking research needed to identify the foundlings. In 1984, somewhat early in their years of collecting, they established a nursery on the state highway leading to Sebastopol. Vintage Gardens, as they named it, enabled them to earn a living off their passion and sustain their prodigious assemblage of plants.

Many public gardens contain far more roses. Yet despite its small footprint, the collection at Vintage Gardens is unmatched anywhere in North America in the scope of its diversity. Only the collection at the Europa-Rosarium Sangerhausen in Germany matches it.

"It’s the most comprehensive collection of roses of all types of classes," says Stephen Scanniello, author of 20 books about roses and former curator of roses at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in New York. "Nothing has been assembled like it in any public garden or private garden in the world, with the exception of Sangerhausen. Vintage Gardens has helped restock many old rose gardens that have been destroyed by disease or lost to changing tastes. A decade ago, curators of the Hearst Castle in San Simeon drew from Vintage Gardens to restore the garden of Hybrid Tea roses chosen by William Randolph Hearst in collaboration with his architect, Julia Morgan. Planted in the 1920s and ‘30s at the Castle, most of these roses had been out of commerce for a half-century.

“Our garden could restore every significant garden of historic roses in the country. On that level it is unique and very special,” Lowery asserts. “There isn’t anything else like it.” On an aesthetic and cultural level, roses have entwined
themselves with human history more than any other flower, and the collection in Sebastopol “is a record of human endeavor and passion,” he says. “It’s a gene bank of human creation.”

It is also in danger. Vintage Gardens had to shut down its roadside location in 2006. And its mail-order business will close at the end of 2013. Competition from big box stores, the recession and, to some extent, the waning of interest in older roses have put the endeavor down for the count. And the collection has suffered accordingly. Blackberries are suffocating parts of the garden, and pocket gophers have chewed away the roots of many plants. The collection, which at one time or another has harbored 5,000 varieties of roses, is badly in need of an inventory.

In 2011 Lowery (Robinson moved on to other interests several years ago) was within 20 days of losing the property to foreclosure when some friends stepped in. They purchased the site and agreed to lease the garden for $1 a year to a group of former customers and friends who call themselves Friends of Vintage Roses. The group, formed in 2012, now owns the collection and is seeking nonprofit status to raise money to preserve the trove that Lowery and Robinson assembled. For now, donations may be sent to the Heritage Rose Foundation at www.heritagerosefoundation.org.

In addition to harboring genetic material that could one day prove useful, Lowery’s roses are windows into human history. On tours of the garden, Lowery often speaks of people and events that were notable when a particular rose arrived on the scene. “He’ll tell you that this rose was popular when Mozart was composing,” says Scanniello, and in his view, the roses of Sebastopol “are heirlooms and pieces of social history, museum pieces… they are van Goghs.”

Andre Stepankowsky is an award-winning writer and city editor of The Daily News of Longview, Washington. He tends two rose gardens and lectures about roses old and new.

Opposite: Madame Plantier’, an 1835 Hybrid Noisette bred in Lyon, France, by Plantier. Of the 5,000 roses that Gregg Lowery has collected, this deliciously fragrant, nearly pure white rose is his favorite. Above: The white climber ‘Lamarque’, an 1830 Tea-Noisette, also from France, scrambling up a pergola in Lowery’s Sebastopol garden. Above Inset: Gregg Lowery.

Photos by Anastasia Stepankowsky
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Eden: the Journal of the California Garden & Landscape History Society (ISSN 1524-8062) is published four times a year (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall) by the California Garden & Landscape History Society.

Editor: Virginia Kean

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Graphic Design: designSimple.com

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We have simplified our membership procedures by putting all dues on an
annual instead of quarterly basis, beginning July 1, 2013.

PITSCHEL PRIZE 2013

Winners of the 2nd Annual Pitschel Prize
Above (left to right): Zann Cannon Goff, 3rd prize;
Veronica Voss, 1st prize; Judith Taylor, MD, Pitschel Prize founder; Nichole Davis, 2nd prize.
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