

OUTSTANDING AMERICAN GARDENS: A Celebration. 25 Years of the Garden Conservancy. By Page Dickey. (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2015) 272 pp; illus. \$50.00/£30.00.

RESCUING EDEN: Preserving America's Historic Gardens. By Caroline Seebohm. (Monacelli Press, 2015) 224 pp; illus. \$50.00/£40.

It's not often that two stellar books on a similar topic land on my desk on the same day. Not since the publication of Tim Richardson's majestic *Great Gardens of America* (Frances Lincoln, 2009) has there been a book, let alone two, that seriously considers American gardens. While there is some overlap between the two, each has its own focus. *Outstanding American Gardens* and *Rescuing Eden* take us well beyond familiar gardens such as Dumbarton Oaks, Filoli, Longwood Gardens and Monticello to another level that encompasses the preservation of historic gardens and the ever-growing number of worthy private gardens.

Outstanding American Gardens documents gardens from the viewpoint of America's premier national organisation devoted to the preservation of gardens, an activity for which there is no one equivalent in Britain. Their mission to identify significant private gardens and assist in their preservation in perpetuity is supported through private funding and proceeds from their popular Open Days garden-visiting programme. Modelled on Britain's National Garden Scheme, the Garden Conservancy's Open Days invites thousands of owners to throw open their gardens to the public, usually for just one day a year. They vary from modest gardens (such as my own on Martha's Vineyard) to large contemporary estates. The Conservancy was founded by Anne and Frank Cabot, who early on recognised the importance of Ruth Bancroft's exceptional succulent garden in California and founded the organisation in 1989 to raise awareness about such places. As it grew, the Bancroft garden and other significant private properties benefitted from essential strategic planning advice to help sustain them. The rest is history, as so beautifully presented in this book's sampling of fifty representative gardens, both historic and private.

It is a lavish publication that celebrates the Conservancy's preservation projects as well as shining a light on a selection of private gardens nationwide over the past twenty-five years. It is skillfully edited by Page Dickey, co-founder of the Open Days programme and the author of several books about gardens, including a previous one of her own, *Duck Hill*. It is a delight to behold, from its handsome design to the beautifully illustrated spreads on individual gardens, all photographed to perfection by Marion Brenner.

Among the eight preservation projects (all open to the public) is Pearl Fryar's amazing topiary garden in rural South Carolina, the work of a visionary gardener who transformed his suburban lot into a clipped fantasy. One of the Conservancy's most unusual projects was the rehabilitation of the historic gardens on Alcatraz, a once-barren island in San Francisco Bay that formerly housed a maximum-security prison with the likes of Al Capone in residence. Years later, when it was turned over to the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, it was little more than an echo of its former days as a military prison. Plants dating to the military era, such as extinct roses and swaths of Mediterranean plant species, abounded. Thanks to its restoration, Alcatraz is now a major tourist destination.

Each of the privately owned gardens featured in this book represents the artistic talent of its creator, such as the former ice-skating champion Dick Button, whose delightful garden is aptly called *Ice Pond Farm*. It includes a picturesque body of water in a woodland glade, with a long vista through the high grass that leads to a rustic farm gate and field beyond. It is filled with follies and busts. *Bird Haven Farm* in New Jersey progresses from a walled terrace with a box-enclosed kitchen garden to informal rambles through farmyards and fields, brilliantly designed by Fernando Caruncho. The garden at *Hooverness*, on Fishers Island overlooking the Long Island Sound, predates a modern glasshouse built on the footprint of the old house that was destroyed by fire. Tom Armstrong, a former museum director, called the garden his 'ultimate creative endeavor . . . after years of helping others realize the rewards of art, I have been able to create my own work of art.' When Bill Noble, former director of

preservation projects for the Conservancy, came to create his own garden in rural Vermont, he drew inspiration from the renowned Cornish Art Colony (New Hampshire), where many of America's most famous artists once resided. Using a popular Cornish design device, he planted a range of Lombardy poplars to visually divide the flower-filled garden from the fields and hills beyond.

In picturesque Charleston, South Carolina, Ben and Cindy Lenhardt designed a classic, historically-inspired garden in keeping with their eighteenth-century townhouse. Small spaces are divided by varying elevations and closely planted with box parterres with an espaliered *Magnolia grandiflora* covering the wall of the kitchen house. It is one of the most delightful gardens I've ever visited and is maintained to perfection. In the Midwest, John Bryan's Crab Tree Farm is one of the best. Ravines and woodland walks filled with follies contrast with a restored parterre garden designed by Ellen Shipman. Phoenix, Arizona, is the setting for an exceptional succulent garden on the edge of the Sonoran Desert. Native mesquite, palo verde, brittlebush and other desert trees and shrubs thrive in the hot, dry climate where shade and water are treasured. California, of course, abounds with modern gardens, including Suzanne Kayne's in Santa Monica, designed by Wirtz International to replace a traditional English-style country garden. To add cachet, they engaged the visionary light artist James Turrell to replace the traditional wisteria pergola with a light pavilion for nocturnal drama.

Outstanding American Gardens is a rare opportunity to take a peek at some of America's most innovative new gardens that clearly show the diversity of climate, traditions, and design talent across the country. It will especially enlighten British garden-lovers as to the delights awaiting them across the pond. In tandem with the Garden Conservancy's book, *Rescuing Eden* is an equally attractive book with photographs by noted landscape and garden photographer Curtice Taylor and text by Caroline Seebohm. While there is some overlap, most notably Alcatraz (which appears on the jacket), the book presents a finely-honed selection that should be on everyone's list of gardens to visit. As the photographer notes, the impetus for the book began decades ago when he photographed an iconic Russell

Page garden in the 1970s, only to see it destroyed years later.

Arranged chronologically, from Colonial days and the Gilded Age to the best of contemporary gardens, it features the famous historic examples, such as Middleton Place, as well as newer ones that are not so well known outside this country. One of the best in the latter category (and one of my favourites) is Hollister House Garden in Connecticut, which is also included in the Garden Conservancy book. Created by George Schoellkopf, a former American antiques specialist in New York, it resonates with his life-long studies of Great Dixter, Sissinghurst and Hidcote, but is translated into an American idiom and setting. It is an exquisite garden consisting of 'rooms' with a sophisticated selection of plants, textures and colour themes, which Schoellkopf has mastered. Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is 'one of the most brilliant gardens in the United States', to quote Seebohm.

I was delighted to find one of my favourite gardens, the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site in New Hampshire, included in the success stories of preservation. In existence for more than a hundred years, it was once the home of the renowned American sculptor, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, founder of the famed aforementioned Cornish Art Colony. After his death his home and studio were donated to the National Park Service (somewhat akin to Britain's National Trust) and over many years the gardens were brought back to life. It offers a rare opportunity to see a garden with a formal layout as a setting for the sculptor's work. Along the same lines is the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, Connecticut (another artists' colony), probably the most famous artist's garden in America with unmistakable echoes of Giverny.

In addition to country gardens, there are examples of large estate gardens that have been transformed into museums or other institutions, such as the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens in Jacksonville, Florida, which boasts historic gardens by Ellen Shipman and the Olmsted firm. In the pantheon of great Gilded Age estates, Untermyer Park and Gardens in Yonkers, New York, is one of the most significant. Until recently the property was allowed to decay and was all but doomed. Fortunately it has now been lovingly re-

stored to its former glory, replete with temples and water gardens.

One of America's most widely admired gardens is Innisfree in Millbrook, New York. Created by Walter Beck (the owner) in collaboration with Lester Collins (designer); it is a masterpiece of informal gardens stretching over a hundred and eighty-five acres of rolling hills, lakes, fields and forest. The stonework and ornamental details are inspired by Asian artists, whom Beck was studying at the time. Asian plants and artefacts appear in Beatrix Farrand's last garden at Garland Farm in Mount Desert, Maine. Recently restored by the Beatrix Farrand Society, it is a tiny jewel in a rural setting. Another jewel is Madoo, the late Bob Dash's garden on Long Island. An artist and a poet, Dash created a garden filled with brilliant colour, robust plantings, and artistically clipped trees. Now renamed the Madoo Conservancy, this property, like many others in the book, supports itself with visitor programmes.

Both these books need to be savoured to understand the full story on the breadth of America's heritage and contemporary gardens. While *Rescuing Eden* focuses on twenty-eight preservation successes, *Outstanding American Gardens* provides a wealth of new private gardens. Each is well written and illustrated and should be on the shelves of all garden-lovers worldwide.

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