

American Book Notes

JUDITH B. TANKARD

Barbara Paul Robinson's latest book, *Heroes of Horticulture: Americans Who Transformed the Landscape* (David R. Godine, \$40), celebrates some of America's most important public gardens seen through the eyes of their creators and custodians, many of whom may be unfamiliar to British garden lovers. The foundation of the book rests with leaders of the Garden Conservancy, America's foremost preservation organisation which sponsors the nationwide Open Days Program. Chief among these heroes is the founder, Frank Cabot, whose gardens at Stonecrop in New York and Les Quatre Vents in La Malbaie, Quebec, are well-known. Cabot had a knack for assembling a team to transform his vision of the Conservancy in 1989



Dan Hinkley, 'plantsman extraordinaire', from *Heroes of Horticulture*.

into a reality. The team consisted of the late Tom Armstrong, art collector and former museum director and Antonia Adezio, who directed the organisation for many years. The core of the book, however, is devoted to the people who made public gardens more visible, such as Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, saviour of New York City's Central Park (more later on that subject) and Lynden B. Miller, an artist-turned-gardener whose work can be seen at the Conservancy Garden at Central Park, the New York Botanic Garden, Bryant Park and her own garden in Connecticut. Other heroes who are profiled include Gregory Long [see HORTUS 126], long-time director of the New York Botanical Garden; Betty Scholtz, former director of the Brooklyn Botanical Garden; Marco Polo Stufano, an art historian-turned-gardener who transformed Wave Hill in the Bronx; and Stephen Byrns, who singlehandedly resurrected the Untermyer Gardens in Yonkers, New York, famed for its Persian water garden and elaborate structures.

Robinson also presents some of America's remarkable plantsmen, including Dan Hinkley, Pierre Bennerup and Tony Avent. The book concludes with two major garden creators whose work should be better known abroad: George Schoellkopf of Hollister House and John G. Fairey of Peckerwood. Robinson's delightful book is sure to whet anyone's appetite for the diversity of American gardens, garden-makers, and plantspeople who deserve to be better known.



One of the most anticipated new books of the season is Linda Jane Holden's *The Gardens of Bunny Mellon*, with photographs by Roger Foley (Vendome, \$60). Rachel ('Bunny') Lambert Mellon (1910–2014) wisely used her vast fortune (an heiress in her own right as well as the wife of Paul Mellon) to create remarkable family gardens and those for her intimate circle of friends, such as the Kennedy family. Her fame rests on the White House Rose Garden, which she designed at the request of President John Kennedy, and later the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden, the John F. Kennedy Grave Site, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. Each of her homes in Vir-



Central Park, New York City, 'saved' by Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, from *Heroes of Horticulture*. See also page 95.

ginia, New York City, Cape Cod, Nantucket, France, and Antigua bears the mark of her impeccable taste and talent for collaboration. For the Mellon townhouse on East 70th Street in New York City, for example, she collaborated with the landscape architect Percy Wheeler and worked with John Fowler and his protégée, Imogen Taylor, on the interiors. Her masterpiece, however, is Oak Spring Garden in Upperville, Virginia, now a private foundation (Oak Spring Garden Foundation) that oversees the estate and sponsors scholarly programmes. The centrepiece is the Oak Spring Garden Library which contains Bunny's vast rare book and botanical collection. The English-inspired parterre gardens at Oak Spring consist of a series of rooms enclosed by the main house, guest quarters, and other buildings, such as the Basket House. The estate also includes acres of farmland and bucolic pastures. Holden's book is a worthy tribute to a remarkable woman – a gardener, artist, and collector – whose accomplishments until now have been little known. A good companion to this book is Meryl Gordon's *Bunny Mellon: A Life of an American Style Legend* (Grand Central Publishing, \$28).



Returning to the theme of public gardens, visitors to New York City as well as armchair readers will find Jane Garmey's *City Green: Public Gardens of New York*, with photographs by Mick Hales (Mona-celli Press, \$50) an attractive guide. The city boasts Central Park, the High Line and Russell Page's intimate garden at the Frick Collection (now under threat), but there's so much more. At the top of the list is Michael Van Valkenburgh's Brooklyn Bridge Park, created from a former industrial shipping and storage complex on the East River waterfront. The park follows the river for almost a mile with ornamental plantings and woodland areas interspersed with playgrounds. The gardens are exceptionally beautiful as well as a welcome addition to a somewhat isolated community. Another new 'must-see' is Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park on the tip of Roosevelt Island. Originally designed in 1973 by legendary architect Louis I. Kahn and landscape architect Harriet Pattison, the memorial has only recently been completed to much acclaim.

Another important garden is the World Trade Center Memorial Garden, a minimalist garden of trees in an open plaza surrounding the 9/11 memorial designed by Michael Arad and landscape architect, Peter Walker. For history buffs, nothing surpasses the medieval gardens at the Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park, the Chinese Scholar's Garden on Staten Island, the Peggy Rockefeller Rose Garden at the New York Botanical Garden, and the Shakespeare Garden in Central Park. In between are the tiny open spaces such as Paley Park and Madison Square Park in Manhattan. And don't forget Battery Park on the southernmost tip of Manhattan. It was revitalised at the suggestion of Elizabeth Barlow Rogers and is now a masterpiece by the Dutch plantsman, Piet Oudolf.



There have been many books on Central Park, from glossy picture books to serious history tomes, befitting for one of the most famous parks in America. Elizabeth Barlow Rogers' new book, *Saving Central Park: A History and a Memoir* (Knopf, \$30), adds a new chapter. It's basically a personal memoir of how she as a young woman – a college graduate and a young mother living in New York City – became fascinated with saving one of New York's most famous green spaces which, over the years, had seen unwelcome changes by various mayors and one notorious city planner. In 1980 she launched the Central Park Conservancy which worked closely with the City of New York to implement changes and educate the public as to the importance of this masterpiece of urban park planning. As she writes, 'By the time I left office at the end of 1995, the Conservancy had put slightly more than \$100 million of private money into the park [and] today that total has grown to \$1 billion.' It now attracts forty-two million visitors annually. At its lowest point, the park suffered from too much automobile traffic, deteriorating buildings and structures, inappropriate new attractions, poor maintenance, and unsafe conditions. Rogers' detailed discussion of the history (both good and bad) of the park is a lesson in traversing (and conquering) bureaucracy. It's a delightful and eye-opening read.



One of the most magnificent books to be published this year is Staci L. Catron and Mary Ann Eaddy's *Seeking Eden: A Collection of Georgia's Historic Gardens*, with photographs by James R. Lockhart (University of Georgia Press, \$49.95). It features a selection of gardens and landscapes that were included in the classic *The Garden History of Georgia, 1733–1933*, edited by Hattie C. Rainwater and recently reprinted by University of Georgia Press. Extending to more than four hundred and fifty pages, this large-format book details two dozen gardens stretching from Atlanta to Savannah, all illustrated with contemporary photographs. The gardens and landscapes, both public and private, date from the mid-eighteenth century to the Country Place period of the early twentieth century. They stretch from the Antebellum era to a rare Arts and Crafts garden. In coastal areas of the state, informal stands of majestic live oaks, such as those at Wormsloe and Wormsloe State Historic Site in Georgia's Lowcountry, balance the trim boxwood parterres in historic inland gardens. Some that were designed by landscape architects are of national significance, such as the ravine garden at the Bradley estate in Columbus designed by the Olmsted Brothers (one of fourteen designs by the firm in the state). Landscape architect Warren Manning (who trained in the Olmsted office) created an extraordinary example of a Country Place era estate at Millpond Plantation. Possibly the best-known garden in the book is Swan House in Buckhead (near Atlanta), designed by the Country Place architect Philip Trammell Shutze, who took his inspiration from formal Italian gardens. Undoubtedly, one of the best-preserved gardens in Georgia is the Hills and Dales Estate located seventy miles south-west of Atlanta. The book includes extensive notes, a bibliography and complete listing of gardens documented through the Georgia Historic Landscape Initiative. This impeccably researched volume is a treasure trove for historians and it is hoped that it will be a role model for other states to follow.



Far from the leafy oasis of Central Park and from East Coast gardens imbued with historicism is a new book on regional gardens

of the West. Caren Yglesias' book, *Desert Gardens of Steve Martino*, with photographs by Steve Gunther (Monacelli Press, \$50) is an appealing look at minimalist gardens in the south-west, in particular Arizona and the Sonoran Desert with their distinctive native plants. Martino, who trained as a landscape architect by default, brings an artistic eye to regional contemporary garden design. His formula for outdoor living spaces includes walled gardens, with vibrant colours and striking foliage, while acknowledging the region's notorious lack of water. His gardens, though formal in design, melt into the sunbaked (and often scorching) desert. His projects mostly include private gardens rather than commercial installations. In his own words, Martino describes his work as 'weeds and walls', a juxtaposition of wild landscapes and designed spaces for them. In the early days, it was difficult to convince his clients to use native plants which were often viewed as weeds. This book features over twenty private gardens that live happily with modern houses as well as the desert at their doorstep. Stark walls (sometime painted to resemble Barragan's iconic gardens), minimalist planters, and geometric reflecting pools provide the background for his exquisite plantings of exotic trees, shrubs, and cacti.