

American Book Notes

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The good news is that shelves are swelling with good books, both on American gardens or written by American authors. This has not always been the case when most garden books focus on English gardens and their renowned garden-makers. Linda Chisholm's *History of Landscape Design in 100 Gardens* (Timber Press, \$50) is at the top of this list. Exceeding more than five hundred pages and nearly six hundred photographs, it is a must-have for the reference shelf as well as worldly garden travellers. The topic is an old one that has been addressed at regular intervals by legions of writers, but most of those older tomes are either too complex or outdated. Linda Chisholm's carefully-curated volume is the result of intellect (she holds a Ph.D. in history), hands-on experience (she is a Master Gardener), and communication skills (she is a long-time instructor in landscape design at the New York Botanical Garden). Instead of the old-fashioned linear country-by-country approach, she has deftly broken the book into seventeen topical chapters, from the Alhambra to Kim Wilkie's Broughton House. In 'Bringing Home Abroad', for example, Chisholm links Powerscourt and Norah Lindsay's Sutton Courtenay with Filoli, Old Westbury Manor, Stan Hywet Hall, and other iconic American gardens. Even though I've visited most of the gardens mentioned in the text, Chisholm's book gave me fresh insight into the complexities of garden history and an urge to revisit old favourites. This book should be on every gardener's shelf.

Christopher Woods' book, *Gardenlust: A Botanical Tour of the World's Best New Gardens* (Timber Press, \$40), is robust to say the least. The author, who began his gardening career at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, was director of Chanticleer, one of America's most famous gardens and renowned for its creative and innovative approach to design. The author's global vision covers five distinct themes in this dazzling book— beauty, nature, people and plants, nativity, and urbanisation— seen through the eyes of

fifty designers. The journey begins in North America, then moves to Central and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. To confess, I have not visited (nor heard of) most of the gardens in the book, each one more spectacular than the next. The book is driven by the author's undisguised love of plants, which began early in his career when he discovered Himalayan rhododendrons at Clough William-Ellis's Portmeirion in Wales and from there became an inveterate traveller the world over, while balancing a working life in public horticulture. Most readers will relish magnificent public gardens, such as China's Xi'an Expo Park, Patrick Blanc's One Central Park in Sydney, and Richard Hartlage's Chihuly Garden in Seattle. From Singapore to Switzerland, there is much to enjoy in this lavishly illustrated book and engaging text.

For history buffs, Victoria Johnson's *American Eden: David Hosack, Botany, and Medicine in the Garden of the Early Republic* (Liveright, \$29.95) is an absorbing story of American horticulture told through the eyes of an early physician. Hosack, who founded the first botanical garden in America, amassed a large collection of plants to train generations of physicians and naturalists. He also pioneered pharmaceutical research in the US. Hosack earned the praise of Thomas Jefferson among others. Long gone, his former garden (more than twenty acres of farmland) is now the Rockefeller Center in New York City. This biography, which brings to life a long-forgotten shadowy figure, has been nominated for numerous literary prizes thanks to the author, Victoria Johnson, who combines academic credentials (degrees from Yale and Columbia universities) with writing skills.

For more on early American garden history, Richard Bisgrove's *Gardening Across the Pond* (Pimpernel Press, £40/\$60) presents a detailed investigation of Anglo-American exchanges from early Virginia to prairie gardens in England. This well-researched book is definitely for the specialist. In the seventeenth century the Tradescants (father and son) introduced plants from Virginia into their nursery and later, in the eighteenth century, none other than George Washington consulted English nursery lists for Mount Vernon. And then there's Thomas Jefferson, who visited gardens in

England which were translated into the grounds at Monticello. Likewise, Frederick Law Olmsted (‘America’s “Capability” Brown’) as a young farmer visited England prior to creating New York’s Central Park. Bisgrove, who recently retired as Course Director in Landscape Management at the University of Reading, has a long-standing appreciation of American garden history that balances his expertise in English gardeners, such as William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll, about whom he has written extensively. This detailed book is a personal exploration of American garden history seen through English eyes. Some themes will be well-known to British readers, but Bisgrove introduces other topics such as women in the garden that are not.

Shaping the Postwar Landscape (University of Virginia Press, \$65), edited by Charles A. Birnbaum and Scott Craver (both landscape architects), presents a subject that is probably not well known among British garden readers. The handsomely-illustrated specialist volume focuses on the rich legacy of post-Second World War landscape architecture in America. During this mid-century era, landscape architects played important roles in revitalising parks, pedestrian-friendly downtown malls, plazas, business parks, and suburban developments. They created outdoor living environments from New England to California that literally reshaped America. Luminaries such as Thomas Church, Lawrence Halprin, Daniel Urban Kiley, Isamu Noguchi and Christopher Tunnard are among the well-known designers featured in the book, alongside dozens who will be new to most readers, both British and American. The volume includes a list of sites open to the public, among them Battery Park and other well-known outdoor spaces.