

## *American Book Notes*

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Gardening advice from much-admired experts is always welcome, especially when it comes from those who have created unforgettable gardens. Such is the case of Bunny Mellon, a self-taught amateur gardener, whose magnificent portfolio of personal gardens was featured in 'The Gardens of Bunny Mellon' [HORTUS 127]. Author Linda Jane Holden's follow-up book, *Garden Secrets of Bunny Mellon* (Gibbs Smith, \$32.00), is a perfect companion. Written in collaboration with Thomas Lloyd (Bunny Mellon's grandson) and Bryan Huffman (an interior designer), this book is the one that Mrs Mellon wished she could have written herself had she not been so busy gardening. The book focuses primarily on the Mellon family gardens at Oak Spring in Upperville, Virginia. Fortunately, Mrs Mellon kept detailed garden journals with sketches and comments on what worked and what didn't as well as suggestions for budding gardeners. Her advice ran from 'allow plants to roam a bit' to 'subscribe to horticultural magazines and read reference books'. But one comment struck home with me: 'Lilies are better planted in pots than in the garden', echoing Gertrude Jekyll's words in *Colour in the Flower Garden* (1908). Mellon, of course, had an incomparable library from which to draw ideas. Her down-to-earth advice included making a list of all the problems and another of the things one hopes to have. In the end, she said, 'gardening takes patience, a reasonable amount of care, and a stout heart against disappointments'. The book is beautifully designed, with glorious photographs (both historic and contemporary) of her gardens as well as botanical illustrations selected from books and prints in the Oak Spring Garden Library. If you only have room for one more book, this is it and as a bonus, there's also *Bunny Mellon Garden Journal* (Gibbs Smith, \$19.99) with blank pages for the reader's own notes.

Most gardeners are content with just one garden, but what happens when it's time to move on, due to financial considerations

or age? Helen Dillon, for instance, gave up her world-famous garden in Dublin and chose to move to smaller quarters with fewer maintenance issues (but she did bring all her favourite plants with her). Or, more recently, Sir Roy Strong who handed over his world-class garden at The Laskett in Herefordshire to a conservation organisation with few thoughts of creating a new garden. In the case of Page Dickey, a well-known American gardener and designer based just north of New York City, the time had come to move to a smaller, less expensive location, a decision which many longtime gardeners are now facing. Her previous books fully recounted thirty-four years of increasingly maintenance-intensive gardening at Duck Hill, so it was with some regrets she moved to Falls Village, in the north-west corner of Connecticut, an area with magnificent views of the Berkshire Hills. In her new book, *Uprooted: A Gardener Reflects on Beginning Again* (Timber Press, \$27.95), she recounts the move to Church House and lessons learned. Like all good (and sentimental) gardeners, she took her favourite plants with her, but left the trees and shrubs. She kept the basic layout from the previous owners, but tweaked it with her own ideas, taking advantage of a less cultivated approach to gardening. In the end, Page seems thrilled with her new garden, where she can enjoy the wilder elements of the landscape. Her story is beautifully told and illustrated.

Bill Noble's *Spirit of Place: The Making of a New England Garden* (Timber Press, \$35) is an engaging story and one of 2020's best garden books. The former Director of Preservation for the Garden Conservancy, Bill is well-acquainted with some of America's foremost private gardens and the problems encountered by their owners in transitioning their life's work from private to public. One of his most recent projects is Greenwood Gardens in New Jersey (HORTUS 131). For Bragg Hill, his own garden located in Vermont, he was boss, not advisor. Years ago, when he and his partner bought a slumbering country place surrounded by acres of rolling fields, he relied on his own resources to develop it. 'Much of what gardening is about is the feeling of being connected to a place [and] fostering a sense of belonging', he wrote. Luckily, he was not

far from inspiration, the nearby Cornish Colony where artists' gardens flourished over a hundred years ago. In particular he admired Ellen Shipman's planting and design expertise. In his own words and exceptional photographs, Noble tells the story of how his garden evolved, the dominant influences and the trial-and-error experience of gardening in a northern climate. A superb plantsman and designer well-versed in history, Noble brings candid and enlightening observations to his book as well as practical advice and plant lists. Bragg Hill is truly an American garden.

Photographer Larry Lederman's new book, *Garden Portraits: Experiences of Natural Beauty* (Monacelli Press, \$50), is a personal selection of large-scale (and large budget) gardens and landscapes primarily in the Lower Hudson Valley and Connecticut. Almost all are privately owned, with the exception of Innisfree, Kykuit, and Rocky Hills. What ties them together is Lederman's exceptional photographs and love of naturalistic woodland and meadow gardens. As Gregory Long writes in his foreword, 'He visits in all seasons, in all weather, at many times of day, in many light conditions. He wants to analyze their design and study their character.' The gardens range from Anne Bass's Rock Cobble Farm and jazz musician Dave Brubeck's Japanese-inspired garden to Pace Gallery founder Arne Glimcher's sculpture garden and Lester Collins's Innisfree. Each garden unfolds in exquisite photographs that focus sharply on the overall character rather than individual plants. As Lederman said in a recent interview with the Garden Conservancy, his photographs are not really about the equipment or specific cameras – it's about how to compose a picture. . . . and, yes, you can use an iPhone. This book is an exceptional personal record of some of America's most important gardens now.

Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887–1973), heiress to the Post cereal fortune, had as many homes as she had husbands, but her last and most famous property, Hillwood, in Washington DC, is the subject of Kate Markert's new book, *A Garden for All Seasons: Marjorie Merriweather Post's Hillwood* (Rizzoli Electa, \$50). Post, whose portfolio included Tregaron (also in Washington, DC) and, famously, Mar-A-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida, always consulted

top-notch landscape architects for developing each of her gardens. At the first Hillwood (now C. W. Post College) on Long Island, she engaged Marian Coffin. When she purchased the twenty-five-acre site of her last home in 1955, she consulted with Innocenti & Webel to help transform the existing estate gardens. Later she worked with Perry Wheeler (who famously assisted Bunny Mellon on the Rose Garden at the White House). The grounds, consisting of thirteen acres of formal gardens, include a Japanese-style garden designed by Shogo Myaida in 1957. From the Friendship Walk to the French Parterre and Lunar Lawn, the gardens at Hillwood are a perfect match for the imperial Russian collections (including Fabergé eggs and a famous portrait of Catherine the Great) in the museum that draws visitors from around the world. The book is a visual treat, with newly commissioned photographs by Erik Kvalsvik as well as historical images. Kate Markert's text helps paint the picture of Marjorie Merriweather's amazing energy and focus.

As Benjamin F. Lenhardt Jr. recently said in an interview, there are plenty of books about East Coast and West Coast gardens, but rarely anything in between. His new book, *Gardens of the North Shore of Chicago* (Monacelli Press, \$65), with photographs by Scott Shigley, documents some of the magnificent estates alongside Lake Michigan just north of Chicago. Lenhardt, an avid gardener and former chairman of the Garden Conservancy, features twenty-five outstanding gardens ranging from formal to informal. Despite the fact that the growing season is short, the soil is predominately clay and the weather is variable, the North Shore of Chicago is a hotbed of important estate gardens. Many of them are well-manicured traditional formal gardens, with plenty of boxwood, while others are naturalistic, taking their inspiration from O. C. Simonds, the legendary Midwest landscape gardener. The work of contemporary landscape architects, such as Craig Bergmann and Deborah Nevins, are well represented. Two of my favourites are Camp Rosemary and Crab Tree Farm, both occasionally open to the public. In Lake Forest, Camp Rosemary's tall undulating hedges provide a backdrop for a series of garden rooms, including grass steps inspired by those

at Dumbarton Oaks, a pergola and dazzling borders. Crab Tree Farm, which is perched on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan, boasts a small parterre garden designed by Ellen Shipman as well as expansive new gardens including a contemporary water garden designed by Peter Wirtz. (Crab Tree Farm also has a world-renowned collection devoted to American and British Arts & Crafts furniture and artefacts). In addition to Lenhardt's engaging text, there are more than two hundred and fifty exceptional photographs in this beautifully produced book.



In my review of *Paradise on the Hudson* in HORTUS 135 I neglected to mention that the lion's share of the planning and planting at Untermyer was done by Timothy Tilghman, head gardener for the Untermyer Gardens Conservancy.