

## The European Garden

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Mariella Zoppi

# The European Garden



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## *Introduction*

As with all written histories of the garden, this one begins with the most ancient civilizations and thus dedicates much attention to the Roman Empire. This way, the ordinary has little that is ritual or can be foreseen and one can witness the true origins of gardens which arrived from western culture. These origins were not lost in the centuries which passed by each other, but were a constant source of inspiration for the civilizations which came and went in the Mediterranean Basin.

The Mediterranean, for an extremely long period stretching from 2000 BC to the late fourteenth century, was almost exclusively the scenery of western culture. Diverse peoples acquired economic and political hegemony, they imposed laws, customs and artistic models which merged with pre-existing backgrounds and styles which then expanded throughout Northern European and African countries. Ideas from the East, such as science, religion and artistic models, filtered throughout the Mediterranean. Nomadic populations reached Mediterranean shores and so cultures and customs were brought together for several centuries in a relatively small circle. It was on the edges of the Mediterranean where the two fundamental ideas of garden design, the formal and the informal, were created and confronted each other. Here, the garden became the idealization of a perfect and immutable world, the mimesis of nature. It was a romantic relived of an aesthetic naturalness blessed by the gods and given to men. It became a symbol of perfection and of creation.

These two concepts were never separated or opposed but were integrated with each other in such a way that one let the other prevail at various times. In Egypt, geometric rigor dominated the organization of space within the garden. In Mesopotamian gardens, nature became a “paradise” of enchantment and wonder, but maintained a neat and harmonious appearance. In Greece, the garden was the dream of earthly transposition from the Golden Age, where fruits and flowers grew spontaneously and there were no seasons. In Rome, shapes that were accurately studied and defined by topiary arts organized open spaces, private or public according to schemes which still exist today.

Over time, it was not only the garden, a defined and enclosed space, which changed depending on its human caretakers. The landscape itself where the garden appeared was an object of continuous transformation and change. Environments which today are familiar to us like the greenery around Ravenna, the terraced slopes of the Costiera Amalfitana with citrus-trees, or the almond trees in the Valle di Agrigento. They each have their own date of birth, while in the whole Mediterranean vines and olive trees live together with peach-trees and pomegranates since the ninth century on. In a similar way, fig trees and cypress have learned to coexist happily with citrus-trees. Before the Arabic conquest, in Southern Italy and Sicily in particular, landscapes were still like the first century after Christ; characterized by a variety of plants and landscapes very reduced in all parts of the peninsula. As is well known, few species of flowers and trees were used by the Romans. Only in some refined Pompeian paintings one can see, as an exceptionally decorative element, a lone lemon tree growing within an exultation of laurel plants and roses.

The beautiful rose has dominated the centuries and crossed civilizations. It can be cut, woven into garlands and cultivated inside pots. It is a vibrant, luxuriant and vital ornament of mystical and secular gardens. The white rose of the Tudors was an important compliment in any portrait of Elizabeth I of England. It was a mys-



tical symbol of the purity of the Virgin or in the *Roman de la Rose*, the rose of love incarnation of youth, chivalry and courtly love.

With time, an incredible variety of flowers were added to the garden along with the rose. From the near East, the first carnations and tulips arrived in Europe. Then, from further lands came the narcissus, passion flower and convolvulus. Later on arrived the agave, fuchsia and an incredible variety of new species with an infinite gamut of colors, which joyously invaded all gardens.

Taste, feeling, aesthetic sense and garden form changed. Shapes transformed from cloister, enclosed, scented, oasis of peace and calm far from the suffering of the world, into the exaltation of reason and capacity of man, interpreter and measure of all things. It successively became the scenographic and commemorative magnificence of power of the man- king who consecrates his triumph and his glory; that man who becomes the “sun”, the engine of all things, and makes nature come alive around himself. He is the king who, for the divine will, celebrates himself through the splendors of his garden.

New values affirmed themselves, the Industrial and French Revolution put the bases of a different social organization and a renewed aesthetic sense. Nature, mother of all things, permeated the idea of the garden’s plan, and gradually, invaded cities.

Trees, grasses and flowers were fragile and changing elements which composed the garden and became symbolic elements. They ran along the centuries and pervaded civilizations, witnessing human feeling and aspirations, enchanted dreams soaked in art and poetry. The history of the garden is intertwined with the history of ideas, of the way people live together, a reflection of government, the tastes and organizational capacity of different societies. The history of the garden is a history of images, dreams and memories: it is simply, the history of humankind.

Mariella Zoppi

*Florence, 14 May 2016*



## The Ancient Mediterranean “Paradises”

*“Now the Lord God had planted  
a garden in the east, in Eden”.*

GENESIS 2:8

### Ancient Egypt

The first gardens we know anything about are those which bloomed in places where nature shows her harshest face.

Egypt was the first of the ancient civilizations to preserve documentary evidence of its earliest gardens and is also the country which, because of its longevity and cultural dynamism, most influenced both Greek and Roman culture.

One of the oldest artefacts to give us a glimpse into how gardens were constructed in that ancient era is a miniature known as “dolls’ house” found in the tomb of Meketre (2000 BC). The little wooden model now on display in New York’s Metropolitan Museum, represents a garden, surrounded by sycamore trees, larger than the humble house, which is little more than a portico covering a bath.

It was only during the reign of the XVIII Dynasty that gardens became truly important and complex structures in their own right. In the tomb of Imeni, the architect of Tuthmosis I (1528-1510 BC), we find the portrayal of a vast garden enclosed by walls, dotted with houses, and surrounded by tall trees with a large rectangular bath

framed by shrubs and columns of palm trees. Imeni includes an exact inventory of the essences which were planted and his meticulous report gives us an idea of just how important vegetation was in Egyptian culture. The preferred flora was not just ornamental (palms or tamarisks) and included fruit trees, which provided nutritious food (figs, pomegranates or dates) or from which the oils and milky substances used to prepare salves, cosmetics and medicine could be extracted. There were indigenous plants as well as imported ones (pomegranates and olive trees).

At Tell el-Amarna gardens were an integral part of both civic and sacred architecture. The most important villas and temples were more often than not protected by high walls with one or more entrance gates. Service buildings leant against the outer walls, while inside the enclosed gardens pavilions were scattered here and there, interspersed with canals and ponds on which small boats floated, or with tree-lined, shady walkways and woods. The gardens around the Aten temple and the Amun temple (the tomb of Sannufer, the Mayor of Thebes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC) are fine examples.

The Egyptian garden was lovingly isolated from the harsh surrounding desert. Water and shade were its most valuable attributes, understandable in this land where the sun's rays are particularly intense, and the importance of its strict lines, precise layout and geometric design should not be underestimated.

The garden's perimeter was regular and emphasized by high protective walls. These walls have many meanings and should be studied from a geomorphologic point of view: flat terrain surrounded by a desert landscape through which the all-important Nile flows, the fountain of life, nurturer of growing things, giver of precious water and tamer of the torrid climate. The presence of an enclosure gave the garden an orderly shape and provided safety, the walls separated a well-defined and structured world from the wild and inhospitable desert beyond it. It is the beginning of the contrast, or conflict, between the concepts of "inside" and "outside", between the canons,

proportions and rules of a fenced garden, and external chaos, comparable to our 'wild' or 'untamed' countryside. It is a contrast which many centuries later, during Italy's Renaissance period, will find its highest and most sophisticated expression. The walls also assume a psychological function, providing a safe haven from indiscrete eyes and public perusal as they define an intimate, private or sacred place, protected and separated. In a more practical sense they were built to defend against attacks by hostile foreign tribes, ferocious beasts or, simply, lashing wind and stinging sand storms.

And last, but by no means least, they define the precise perimeter of an area to nurture, to irrigate and to design according to rational criteria and lofty aesthetic values.

## Mesopotamia

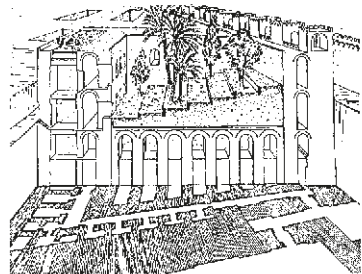
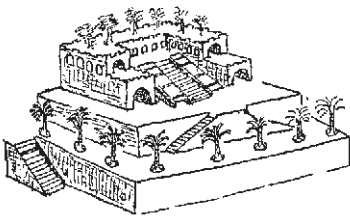
The intrinsic fragility of gardens, and their marginality compared to the long-lasting concreteness of solid buildings, denies us any information about their layout during the Akkadian Era (2350 – 2150 BC), nor the era preceding it. It is only as the Egyptian capital moves northwards, to areas where the climate is milder, that remaining traces allow us to study the organization of open-air spaces.

Sargon II (late eighth century BC) constructed what appears to be the most important building complex in the Assyrian world, next to which he had an immense park laid out. He planted the flora from the Hittite countries, lands located south of Anatolia and north of Syria, in an attempt to have it resemble Mount Amanus.

It was the first great Botanical Garden in history, the first collection of exotic plants, a symbol of conquest and therefore a tangible affirmation of power. But it was also an indication of a great interest in science and botany, the study of climates and the flora of foreign lands. A bas-relief from the palace of Sargon's son, Sennacherib, depicts trees growing on hills, around temples, on terraces in front



*Pond in a Garden* from the Tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, c. 1350 BCE



The Hanging Gardens of Babylon: reconstruction-hypotheses by M. J. Lancam (left) and by R. Koldewey e E. Witzel (right)

of kiosks and columns, and free-roaming animals. Another, found at Nineveh, depicts the conquest of the city of Susa and clearly shows the contrast between the walled city and the countryside dotted with homes surrounded by nature. It is the first evidence we have of an entirely new natural environment where the geometric planting scheme emanates a sense of natural freedom, which will later be seen in the scenic Persian landscape depictions of “paradise” in the sixth century BC.

All that remains today of the hanging gardens of Babylon, which according to legend were constructed by Nebuchadnezzar II in 600 BC for Queen Semiramis and ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world, is a sequence of 14 vaulted rooms whose function was probably to support a terrace with trees above the hanging gardens. It is very little from which to reconstruct a realistic image of this architectural wonder and there are two schools of thought about its design: M.J. Lacan maintains that the gardens sloped downwards externally, while R. Koldewey and F. Witzel claim there was a large courtyard in the centre off which the gardens sloped. In any case we do know that there were overlapping levels of which we know the sizes of only the first two (45x40m the lower, and 40x30m the second one). They were covered in a thick layer of earth laid over a vaulted construction with a double hollow space and criss-crossed by a network of small canals which served both to water the plants in the garden above and cool the rooms below. The description provided by Strabo in the first century AD, contradicts the archaeological evidence which confirms the religious nature of the *ziggurat* also seeing the gardens as an integral part of the sacred building which together forms the ideal representation of the universe; the garden is where, between moments of meditation and contemplation, the magician or priest performed his sacred tasks. These men were the symbol of perfection and grace, and had the wisdom and power to manipulate and use plants and medicinal drugs to aid them in their divinations.

## Persia

We owe all the knowledge we have of ancient Persian gardens to the description left to us of King Cyrus' park in Sardis by Xenophon (430-355 BC, *Econ.*, IV, 20 sgg.). Xenophon uses the word *paradeisos* (from the Persian word *pardes*), or "paradises", because he says "they are full of all things beautiful and good that the earth has to offer".

The park in Sardis was immense and had a geometrical layout with lines of tall trees creating divisions in the hunting grounds. The green lawns underfoot were constantly irrigated, and there was no lack of pavilions, kiosks and firing ranges.

The *paradeisos* contained three main characteristics: trees, water and the regularity of the grounds' design. These three components were a recurring theme throughout oriental mystic tradition, while remains from the Sasanid era show us a quadripartite garden divided by two right-angle tree-lined canals with a fountain or small temple at the intersections, symbolizing the division of the world into four parts. The *paradeisos* were to have a great influence on the history of gardens, not just for their direct connection to the Moslem world, but also for their influence, through Alexandrian and Hellenistic culture, on the rest of the Mediterranean area.

The culture of the walled geometric-motif garden was to overwhelm the Persian "paradise" gardens when Egypt conquered the area in 525 BC. The oriental flavour of the gardens was to be enriched and guided to its their confluence with Hellenistic culture adding a naturalistic inspiration to the original orderly geometric imposition. This naturalistic inspiration brought with it landscapes of fields, streams, canals and with depictions of freely roaming animals which had no relationship to the classical Greek tradition which preceded it.



## Greece

The Greek world, made up of compact cities surrounded by vast open pastures for grazing, in keeping with their respect for the countryside as a source of sustenance and wealth, did not have room for “paradise” or the pleasures of contemplation. Greek palaces, when they had them, did not compare to those of the eastern empires, at least until the first century AD, and their gardens were more a fenced-in area in which both beautiful and delicious plants grew and prospered together. The first Greek gardens we are aware of are those described by Homer and can be identified according to two different interpretations: those dedicated to fecundity and those dedicated to the gods. The gardens of the first group are those that belong to Alcinoos, Laertes and the Feaci, the second group belong to Calypso.

Wooded areas were later added to the gardens to identify them with the home of the gods. Near the great sanctuaries at Delphi and Olympus, for example, extensive woods were allowed to grow freely and protect the god within while bringing man closer to nature: monuments, columns, memorial stones, cells and burial mounds were built there as a confirmation of their sanctity. In all likelihood temples, in the more archaic period, were not much more than small cells protected by trees. When they came to be constructed in urban areas the trees evolved into a complementary accessory rendered in wood or stone (columns) as a reminder of their ancient agrarian roots. Woods, however, remained holy places where funerary and divination rites took place. At Delphi, and around the tomb of Diomedes plane trees (the tree of heroes) were planted, and the woods of the Eumenides and those of Apollo at Colophon were famous.

Adjacent to the woods, fields for the god were cultivated, with aromatic bushes, fruit trees and flowers for cult worship (always including myrtle, figs and hazelnuts) and small plots were cultivated and the produce sold at market in order to give the temple an adequate income.

Little is known about private urban gardens, but one thing is certain: Greek houses were a woman's domain. They were not places where important guests were received, but were wholly dedicated to family life and, as such, it is highly probable that they had gardens for purely practical purposes: little more than a courtyard with some vines, willow trees, cypresses, country elms; and flowers, such as roses, for decorative purposes in garlands, or for offerings at the temple. The growing of flowers also went beyond the need for domestic decoration and cult purposes as it acquired a scientific value with the studies conducted by Theophrastus (*Enquiry into Plants*, 372-287 BC), who signaled the beginning of a great botanical tradition and Dioscorides' treatise on the nature of medicine, which was the first book on medicine in the history of man.

One of the greatest advances in the history of modern civilization is the birth of the public park. The finest early examples were, according to Plutarch, the gardens of Agora, the Academy and the Lyceum in Athens.

The cities of Magna Graecia have more lushly verdant parks, with many sacred gardens much like the one dedicated to Aphrodite in Croton and described by Plutarch. The most famous gardens, however, belonged to princes, like Gelo's park at Syracuse, where, next to great trees and fresh streams of spring water, there was an *Amaltheum*, or sacred grotto. Antheus described one which Hieron II even had constructed on his ship, complete with miniature gymnasium, grass-lined walkways and an *Aphrodisium* (a pavilion dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite), which was used as both a holy site and a place of pleasure. In Thebes, Rhodes and at Pergamon parks were constructed with what we would today call a "romantic theme", where temples, nymphs and grottos were hidden in the thick shade of trees dotted over open flowering fields.

## Republican Rome

Roman civilization had its roots deep in the culture of farming, the cycles of sowing and reaping, in the woods, streams and everything in nature that is useful to man.

In the first century BC this agricultural-pastoral connection was still very much alive when, as Pliny the Elder observed (*Nat. Hist* XIX, 50), the word *villa* was not yet even used in the Law of the Twelve Tables. What was mentioned in this fundamental body of Roman law was *hortus*, meaning *heredium*, or a fenced-in terrain which was an integral part of the house belonged to the plot of land which “followed the heir”. The house and its garden were, therefore, inseparable: the garden belonged to the family concept of “hearth and home” and was dedicated to the cult of the *Lares familiares*, the ancestors and guardians of the home and family.

The relationship between divinity and nature was emphasized by rustic sanctuaries, chapels that dotted fields and woods and which, with the arrival of “urbanization”, became sacred niches in gardens decorated with motifs that recalled the woods and its fauna. The coiled snake was one such a recurring theme.

The woods, themselves, were considered sacred places and the cult of the woods was one of the most important characteristics of ancient Rome as its people, even before becoming farmers, were shepherds. These ancient woods were sometimes so sacred that they were “un-touchable”, they had to be left to grow freely and in accordance with their own random laws of nature. What a difference from the cultivated grounds which surrounded Greek temples, where organized nature represented the harmony between man and his god.

With the advent of the Punic Wars the Roman economy underwent its first real transformation: the farmer now became specialized and the home garden was, according to Cato in his *De Agricultura*, divided into specific sectors for growing grain, or willow trees for making wicker or oaks to produce acorns for raising pigs. The

economy shifted from being family-based to a “national” one, and the countryside was called upon to feed the city. This was also when suburban kitchen gardens came into being and their function was to provide fresh vegetables which, to avoid wilting, must reach their destination quickly. This specialization process developed and evolved and by the time of Varro (116-27 BC) agriculture had definitively assumed its new format of extensive single crops belonging to territories which could be compared to Italy’s modern day *Regioni*.

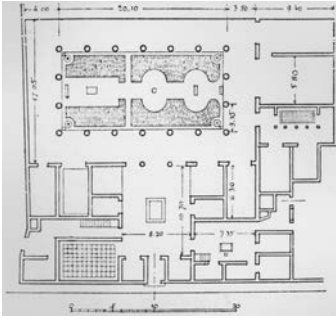
Between the second and first century BC the first “constructed” gardens come into being. According to Cicero, in his *De Amicitia*, they belong to Scipio Africanus and Junius Brutus and already show signs of Hellenistic influence. Servius Sulpicius Galba and Cicero’s own home can also be added to the list. During the first century BC there is a boom in suburban villas.

The art of gardening comes into its own with Lucullus (60 BC) and Rome was overtaken by a sort of contest to transform the old family properties. In just a few years the land along the Tiber river became the most desirable location for those who wanted gardens. This trend continued and increased over time and in first century AD Statius described the river as “enclosed by gardens of delight”.

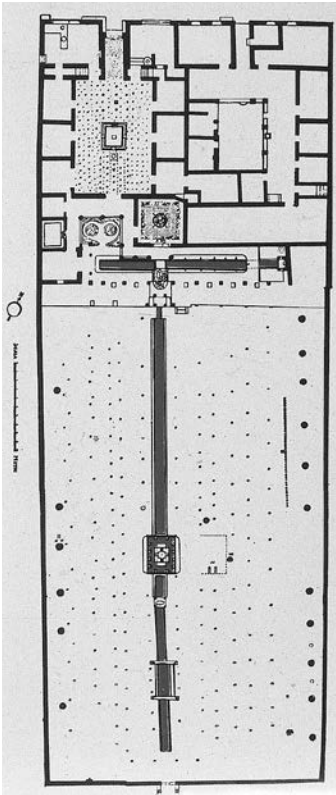
## Imperial Rome

At the height of the Roman Empire, gardens and parks were varied and manifest: in Imperial Rome, parks and gardens become separate entities in the fabric of daily life, and were created in various forms.

The wealthiest citizens owned magnificent villas with splendid gardens, while the inhabitants of the *insulae* made do with real flowers in window boxes or painted ones on the walls of their homes. On the outskirts of the city there were *hortuli*, or fenced-in parks, and *tabernae*, where citizens could to benefit from fresh air as they relaxed



Pompei, House of the Vettii: floor plan (left) and the peristyle garden



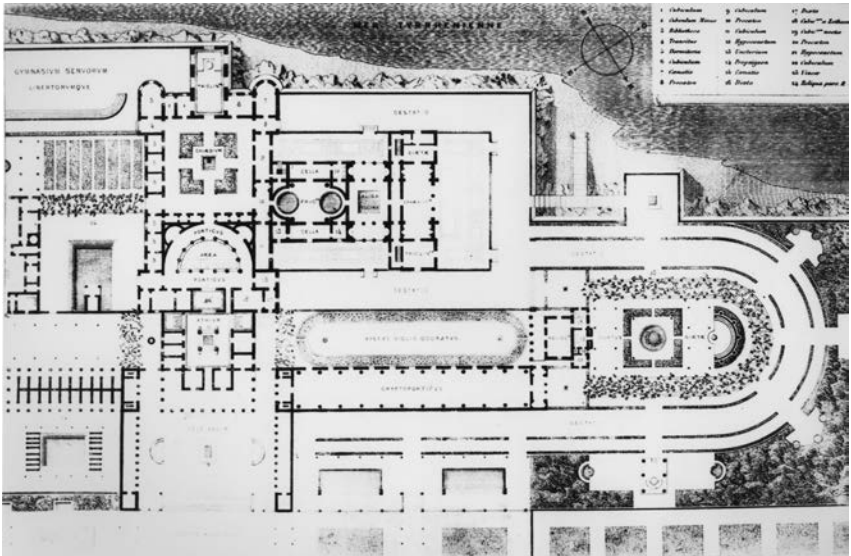
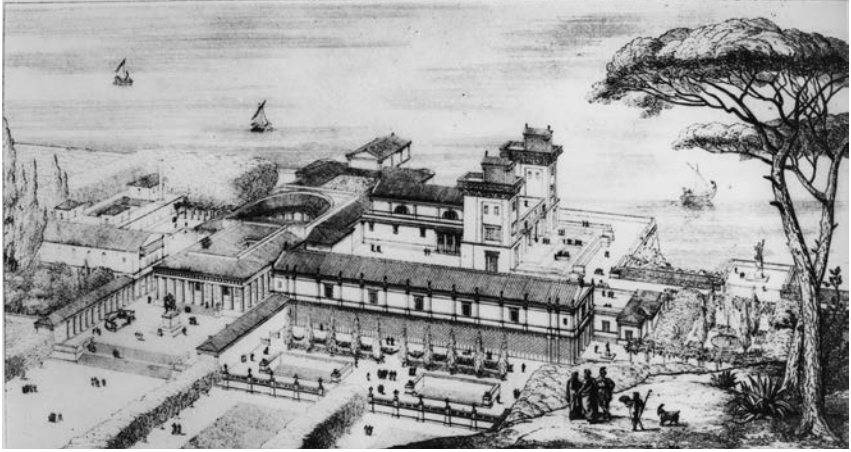
Pompei, House of Cecilius Iucundus: floor plan (left) and euripus garden

and enjoyed the company of friends. The sacred woods remained, even though over time they bent to aesthetic trends and became embellished with scenic Hellenistic and Oriental influences. Next to the sacred woods were the public parks, and the walkways and gardens next to the thermal baths, which declared to the world that Rome was indeed *Caput mundi*.

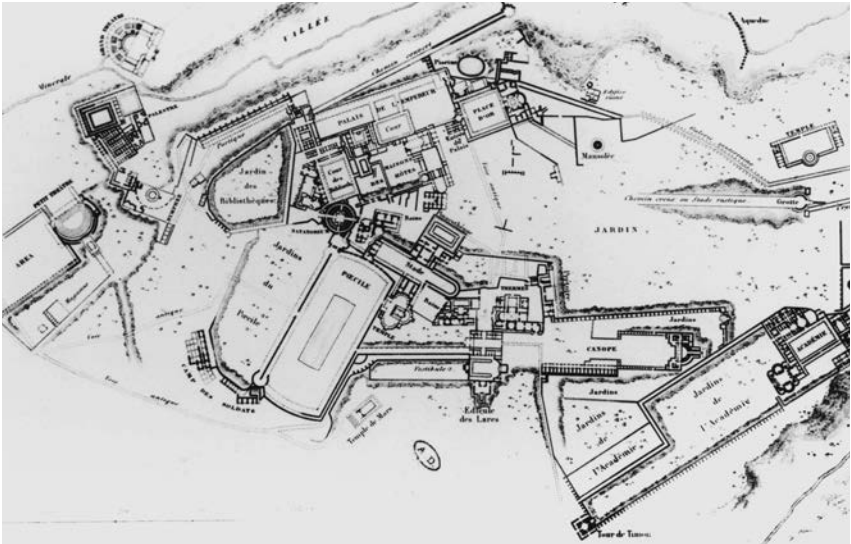
The first example was Pompeo's Portico (55 BC), which was based on a Greek model and introduced two new concepts to Rome: the tree-lined walkway and the portico. The complex, located in front of the theatre, was laid out on three naves lined by columns and surrounded by open spaces embellished with plane trees, laurel bushes and fountains. Agrippa's tree-lined garden was not far away and had a portico of a hundred columns interspersed with statues. This type of garden, as well as the gardens surrounding the thermal baths and temples, became very popular. The thermal baths were an important part of the city's park and public buildings system and, after 60 AD, gardens began to embellish their grounds as well. The same was true of the grounds surrounding the bath and gymnasium complexes where the park created a delightful ambience in which to give oneself over to pleasure, relaxation and *otium*, or idleness. Water became a very important decorative feature along with statues, plants, woods and porticos that further embellished the scenery. A new urban setting took shape which followed a baths-gymnasium-pool-canal sequence which was at the same time decorative and functional: bathing and swimming were an integral part of Roman culture.

In the first century AD Rome's public and private gardens started to resemble modern day parks, combining beauty and practicality in the search for aesthetics with a social function. They began showing the first signs of their environmental function as "green areas" which, even then, was sought out for the reprieve they gave from the nauseating odours of the densely populated city.

The evolution of Rome's public park system can also be seen in the private garden. In little more than two centuries it evolved from



Pliny the Younger's Villa at Laurentium: geometric restitution of perspective (above) and plan of ground floor and gardens (below)



Tivoli, Hadrian's Villa: The Maritime Theatre (above) and general plan (below)



its first appearance as a *hortus* (kitchen garden) next to the house in an originally Etruscan and rustic style around the *atrium*, to being a much more complex reality in which the *hortus* became an increasingly integral part of the home. The architectural importance of the peristyle also gained momentum at this time.

The new concept of *ars topiaria*, topiary art, was born and gained popularity as the ultimate fashion of garden and park construction in Rome. This trend was a response to the desire to create new landscapes, to give nature a new and pleasing look in which citizens could rest, relax and converse with friends.

What did remain of the farming culture in Imperial Rome was an intimate understanding of botany. Pliny the Elder, in his *Natura florum et coronamentorum*, the XXI book of the *Naturalis Historia*, lists the most common plants used in his time.

Water is, of course, essential in Mediterranean gardens and its fundamental importance is proven by the fact that excavations have never uncovered a garden which was without a fully developed irrigation system. Quite the contrary, archaeological digs have often exposed private aqueducts whose sole purpose was to bring water to the garden's irrigation system.

Roman gardens had recurring patterns that included pergolas, columns, statues, hedges, canals and exedras which enclosed smaller spaces with backdrops and *trompe l'oeil* perspectives. The houses discovered in Pompeii (the Vettii, Amorini Dorati and Loreius Tiburtinus houses for example) and Herculaneum (the Cervi house) bear witness to the amazing levels of sophistication they were able to achieve. In the country villas the architecture itself became an integral part of the landscape. The Papyrus Villa, built halfway up a slope near the sea, is a fine example, with its Hellenistic architectural features and a garden which reaches all the way to the water's edge.

From the second century onwards, the Roman garden, with its rich and varied decorations and architecture, came under the influence of the events taking place in the Hellenistic world. Greek culture

was, by now, widespread and had been absorbed by Roman culture. Inherent contradictions were developing in the concept of the garden: between the original idea of nature allied to the world of simple, yet important, agriculture and that of the grandness and pomp associated with new parks, influenced by the Orient, a region of the world which had long been conquered. Nostalgia for the sober nature of antiquity, however, did remain and Pliny the Younger, himself owner of several of the most sumptuous villas of his time, was opposed to the ostentation of the rich gardens and ornate structures. He tended to follow in the tradition of the great landowners of pre-Imperial Rome, like Cato and Varro. For Pliny, gardens were above all an economic investment closely related to farming, but they were also elegant places in which to spend the best times of the day in leisure (*otium*) or in study.

Many of the villas found everywhere across the vast Roman Empire are no less elegant than Pliny's. Archaeological excavations conducted in the 1960s in Fishbourne, England, brought to light a villa perfectly placed between land and sea. It had three gardens: a large (73x91m) quadrangular one, with Pompeian porticos, and a formal layout with canals and low box-hedges; a terraced *ad imitatio ruris* garden that slopes downwards towards the sea and a *hortus* (kitchen garden).

Perhaps the most famous Imperial garden was that of Hadrian (118-138 AD) in Tivoli. Although there is no literature to provide us with a precise description of the complex at the height of its splendour, and although the villa was destroyed after his death and became a camping ground for bands of brigands, the remains bear witness to the level of complexity the Roman garden had achieved over the centuries. Hadrian's was a large-scale composition carved into the landscape with an open plan which was, nonetheless, geometrically sound. The resulting garden recalls Greek culture, yet with an Oriental touch, and is obviously deeply rooted in the origins of Rome herself and the ancient pastoral sentiments expressed by Virgil in his works.

## The Middle Ages

*“If possible a clear fountain of water in a stone  
basin should be in the midst,  
for its purity gives much pleasure”.*

The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus, 13<sup>th</sup> century

### From the fall of the Roman Empire to the year 1000

When the Western Roman Empire fell in 476 AD the southward immigration of the Germanic peoples was unstoppable and all of Europe came under their influence. Out of this tangle of peoples and wars the foundation of a new civilization was laid. Roman culture and language, Latin, together with Greek, formed a sound basis that provided an ideal cultural continuity with the ancient world until well after the year 1000 AD.

Life during these centuries was strictly rural, based on an agricultural economy which barely satisfied the nutritional needs of its people. In these times deforestation was considered a grandiose undertaking worthy of sainthood (St. Fiacre).

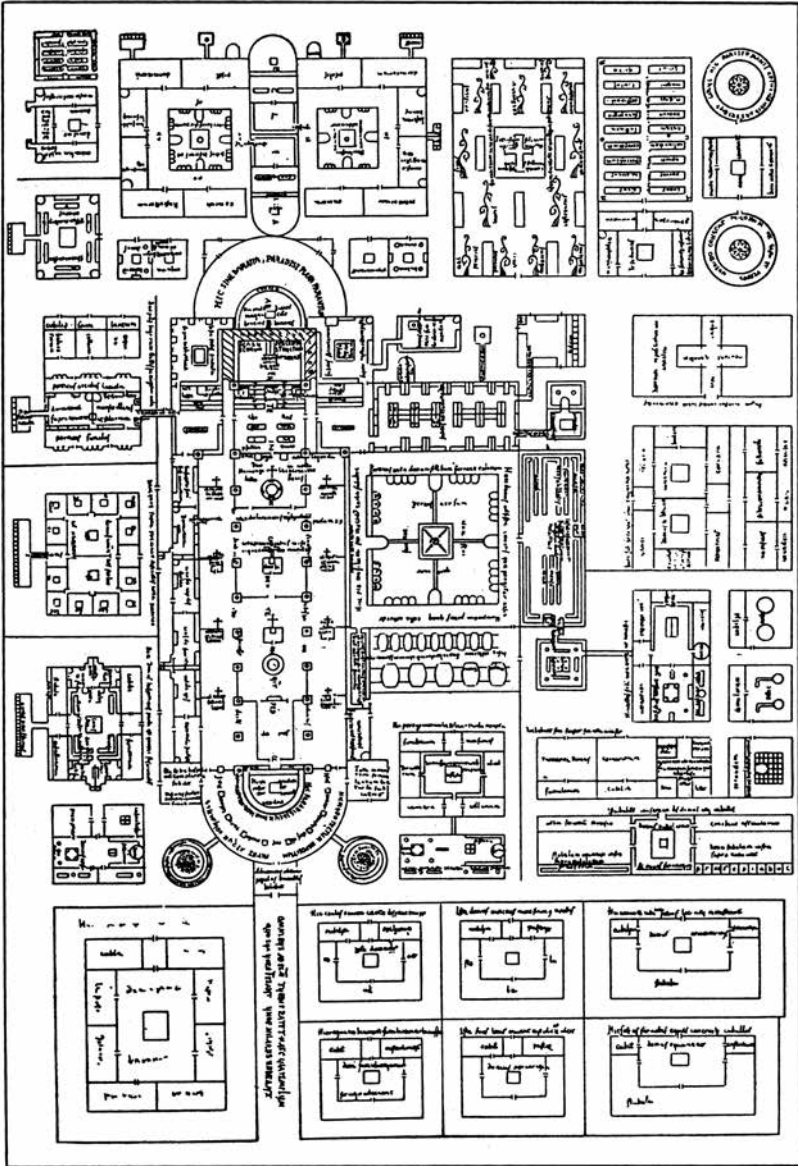
The only way to live in relative safety was to live in a fortified complex. The garden as such became a small plot inside a hamlet, castle or monastery. In these times the latter were not just religious buildings housing the pious, but very real centres of culture, work and production. Here the works of Cato, Varro, Columella, Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis Historia*) and later Palladius (*De Agricultura*) were read and copied.

It is from the writings of pious men like Venantius Fortunatus and the Venerable Bede that we learn much about the flowers and plants of the sixth and seventh century, but most of the information we have comes from Alcuin (735-804), Charlemagne's "botanical consultant". His *Capitulare De Villis* (c.795) contains a list of 73 herbs and 16 trees which Charlemagne wanted cultivated on his properties and which were to be reported on every year at Christmas. There are fruit trees, but also useful and ornamental flowers like the white lily (*Lilium candidum*), the rose (*Rosa gallica* and *alba*), the poppy (*Papaver soniferum*), camomile (*Camomilla matricaria*), sage (*Salvia viridis*) and mallow (*Malva sisvestris*).

With Charlemagne and the reconstruction of the Holy Roman Empire, the court in Aachen became a haven for intellectuals and poets, a sort of Academy which sought to revive classical times through the meditation of Christian art. Due to the nomadic nature of Carolingian civilization, the influence of the cultural movement known as the Carolingian renaissance actually had little effect on urban planning, and even less on gardens. It did, however, leave a distinct mark on the lesser arts and on heroic poetry (*chanson de geste*).

When Charlemagne died, the court lost its importance as a cultural centre and the monasteries regained their hegemony. The earliest architectural plan we have is that of the Abbey of St. Gall. It shows a very precise floor plan in which the harmony between buildings and open spaces is clearly evident in the complex enclosure of the monastery. There are three gardens bordering a cloister. The cemetery has a central tumulus and 14 tombs shaded by fruit trees are next to the kitchen garden. The three gardens differ from one another in size and function, but in each one utility goes hand-in-hand with a keen sense of form and beauty.

A few years later another document comes into being: Walafriad Strabo's *Hortulus* (*Liber de Cultura Hortorum*), a poem of 444 verses in which all of the practical rules of cultivation, from drainage to irrigation and from sowing to harvest, are put forth.



The plan of the Abbey of Saint Gall, 816-836

Flowers were an essential feature of the garden and were, for our purposes, perhaps the single most important cultural novelty of the Middle Ages. Their colour and perfume helped to create that quiet and meditative atmosphere so intrinsic to monastic life. All of tenth-century Europe had a keen interest in plants, as shown by the many *Tacuinum Sanitatis* whose main task was to diffuse information about the properties of plants and their medicinal, decorative and domestic uses via printed texts and illustrations. The *Vocabolario*, or dictionary, put together by Archbishop of York Alfric (c.995) which paired Anglo-Saxon terminology with the Latin equivalent, shows that here, too, it was the cathedrals that dominated the cultural scene, and it was around them that gardens and vegetable gardens developed.

Even so, it was Byzantium, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, which dominated the Mediterranean with her laws, literature and gardens. It was from there that the Arab world enriched and enlivened traditional Greco-Latin culture with new experiences and a new view of the world. In ninth century even Emperor Constantine VII Porfirogenitus gathered information about agriculture that came to him from Arab, Latin and Greek texts into a treatise entitled *Geoponica*: centuries later this work would still wield great influence, and in 1549 it was translated with a new title *De' notevoli ed utilissimi ammaestramenti dell'agricoltura* (on important and very useful notions of agriculture).

## Arabs in the Mediterranean

Arab culture, which was already present in Syria and Persia, began to take hold in the Mediterranean after the death of the Prophet Mohammed in 632, when the area was shaken by religious conquests involving Egypt and northern Africa, then Sicily and southern Spain. The spreading of the Koran also brought with it the diffusion of a scientific and philosophical culture which also took hold in the lands

occupied by Germanic tribes; mathematics (the introduction of Arabic numbers), astronomy, alchemy, medicine and even chemistry experienced a renewal under Islamic domination which reached those areas not under their control, like northern Europe. But it is in the Mediterranean basin that Moslem culture assumed aspects that were highly particular and innovative.

The Moors, or *el-Andalus* as they are called in Spain, occupied Cordova and Seville. Although their advancement into France and northern Europe was stopped by Charles Martel in 732, the Moslem Caliphate of Cordova held on to power there until 1031, Seville resisted until 1248 and Granada remained a Moslem enclave until 1492.

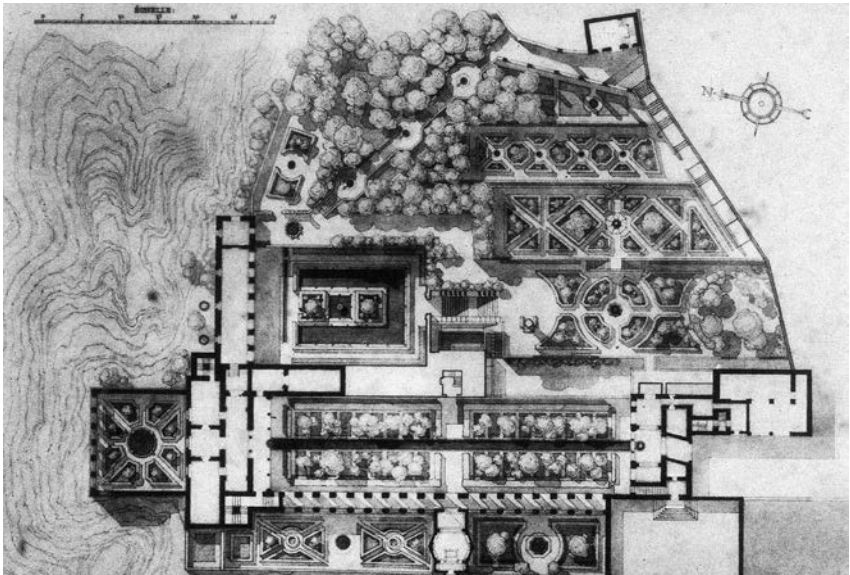
The architectural heritage left behind by Arab domination was considerable and was marked by a building-courtyard-building-garden pattern. Gardens were an integral part of Islamic culture and religion, and the Koran uses gardens as a metaphor for paradise, albeit one that is somewhat different from that imagined by Christians, where everything is spiritual and ascetic: it is a paradise where, after death, those who have lived wisely will be able to enjoy all the pleasures and happiness which the senses can give.

Water is the vital lymph of a garden. It is water that gives relief from the arid desert, that enchants the eye and charms the ear when it gurgles, flows, gushes and murmurs. Water quenches thirst and gives life to plants and flowers, letting them fill the air with their perfume, show their bright colours and bestow the earth with fruit. The plants that grace Islamic gardens are perennial and “deep green”, according to the Koran. Nothing must change or die in these gardens, they seem to underscore the continuity of the flow of life and reaffirm the legend of eternal youth as seen in young and resilient plants. The layout of the garden follows a traditionally Persian geometric scheme.

The Koranic garden and Islamic paradise share the concept of “exclusion”, meaning against or away from; the word *jinna*, in fact, identifies all that is the opposite of desert, of the absence of life; *jinna*



Granada, Alhambra: *Patio de la Acequia* (Court of the Water Channel), and the *Jardín de la Sultana* (Sultana's Garden)

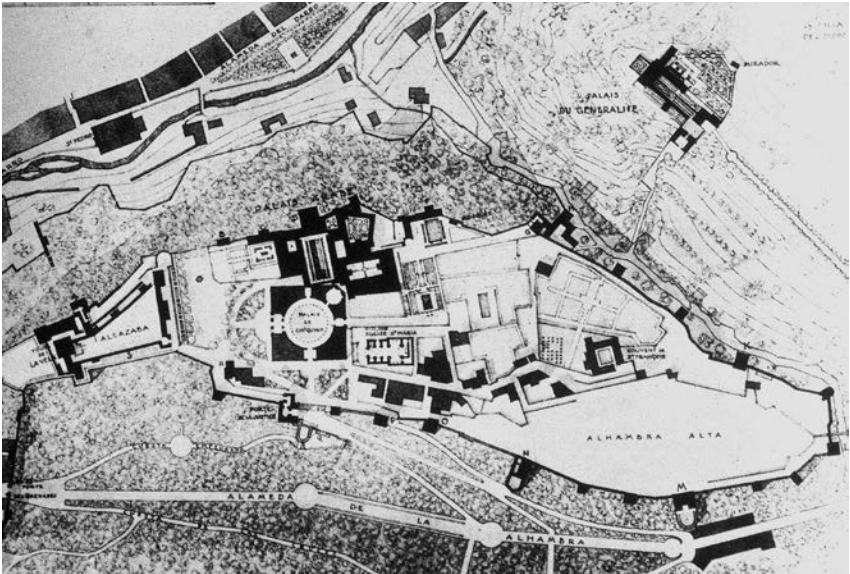


Granada, Alhambra: Generalife's plan





Granada, Alhambra: *Patio de los Leones* (Court of the Lions)



Granada, Alhambra: general plan

is the promise of eternal ecstasy which is easily translated into the pantheistic concept of nature in which the four sacred elements – fire, air, earth and water – come together in perfect harmony.

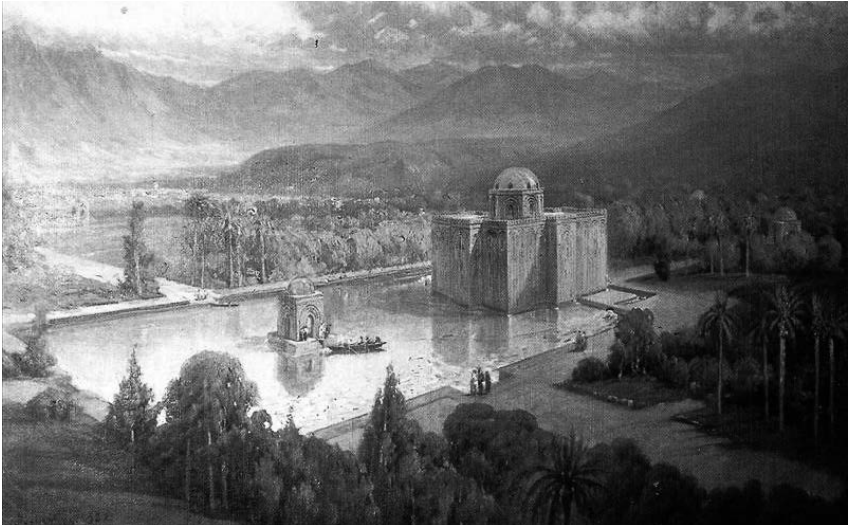
The importance of gardens in Islamic culture prompted the publishing of several treatises, among them the text written by Abulcasis (tenth century) indicating guidelines for the construction of a proper garden: it should be located on a terrain with a gentle slope to favour the drainage of water, it should be surrounded by high walls covered in climbing plants and it must have enough cisterns to provide a constant supply of water. Flowers and perennially green plants should be planted at a good distance from the wells and the leaves from the shrubs planted along the canals should never clog the flow of water. The lawns must be rectangular and there should be a pavilion surrounded with bright colourful flowers at the centre of the garden. The Hispanic-Arab gardens were often quite complex since they represented the fusion of two great cultures: Persian and Roman-Byzantine. In both, the gardens were well-defined and enclosed, private and intimate. In both, the rules of geometry are closely followed and the presence of water served to highlight the theme as well as the architectural layout of the garden. While the Persian garden was divided into quadrants, the Roman-Byzantine garden followed a more linear line along a main central axis. The rectangular layout of the Persian garden, closed in by its high walls covered in climbing vegetation and organized along two perpendicular axes with 4 canals (representing the four rivers of the Koran), was often accentuated by vegetation that divided the area into four equal plots on which shrubs and brightly coloured flowers were planted. At the convergence point of the two axes there was a fountain from which running water flows. The Roman layout was more severe: the line of the walls was interrupted by a portico from which the visitor can contemplate the orderly space organized around the median axis which often flowed from a fountain and was highlighted by vegetation. The canal, reminiscent of the Pompeian *euripus*, remained a dominant feature which, quite

often, also had a chromatic feature of Persian origin – it was lined with multi-coloured marble or colourful mosaic tiles.

If Cordova, Granada, Toledo and Seville have handed down to us their architecture and images of truly interesting gardens, the same can be said of Sicily, where Islamic domination lasted just under two centuries (878-1061). The Arab culture remained well rooted in Sicily even after the Moslems left. When the Normans came to conquer, their comparatively poor culture benefited from many aspects of the richer Islamic one. When Roger II united Sicily and the Kingdom of Naples there was a cultural continuity, political and dynastical changes notwithstanding, which lasted until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the poetry, the figurative arts, architecture, science and technology, although somewhat different and actually defined as Arab-Sicilian, can be traced to the Islamic tradition.

We actually know very little of the architecture (although we do have some significant examples in Palermo and Amalfi) and gardens of the actual Arab period, but thanks to the Arab geographer Al Idrisi we have marvellous descriptions of the Sicilian landscape as rich in water and gardens during the reign of Roger II. A profound change in the landscape took place between the ninth and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries when certain hitherto-unknown tree species were planted which would eventually become typical of the Mediterranean area: citrus, almond, peach and apricot trees, and also pomegranates, date palms, bananas. Orange trees soon became an integral part of the southern Italian landscape, taking over hillsides and valleys and used in urban areas as a decorative element.

Agricultural cultivation followed specialized programmes based on new irrigation techniques imported from the North-African Maghreb, which combined with the old efficient system of aqueducts still in use since Roman times. The “gardens”, as the fruit orchards are still called in Sicily, were planted next to, and sometimes even took the place of, traditional wheat fields and olive groves.



An ideal reconstruction of the Zisa palace and its gardens in a painting (oil on canvas) by Rocco Lentini (1922)



A landscape painting of the Cuba palace in Palermo – Anonymous, 18th century

## After the year 1000

The year 1000 AD is a turning-point which is fundamental to our understanding of modern Europe. There is an upturn in the economy due to a series of occurrences such as the evolution of the feudal system, a population increase together with the introduction of innovative agricultural technology; the mouldboard plough, the water-mill and wind-mill all helped to overcome the subsistence-level agricultural economy which had prevailed in the preceding centuries.

The Holy Roman Empire enjoyed new vigour under the Saxon (962-1024) and Franconian (1024-1125) dynasties and Bishop/Counts gained in stature as they joined forces with the old feudal lords. In doing so they also gave the Church of Rome a new role in society. Cities flourished and imposed their power on the surrounding countryside as they became more autonomous. The Maritime Republics prospered.

The Normans ruled over Europe from the North to the Mediterranean, conquering England and, as has already been mentioned, southern Italy and Sicily.

Culture began to circulate freely thanks to such political and military events as the Crusades, and the diffusion of monastic rules brought about a consolidation of networks of like-minded religious centres which, ideally, obeyed Rome and the Pope. International exchanges became more frequent and academic endeavours regained their importance: monasteries, universities and cathedral libraries became centres of study and enlightenment. The arts, music and architecture gained in both importance and technical complexity. National languages became more defined and differentiated. In the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Europe was overcome by a renewed religious fervour triggered Catharian, Waldensian and Franciscan pauperistic movement.

Although cities are still protected by thick walls and abbeys remained fortified, their relationship with the population of the surrounding countryside became more direct. In the tenth century,

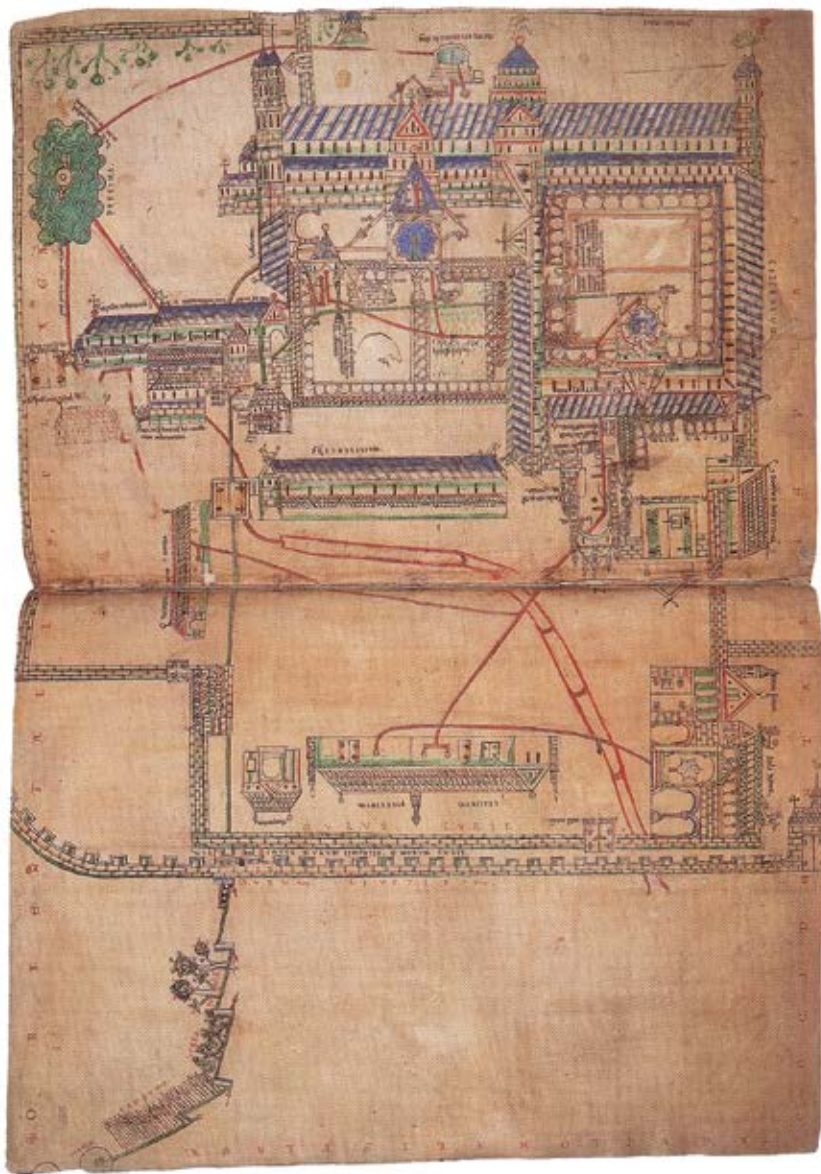
Benedictine monasteries under Odo of Cluny began to aggregate into congregations led by an Abbot General (Cluniac Order) and when the Benedictine monk, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) founded his Cistercian (or White Monks) order based on the exaltation of manual labour their rapport with the countryside improved even further. Religious orders were no longer just “cultural transmitters”, but gained in social standing as centres of work and production. It is in this environment that the idea for a new garden took shape. St. Benedict had included in his Rules that the monastery have two gardens, one with herbs and flowers, and the other with vegetables and medicinal plants. Bernardo of Clairvaux goes a step further and insists that the monastery must also have a walled-in orchard where “the sick can stroll and within which there shall be a pond filled with swimming fish and whose borders shall be built in such a way as to allow the infirm to sit there and rest.” The cloister became a place of peace and relief from the illnesses of the body and the mind, a place where nothing could disturb the individual’s search for God. The garden abandoned its strictly utilitarian function and became a place of meditation able to separate man from all things terrestrial and lift him into a world where he becomes God’s “gardener”.

No matter what the order or rules, the organization of all abbeys began to resemble one another.

The abbey reigned over the land, it organized it and kept it under control through outposts, typical of the Cistercian system, manned by converts and employees under the watchful eye of a *magister*.

In less than a century the Cistercian abbey became a full-fledged “city” for manual labour and intellectual pursuits; the stimulator of an open and dynamic economy and involved in the general development of its time. These religious “cities”, with their territorial organization, joined the system of settlements formed by the non-religious cities and castles and acted as a structural component in overcoming the feudal economy.

You could say that 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe was under the dominion of monks and sovereigns.



Canterbury: the system of water-supply at the monastery of Christ Church, c. 1156  
(Landsberg, S, 1992, *The Medieval Garden*)

While their existence was cited in many chivalrous novels, there is little evidence remaining of gardens within the castles.

In the *Roman de Tristan*, the water of a fountain-fed stream laps Isolde's dwellings, and the fountain itself is in the nearby orchard of the king. It is a recurring theme in these texts (*Chanson de Roland*, *Roman de Erec et Enide*): the garden is enclosed, fruit trees (*verger*) prevail and there is always a stream or fountain. In the *Roman de la Rose*, however, things are very different: Déduit's orchard is surrounded by high walls and can be accessed only by a small door which leads the visitor into a world of colours and perfumed air. This novel must be viewed from the highly symbolic and allegorical point of view which interprets the garden as an initiation into a journey to achieve happiness, wisdom and courtly love. It is in this spirit that the protagonist's love for a "rose" can be interpreted as his love for youth, for the richness and happiness this flower exudes. It is a perfumed garden, where tiny flowers dot the green, grassy field upon which figures play music, read or listen. It represents a mystical garden where the clear running waters reflect the colours and lights of nature. It is also the clear opposite of the "earthly" utilitarian garden, with its orchard divided into simple geometrical plots of grass where each plot grew only one species of fruit tree.

There were many gardens in the cities of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century: Ugo di San Vittore (1078-1141) describes those in Paris and William Fitzstephen, in his preface on the life of Thomas à Becket (1174), says that there are private gardens outside the city walls of London (he uses the word *gardinus* for the first time), while inside the city there are public parks with tree-shaded promenades. Outside the city there are also wide open spaces where citizens may go for a ride on horseback, or to play games of all types. The concept of urban strolling paths appeared in France at about the same time, as for instance in Saint-Germain-des-Prés and in Pré-aux-Clercs. But it also appeared in Vienna at the Prater and in Madrid where, over the centuries to come, this promenade would enjoy a success all its own.



As the monarchies consolidated themselves great royal parks come into being. Frederick Barbarossa had a garden with peach trees and exotic birds and on a buttress of his castle in Nuremburg, Frederick II had an exotic garden built, with plants brought to him from the land of the Saracens and Spain.

The first real nucleus of royal gardens came about in England when William I bought a hunting reserve at Windsor, land near the military post at Clarendon and a property at Woodstock, near Oxford. His son and heir to the throne, Henry I, increased his estates by buying vineyards and gardens in Windsor and by fencing in the forest at Woodstock.

The garden on which the most love and attention was lavished by the sovereigns was Woodstock – today Blenheim Palace. Henry I and William of Malmesbury, although keeping most of the estate as hunting grounds, had one part of the forest populated with exotic animals. In 1165 Henry II built Everswell, a second residence for his beloved Rosamund, with a vast amount of land around it. At his behest, a river was deviated onto it to make it more pleasing and an extraordinary structure “of stone and timber strong and hundred and fifty doors, did to this bower belong” (J. Brompton, *Cronache*, 1436) was built, in fact, a labyrinth. In 1300 Everswell boasted at least two enclosed gardens, one near to the King’s quarters and the other near to the Queen’s, decorated with trees, baths and benches to sit upon. The gardens of Everswell were, unfortunately, completely destroyed by landscape architect Capability Brown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Hesdin Park in the Bourgandy region of France, flourished at the same time as Everswell and was located near an ancient castle. It was conceived as one of the greatest landscape compositions of all time by Robert II Comte d’Artois at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The park, which from many points of view can be considered an ostentatious sign of the fortune and decadence of the Dukes of Burgundy, suffered tormented times and was finally destroyed by Charles V in 1553, along with the city and its castle.

Hesdin Park was an enclosed park with, at its centre, the *Maison du Marais* pleasure house. The rest of the park was exquisitely embellished with pavilions, circular paths and gazebos, water fountains and a labyrinth (*Maison de Dédale*). But what made the Hesdin park so rightfully famous was the presence on the grounds of “robots”: self-propelled stuffed animals (swans, lions, etc.), fitted with complex mechanisms which welcomed guests to the grounds. Underground conduits spouted jets of water or flour on the visitors and deformed mirrors placed here and there amongst the plants, little houses, tiny bridges, aviaries and fountains served further to distort their view of the fantastical landscaping.

The idea of this garden, where robots and special effects enhance the beauty of nature, was certainly influenced by Arab culture and by the great hydraulic experts who Robert d’Artois had met at the court in Naples. It was also certainly influenced by the adventure novels written by Chrétien de Troyes (the enchanted orchard in *Erec et Enide* and the garden of the Emir of Babylonia in *Flore e Blanchefleur*). The famous garden was, in turn, the source of inspiration for some of the greatest novelists of the time, Philippe de St. Remi and his *Roman de Jehan et Blonde* and Guillaume de Mechain with *Le Remède de Fortune*.

While the novels tell of gardens and enchanted places, meetings between lovers and brave adventures, the scientific writings produced between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries include many important treatises. The cultivation of orchards and gardens of all types is a topic of great interest. Around 1086 in England, at the behest of William I, the *Liber de Wintonia* or, as it is better known, *The Domesday Book*, was compiled to record all of the material wealth held by England’s citizens.

The *Hortus Deliciarum* (The Garden of Delights), on the other hand was written by Abbess Herrade of Landsberg (1125-1195) with an entirely different goal in mind. The 45,000 lines of text on pages embellished with colour illustrations, of which we unfortunately only have black and white copies, is a compendium of all of the sciences

studied at that time, includes the Old and the New Testament, and delves into the battle between Virtue and Vice with vivid visual imagery. The Middle Ages was in the grip of mystic symbolism and the garden was not only a protagonist, but became one of its most fertile fields of application.

The cloister-enclosed garden took on many meanings: it was the ensemble of a community of believers, the church itself, but also a symbol of Mary's virginity. It is not just a coincidence that the Annunciation is almost always depicted in a cloister. The representation of Mary was intricately tied to the garden where, often, roses grew on a bower near the protective walls further enclosing the internal space, exalting it and rendering it even more sacred; as sacred as the most beloved flower of classic antiquity and later years: the rose. Sacred to Venus, with the advent of Christianity the rose becomes the flower of the Virgin: Mary herself is a "mystic rose" and a "rose without thorns" according to the tradition which called for a rose without thorns in the heaven which earth was before Original Sin.

The spectacular work written by Abbess Hildegarde von Bingen (1099-1179), on the other hand, turned its back on mystical interpretations and concentrated on the spirit of scientific observation. Her *Liber Simplicis Medicinae* studied the relationship between botany and medicine and listed over 230 plants and 63 trees cultivated in 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Exotic species were also ordered according to a methodology taught by the Arab Ibn Sina (Avicenna, born in 980), probably the greatest scientist of the ancient Islamic world in the field of botany and pharmacy.

Henry, the Archdeacon of Huntingdon and one of the era's most meticulous historians, left us a masterpiece of eight volumes about plants, aromatics and seeds entitled *De herbis, de aromatibus et de gemmis*. Another Englishman, Alexander Neckam, the milk-brother of King Richard the Lionheart, wrote two widely-read books – *De Naturis Rerum* and *De Laudibus divinae sapientiae* – in which he enumerates 140 vegetable species. But the most important treatise



*Le Roman de la Rose*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun



Miniature in the *Roman de Ranaud de Montuaban*: Maugis and Orlando seated in the garden (1475 edition)

from this era is, without a doubt, Bartholomew de Granville's 17 volumes, *Enciclopedia*, written in 1240.

The German Dominican philosopher and theologian Albertus Magnus, apart from being St. Thomas Aquinas' teacher and the Bishop of Regensburg, wrote *De Vegetalibus*, the *De Plantatione Viridariorum* and *Parva Naturalia*, which gave its readers practical advice about how to cultivate, till, cook and irrigate.

Magnus pupil, Thomas of Cantimpré continued his studies in *De Natura Rerum*, a text that, although widely read, was never published. It laid the scientific basis for the 1260 compendium *Der Nature Bloene* by the Flemish author Jacob van Maerlant. In fact, no European country remained immune to this botanical fervour: in Denmark Henry Harpestreng wrote about herbs and medicine; and Norwegian Cistercian monks in Hovedø introduced exotic medicines into mainstream medical practices by expounding on their beneficial properties, many of which are still used in modern medicine today.

Perhaps the best known text of the times, for its popular nature, is *De Ruralium Commodorum* by Pietro De Crescenzi, a lawyer from Bologna, who served at the Angevin court in Naples for many years. The work is made up of 12 volumes, dedicated to Charles II of Naples, and was completed in 1305. The success this work enjoyed is evident by the many editions and translations that followed after its first printing, ordered by, amongst others, Charles V of France. It was actually in publication until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. De Crescenzi's work was highly original and begins with the notion that gardens are essential to every social class and he examines the "gardens of short grass", those of the "great and important persons" and, finally those of "Kings and other wealthy persons".

It has been said that De Crescenzi's description matches that of a mature mediaeval garden, and, while his garden comes close to the descriptions we have of the garden of Charles V's Hotel San Paul in Paris, it must also be noted that he includes mentions of traditional components such as the Roman *viridarium* and *pomarium*, with its

fruit trees planted in an orderly *quincunx* pattern; also the conventual garden, the Byzantine garden, and the Persian and Islamic garden with regard to precise boundaries, evenly balanced internal divisions and a complex cycle of water flowing through pools, fountains and a network of canals.

The De Crescenzi's descriptions, with their wealth of components became, together with another celebrated work of the times, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the starting point for understanding the events of the following century. They are the precursors of the great and long-lasting tradition of the Italian Garden. The actual real-life garden in the *Decameron* seems to echo that of the *Roman de la Rose* even though the garden itself, its lawns, fountains and streams, still belongs to the Byzantine-Persian tradition and its setting in the hills of Fiesole gives it an aura of the Classical age, when trees had both flowers and fruit, and statues exalted the tales of ancient deities from the compelling mythology of the ancient gods.

# The Renaissance Garden

*“Well building hath three conditions:  
firmness, commodity, and delight.”*  
Vitruvius, *De architectura*, 15 BC

## Humanism and the Renaissance

The Mediterranean basin, at the threshold of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, began to lose some of its importance in favour of Northern Europe, where the commercial and mercantile activities of Flanders, Holland and the Hanseatic League were on the rise. Yet north-central Italy maintained its standing in Europe thanks to its industrial and commercial prowess as Genoa and Florence became international economic powers, and Venice was busy expanding its influence in the Orient.

Italy, in this era, was enjoying an economic and social boom which was clearly reflected in the arts, so much so that aesthetic innovation and the artistic output of the 15<sup>th</sup> century's remained exclusively Italian. In later centuries, Renaissance and Mannerism would see all of Europe equally involved.

The transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance evolved in this context: Giotto's landscapes, like the garden in *Decameron's* third day, were real and belonged to a naturalistic aspect of the Renaissance which was present, although by exception in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, each time artistic expression does away with symbolic

interpretation and transcendental transfiguration in order to represent things in a more unified, realistic and earthy manner.

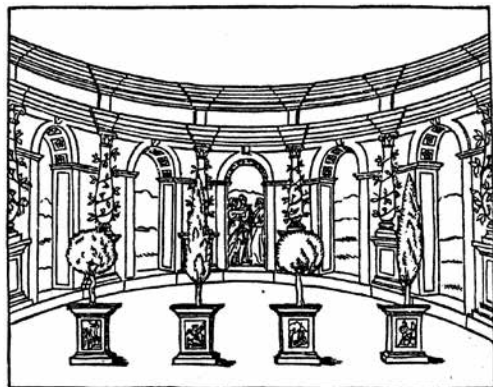
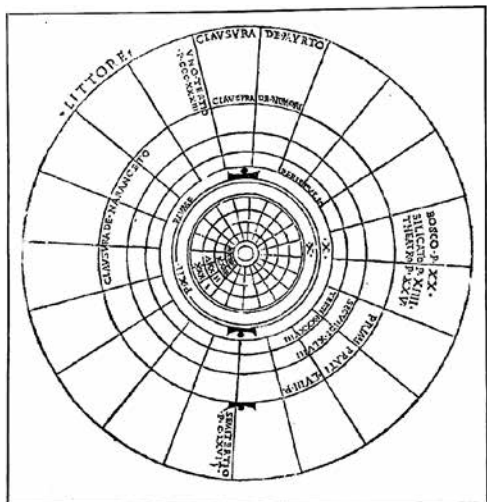
Boccaccio's works, like those written by De Crescenzi, were conceived in a very real space and time. Later, accomplished theorization and ideal abstraction appeared in the works of Francesco Colonna (*Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*) and Leon Battista Alberti (*De re aedificatoria*). These works, written in the early 1400s, had a profound effect on culture, especially in the second half of the century when, thanks to the invention of the printing press, they would spread over Europe.

Reason, comprehension and knowledge of the laws of nature were the basis of the naturalism in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The search for beauty became the search for perfection, and it was no longer just an ornament to be added to a form, as in Gothic art. Beauty came from the harmonious balance of the parts among themselves and the parts as a whole. Here the Vitruvian concept of *eurythmia* returned once more but, this time, Man was the standard bearer. Man, therefore, was the symbol of the universe and, with the natural symmetry that governs his body, he has the ability to regulate beauty and determine numerical and formal proportions.

The formal expression of this philosophical ideology can be best seen in Leon Battista Alberti, who, with his treatises, brings Medieval-style aesthetics to an end and places the arts in an anthropocentric and mathematical vision which defines the laws that rule harmony and, therefore, beauty.

In his *De re aedificatoria*, for the planning the layout of a garden, Alberti recalls Pliny the Younger and states that the same rules that apply to the construction of a building must also apply to the garden: "The architect must take his main directions with scrupulous proportion and regularity so that the pleasant harmony of the whole is subordinate to the attraction of the single component parts." And, getting into more detail of the composition, he states that "the promenades will be determined by the composition of the plants, which will have perennially green leaves."





Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*The Dream of Poliphilus*): the plan of Cythera Island (above), the Metamorphosis of the seven **Nymphs** (1499 edition) and the Crystal Garden (1564 edition)

The layout of the garden is closely bound to the architecture, and is, itself, also architecture. The garden is a sort of projection of the building itself onto the ground, and as such, has the same characteristics as an architectural perspective. This involves a regular layout inside a defined space marked by geometric partitions along a symmetrical axis. The inspiration behind this would be the criteria for the “immutability” of the scene, in which there are no flowers, just selected perennially green bushes along with statues and decorations.

After 1420 Florence became an important arena of artistic experimentation, largely the consequence of the city being at the peak of its economic prowess in this era. Cosimo the Elder, the first of the great Medici ruling family, and later his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent, gave a whole new meaning to urban open-air space. It was in these years that the Florence we know now took shape, defined by the architecture of Brunelleschi and the other fine artists of his day: Ghiberti, Donatello, Ghirlandaio, Verrocchio and Botticelli.

For all of the 1400s the Medici kept public power separate from private life and this was immediately evident in the buildings designed by the two great protagonists of the day: Brunelleschi, who designed buildings in the public spaces, and Michelozzo, who projected the family’s most important residences (the Palazzo on Via Larga, Villa Medici at Careggi, Villa Medici in Fiesole).

The only new villa built at Lorenzo’s behest is the one at Poggio a Caiano in 1485, designed by Giuliano da Sangallo. The villa is interesting for several reasons: for the architectural style, which is a return to the classic Tuscan rural house, with a monumental base and a portico under a triangular pediment; and for economic reasons relating to the running of an agricultural business. The “master’s farm” here becomes the cornerstone of an organized agricultural system in which it serves as the managerial and organizational control centre of production, which often also dabbled in experimentation, as evidenced by the presence of mulberry trees for silk production.

The rest of Italy was no less interested in the arts, and a great deal of attention was dedicated to the design of the garden. The Sieneese born Giorgio Martini, for example, was at court of Federigo da Montefeltro in Urbino where, at the same time, Piero della Francesca and Luca Pacioli were also working. The garden here lacked the openness of a Tuscan country garden, but was a city garden which looks out over the countryside (see Luciano Laurana's work in the Palazzo Ducale of Urbino and Bernardo Rossellino at Pienza).

The Milanese court of Francesco Sforza (1450-1466) was another centre of innovative architecture where Filarete and Leonardo da Vinci, who was then also involved in resolving problems of land reclamation and the building of a new city on the plains of Padua, were in full artistic bloom. Leonardo also left us a sketch for a pavilion meant to be constructed in the park of the Castello Sforzesco and the fresco of the Sala dell'Asse, which give us a very clear idea of just what the park looked like in reality. Leonardo, with this fresco, began a new trend in pictorial decoration which would see Giulio Romano as his greatest imitator as witnessed by the frescos at the Palazzo del Tè in Mantua.

## The 16<sup>th</sup> century

If, at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy was the greatest economic power in Europe and its most artistic country, in the first fifteen years it was also prey to the French and Spanish armies who, after the Peace of Noyon, established dominion over the North and South of the country respectively. The only state able to ensure relative political stability was the Papal State where, thanks to the patronage of three popes – Julius II, Leo X and Clement VII – the era's greatest artists were concentrated.

The first great example of the Italian garden was in Rome and adhered to the principles laid down by Alberti. Donato Bramante was called on by Pope Julius II in 1503 to lay an extensive garden to fill



Florence, Medici's Villa of Careggi: detail of the Villa in a map dating 1696 (State Archives, Florence, Pian-te Scrittoio Regie Possessioni)

Florence, Medici's Villa of Careggi: the main façade and the round basin



Detail of the Medici's Villa of Poggio a Caiano in a *lunetta* by the Flemish painter Giusto Utens



Florence, Medici's Villa of Castello: the formal garden and the statue "January" by Bartolomeo Ammannati (below)

in an area with a height difference of about 20 metres which existed between the medieval buildings of the Vatican and the Villa of Pope Innocence III. Called the Belvedere, it was the first time that such a vast open space was conceived as architecture and given a precise function, that of a museum. It was there that very valuable ancient sculptures, such as the Laocoon Group, Venus and Apollo, were placed.

The solution Bramante came up with has all the stylistic characteristics of the Italian garden, although he also included some classical touches and a hint of the ruins, then still visible, of the ancient gardens of the hills of Rome. He kept the Alberti “rules” in mind and their application can be seen in the resolution of the side edges with three overlapping layers which cancelled the external height difference and appeared as the inside facade of the garden.

Bramante divided the space he had to work with into three corresponding parts on three different levels. The ground plan is underscored by a main longitudinal axis from which smaller perpendicular axes reach out to mark the articulation of the various terraces. These, in turn, are accented by architectural elements and the rapport with the main building is so strong that the garden seems to be the natural extension of the facade, being both its backdrop and at the same time creating a privileged scenario for its content. The garden is no longer just a place to rest and stroll, but becomes an elegant introduction to the villa. It is a scenario which remains unchanged by the seasons as there are no flowers or local trees in the setting, just shrubs that have been shaped into square hedges and formed to make edges and curbs.

The creative capacity and innovative talent of Bramante for the art of designing gardens can also be seen in the Orti Farnesiani or the Giardini Farnese on the slopes of the Palatine hills.

Many great artists were called to Rome as it prepared to celebrate the Holy Year of 1500, but it was only under the leadership of Julius II (1503) that the Church began to show its power in a concrete and visible manner. Leo X, a member of the Medici family, followed in his footsteps and continued the construction of the monumental

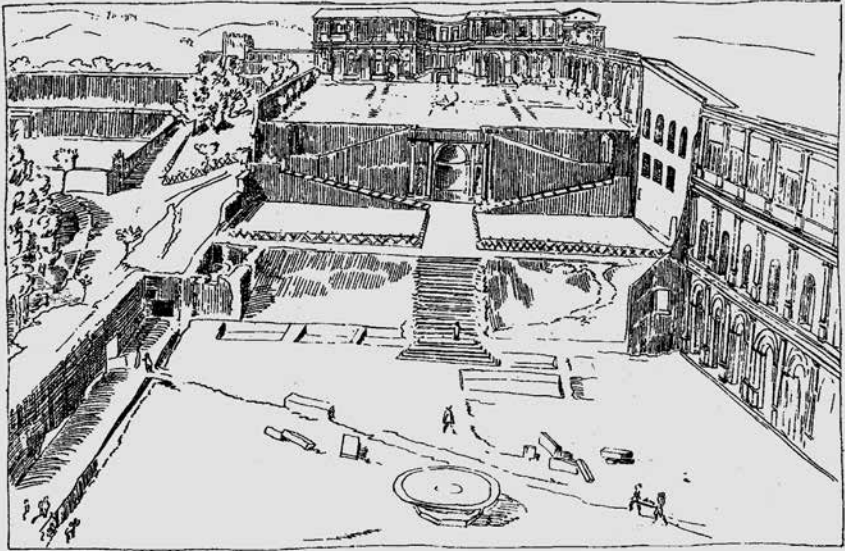
buildings that called artists and intellectuals alike – besides Bramante, Raphael, Antonio and Giuliano da Sangallo, Sansovino and others – back to the city.

Totally different concepts of the garden matured in the two most important cities of Italy, Rome and Florence, during this time. In the first, the concept of the city as the scene for public events and massive celebrations of the magnificence and power of a single sovereign was evident in the gardens belonging to the great buildings (Villa Madama and Villa Medici). In the second, the shape of the city remained as it was designed by Brunelleschi a century earlier, and the garden stayed, with the exception of a very few, in the realm of private residences, where members of the *haute bourgeoisie* gathered to relax and enjoy themselves.

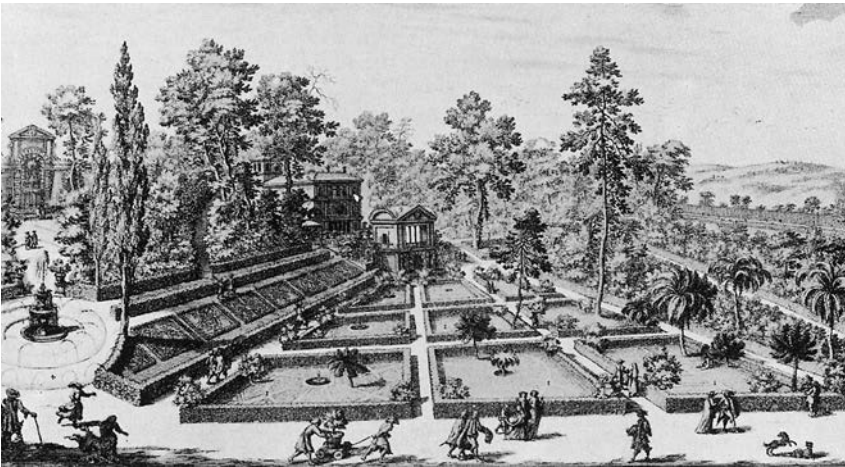
### **Florence in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century**

After the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent in 1492, and the expulsion of his son Piero two years later, the splendour of the Medici family waned in Florence and they were forced to take exile, where they shone brightly for a few decades. They had to wait until 1531 to be admitted back into Florence, and when they they were received with enthusiasm, at the same time as they accepting the title of Duca. With the rise of Cosimo I, a distant relative of Lorenzo, a great period of economic and cultural prosperity began in Tuscany which, when Siena was conquered, became a true and proper state.

By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> the 18 villas built or bought by the Medici family constituted a very real economic power base that covered the entire territory. Two extraordinary documents from the time – Michel de Montaigne's book *Voyage en Italie par la Suisse et l'Allemagne* and the lunettes painted between 1599 and 1602 for Ferdinand I de' Medici by the Flemish painter Giusto Utens – offer us a clear picture

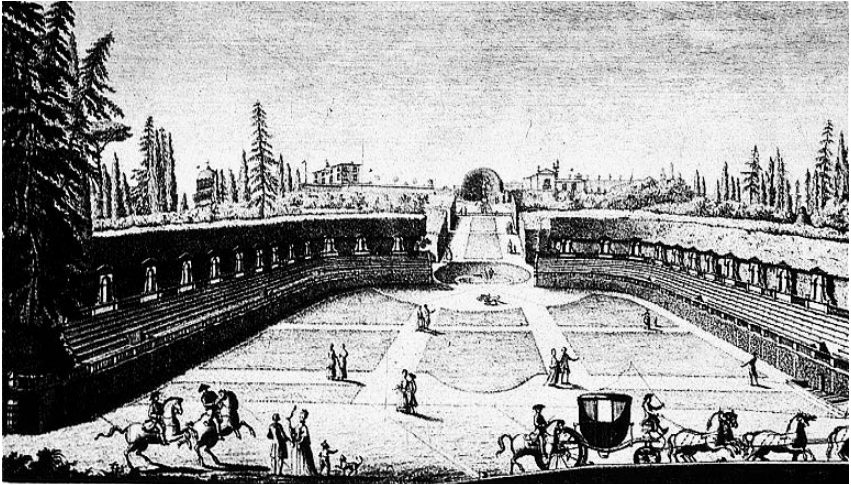


Rome, *Cortile del Belvedere* (the Belvedere Courtyard) by Donato Bramante in an engraving by Stefano Pera

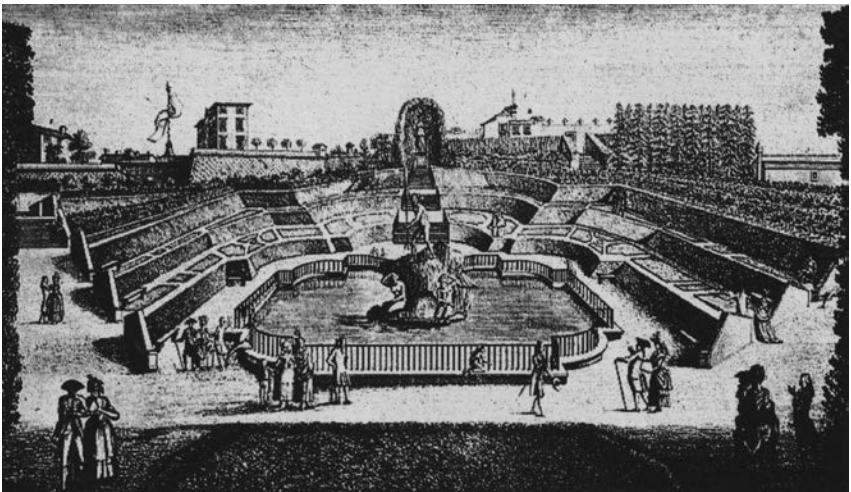


Rome, Villa Pia or Casina of Pio IV by Pirro Ligorio in an engraving by G.B. Falda





Florence, Boboli gardens, view of the Amphitheatre, in an engraving by A. Lamberti, 18<sup>th</sup> century



Florence, Boboli gardens, view of the Basin of Neptune, in an engraving by A. Lamberti, 18<sup>th</sup> century

of what life at court was like and the aesthetic evolution of gardens during Humanism, Renaissance and Mannerist times.

The first houses at Cafaggiolo and Trebbio – far from the city, fortified, closed and with the sole purpose of managing agricultural concerns – were followed by the villas at Careggi and Fiesole, and later by those at Castello and Petraia, closer to Florence, and built according to Alberti's rules. When Lorenzo the Magnificent had his villa at Poggio a Caiano built, there was a fundamental change in the criteria governing location (distance from Florence) and the search for fertile land to be encompassed in the business.

By the time Ferdinand I bought Montevettolini and Artimino and enlarged Ambrogiana, Petraia and Castello, the system of villas was complete. After Tribolo and many artists such as Vasari and Giambologna, both Ammannati and Buontalenti influenced and confirmed the Mannerist style. Gardens more complex and their decorative elements – statues, fountains, pools and water games – recalled the celebrative iconography of the Medicean dynasty. The garden, however, remains a private one, a place in which to enjoy the company of friends, or entertain intellectual discussions within a close circle of artists and thinkers of the time. Only Boboli, the city's garden, enjoyed a public role and the symbols of this function are evident: it is here that the big parties took place, and it is here that its hosts amazed visiting friends and enemies alike with the grandeur of the architectural setting, the statues and the furnishings.

Boboli is the one garden that best symbolizes the entire dynasty. It was the only place where the entire family could celebrate and show off its power. It was no longer a quiet, private place in which to relax, but a park scenically organized to meet the needs of the entire court.

The first mono-axial layout was designed by Tribolo, who carved the hillside into a large amphitheatre: a vast green conch which can hold large numbers of people in movement as it further developed the theme of perspective. It was a perfect setting for parties, games, balls,

masked events and tournaments, and, a century later, it assumed its current shape with high steps embellished with amphorae and statue-filled niches.

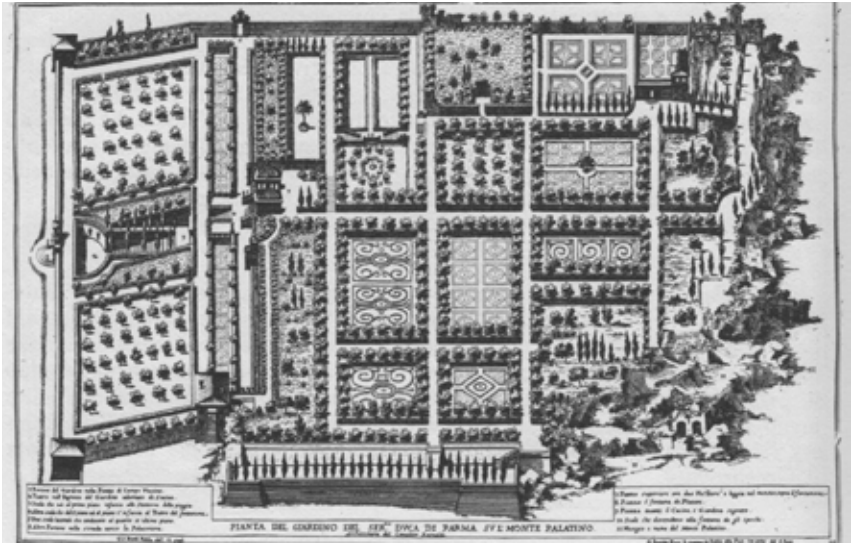
A second, almost perpendicular, axis was introduced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Giulio and Alfonso Parigi. They had detected, in the steep downhill slope of the Viottolone, an important perspective expedient that introduces the Vasca dell'Isola (the Island Pond – elliptical in shape with statues and columns) and then continues until it reaches the city walls.

The timid, intimate scene of Cosimo the Elder in his little cloister-garden at the palazzo in Via Larga is a distant memory. The concept of space as an entity in which everything and the parts of everything could only be appreciated by their innate reciprocity was also a distant memory. Space has now been articulated into parts which were complete in themselves, even though their autonomy was still only partial because they nonetheless remained part of a united and coherent composition. Mannerism influenced the gardens of Florence under the protective wings of the Renaissance canons which dominated each dreamy aspect, each unconventional element and every breaking of the rules. Mannerism offers illusions through controlled and carefully weighed sequences that fit in well with the refined taste and classical culture generated by Humanism.

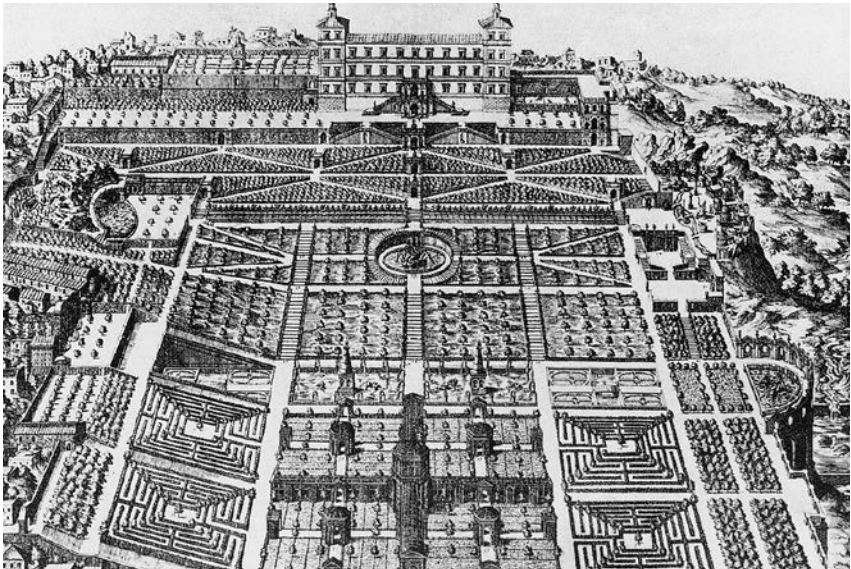
## **Roman exuberance**

The measured and controlled Florentine way of designing gardens was completely overwhelmed in Rome, where the opulent ostentation of decoration was further exalted by the joyous ever-changing flow of running water.

The number of villas on the city's hills multiplied and in just a few decades took over the entire Tuscia area. Iacopo Barozzi (1507-73, also known as Vignola), was the heir to Bramante and Raffaello,



The Orti Farnesiani in Rome, in an engraving of G.B. Falda



Tivoli, Villa d'Este: the plan for the garden by Pirro Ligorio

and the most important architect of this new chapter in design. He found himself in the fine company of such talented artists as Pirro Ligorio, Antonio da Sangallo, Baldassarre Peruzzi, Giacomo della Porta and Domenico Fontana, all of whom were enthusiastic participants in the fantastic creativity of this period.

By the mid 1500s villas became important status symbols in addition to the palazzo in the city. The garden was, of course, an integral part of the building itself and was given the role of mediator between the inside of the villa and the surrounding landscape. The garden, although somewhat limited by its perimeter, does not have the same rigid definition as the Tuscan *hortus conclusus*, and the landscape beyond it became a sort of idyllic and reassuring countryside which acted as a frame for the exuberant formal layout of the neatly fenced-in space. The garden's design kept its mono-axial character and the geometrical lines in its composition; but it presented itself with a succession of different ambiances marked by perennially green shrubs shorn into geometric forms, lawns with statues and fountains, and an incredible number of steps, seats, belvederes, porticos and open galleries. Water was the dominating feature of the composition and was used in any number of different ways: in shaped ponds, for reflections, for light and colour, and even for sound. Take, for example, the great gardens of Alessandro Farnese's Caprarola, Cardinal Gambara's Bagnaia, or Ippolito d'Este's gardens at Tivoli, where Vignola and Pirro Ligorio both worked.

The number of villas in the area between Rome and Viterbo also multiplied in just a few years. There were the gardens at Frascati belonging to Cardinal Rufini, or those belonging to Cardinal Arrigoni, or Villa Torlonia which brought back the water chain motif in a rustic version. Villa Aldobrandini, which dates to the early 1600s, marked the first time Italy used the fashionable French mono-axial layout on a grand scale also including a great part of the adjoining land.

We know very little, unfortunately, of another garden in the Roman countryside: the Sacro Bosco or Selva di Bomarzo, a product of Vicino Orsini's (1523-85) creative energy.



Bagnaia, Villa Lante: perspective view in the Villa's 17<sup>th</sup> century fresco



Bagnaia, Villa Lante: the water chain

The relationship between buildings and their gardens is particularly interesting in city villas and, among the many fine examples are Villa Montalto, Odescalchi and the gardens of the Quirinale. Once again Vignola and Pirro Ligorio are those who offered the most interesting solutions for Pope Julius II' Villa Giulia and Pope Paul IV's Villa Pia in the Vatican.

Siena was not immune to these Roman trends. Take the garden at Villa delle Volte Alte with its opposing scenic elements such as a fish pond surrounded by a curved wall and wavy stairs moulded to resemble the sea floor; seemingly without any organizational or spatial unity it nonetheless fits beautifully into the surrounding countryside. The 1581 Horti Leonini remained an isolated case. This unusual garden was laid out with an irregular plan inside the perimeter of the old city walls of San Quirico d'Orcia and has an unusual geometric design of triangular *parterres* on the flat part which then slopes upwards into an oak woods: the ideal reconstruction of wilderness.

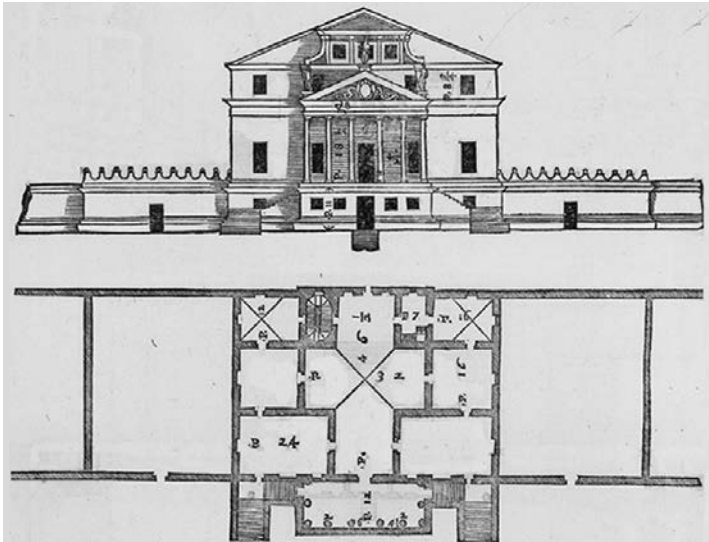
Other interesting gardens are also worth a mention, like the Villa Imperiale "La Bellezza" or Villa Dora Pamphili in Genoa, where Galeazzo Alessi and Rocco Lurago worked, or the Palladian Villas of the Veneto where the garden acquired, over the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, autonomous characteristics and interpretations which left Renaissance canons behind to enter into the fantastic world of Mannerism, which was more in keeping with the city's festive character.

The most compelling architect in the Venice area was Palladio, who had a very detached attitude towards gardens. Palladian villas are in perfect harmony with the landscape, whether set in the country or alongside a river, and are almost completely lacking in formal boundaries. Only the *barchesse* (arcades) – when used – seemed to mark the transition area between the building and its immediate surroundings.

Vincenzo Scamozzi, who shared Palladio's conception of space, give gardens a bit more importance, as we see in Villa Corner at Piosolo, Treviso, and read in his *L'Idée dell'Architettura Universale*. But



Villa Foscari, named La Malcontenta by A. Palladio



La Malcontenta: front and plan from *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (The Four Books of Architecture)



even then it is not exaggerated, Sebastian Serlio, in the fourth book of his *Trattato di Architettura*, had already discarded Renaissance notions and replaced them with more Mannerist ambiences, in which the function of a garden is purely ornamental, separated from the building and to be designed and laid out autonomously, its distinct parts easily disassembled.

The gardens of the Paduan flatlands and the rest of Northern Italy are of lesser interest, although the exceptions worth mentioning are actually quite important: the Belvedere over the Po River at Ferrara and the Verona gardens of Alessandro Giusti.

## Art and botany

Italy, in the era of the courts, was an Italy of gardens where interest in plants was not just limited to their contemplation for aesthetic purposes, but where gardens were increasingly influenced by science and botany.

Since antiquity, plants have been the object of scientific attention for their medicinal properties, and texts, such as those written by Galen, or the *De Materia Medica* by Dioscorides, formed the basis of medieval herbal therapy. In the mind 16<sup>th</sup> century there were more than 60 editions of Dioscorides' book in circulation, and it had been translated into Latin, Italian, French, German and Czech.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century the first botanical gardens (*horti medici*) were laid out in various Italian universities: Pisa in 1543 and Padua in 1545, as well as in Florence in 1550 (near the hospital). Starting in 1580 the number of botanical gardens multiplied all over Europe: Leipzig in 1580, Heidelberg in 1593, Leiden in 1587, Oxford in 1620, Montpellier in 1593 and Paris (Jardin des Plantes) in 1635.

Tied, as they often were, to universities, these gardens important centres of study where scientists come to share observations and

impart knowledge. New observation methods come into being and also involved the representation of plants by designs or engravings. The fashion of drying leaves and flowers in *horti sicci* was very popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century's most famous botanist is, without a doubt, Carolus Clusius. A researcher, classifier and collector, he became famous when, in 1592, he took over the Leiden garden and transformed it from *hortus medicus* to *hortus botanicus*, introducing a wide range of species collected from all over Europe and included in his book *Rariorum Plantarum Historia* (1601).

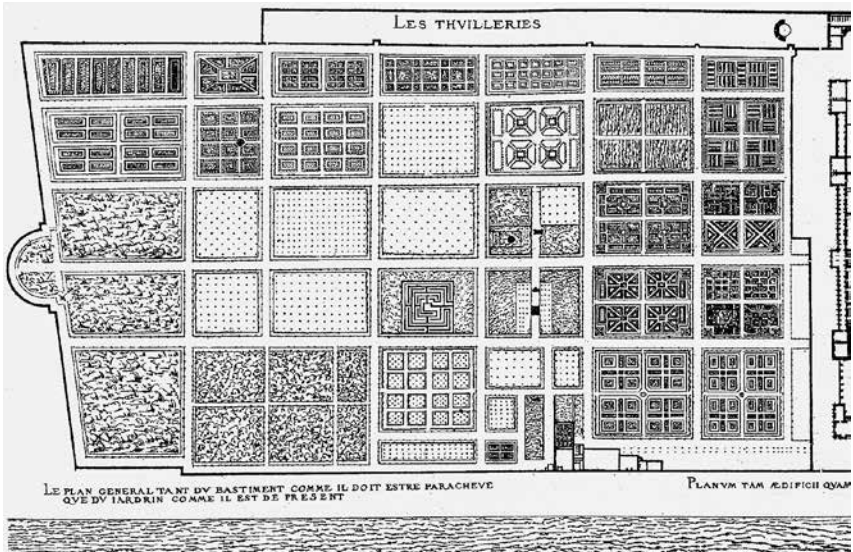
## The Renaissance garden in Europe

### France

Although Italy was overrun by wars and territorial battles fought by the French and Imperial armies on its land, its artists nonetheless dominated the European cultural scene from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Even though each country has its own particular characteristics, the art of the garden still has all of the markings of the Italian garden: a symmetrical layout with a geometrical pattern organized on overlapping terraces dotted with lots of statues and decorations.

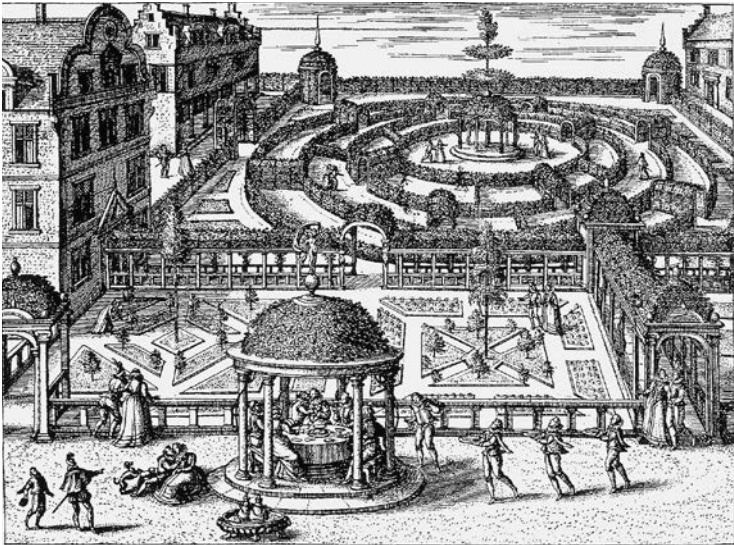
In the late part of 15<sup>th</sup> century, France, after having conquered Brittany and Burgundy, was finally under the rule of a single sovereign, Charles VIII who, when arrived in Italy, came under the spell of Renaissance art and culture. Evidence of this can be found in the gardens at Blois, Amboise (designed by friar Pacello di Mercoliano) and Gaillon castles. There are many similarities: they are separated from their castle by a moat, have a geometrical layout with a symmetrical axis and plenty of water.



Paris, Le Tuilleries, view (above) and plan (below) in an engraving by J-A. de Cerceau (mid-16<sup>th</sup> century)



Peter Bruegel the Elder: *Spring garden works*, 1570



Hans Vredeman de Vries: *Garden*, from *Hortum Viridariorumque Elegantes et Mumultiplicis Formae*, published c.1583

Francis I had the gardens of two of his royal estates, which he actually used more as hunting lodges, further embellished. Both have an abundant water supply: Chambord and Fontain-bel-eau, later Fontainebleau.

The layout of the French garden became increasingly complex, but the castle remained in a class of its own. With its moat and imposing walls, its massive size utterly dominated the surrounding land which could either be shaped to complement the architecture, such as at Amboise, or remain completely independent, as at Blois.

There were also Renaissance-type gardens, but in a fragmentary way and, not infrequently, as a sort of artistic and decorative citation. In most cases, the layout of these gardens refer to a unitary concept, which flattens out in a succession of large and small “fenced-in” areas surrounded by pergolas, *terrepleins*, or such structures as hothouses or porticos. Even when the aim of the project is to shape and mould the rise in the terrain, the parts do not come together in a single perspective, but become even more isolated as they define separate ambiances (Verneuil and Chenonceaux). The composition remains flat and without a defined hierarchy (the Tuileries). The only exception to this is the garden at Saint Germain-en-Laye near Paris, where Tommaso Francini worked.

While the Italian influence is evident and deliberate, it would nonetheless be inappropriate to say that they are copies of the Italian Renaissance garden, or, even worse, gardens reflecting late versions of medieval styles. Some of the innovative and distinctively French features are, however, worth a mention. There is a clear search for increasing the dimensions of the garden and for filling it with pools and ponds. At Verneuil, for example, canals substitute plants to mark the strict divisions of Italian gardens and are a preview of stylistic innovations which will bloom in the great 17<sup>th</sup> century French tradition.

## Holland

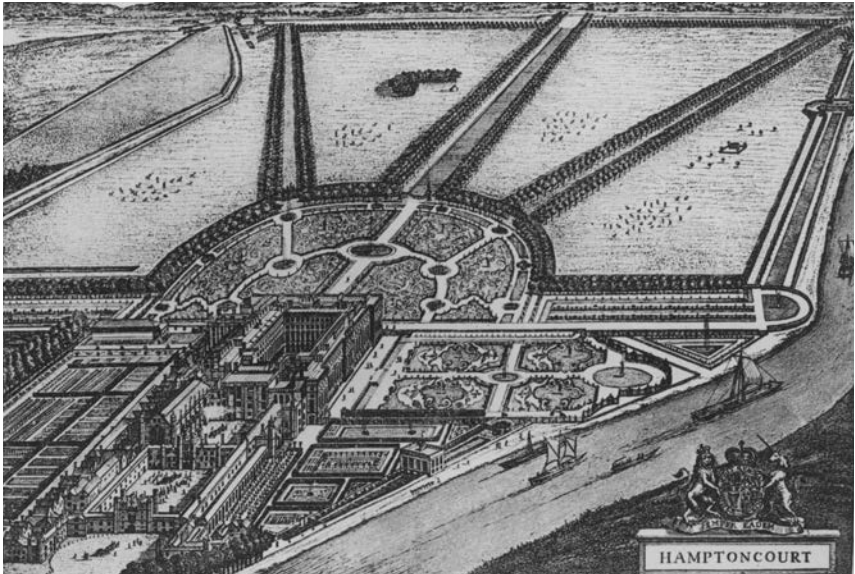
While in France gardens were occupying more and more space, in Holland the garden remained in small walled-in areas. Even when the garden seems to be in wide open spaces, such as the one shown in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Spring*, it remains simple, content to be where it is, part of a pattern designed by evenly spaced geometrical plots bordered by potted plants with flowers or shrubs ready to be planted. In his engraving, a banister marks the garden's edge and separates it from the river and the surrounding landscape. The building that the garden belongs to is not visible.

## England

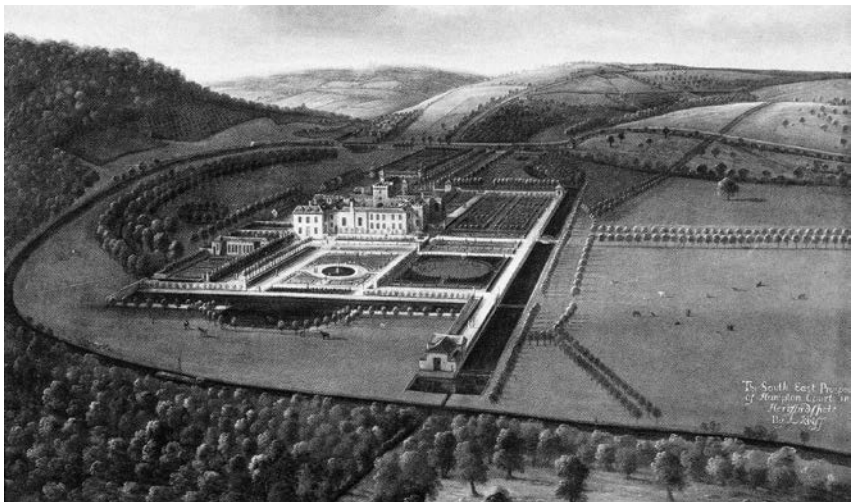
The end of the Wars of the Roses and the Tudor ascent to the throne in 1485 brought with it an economic recovery and a boom in culture and the arts, including the garden. The importance of monastic gardens diminished and a rapid evolution away from the mediaeval format came about. At first this resulted simply in seeking larger areas in which to plant; but soon solutions were also being sought for innovative layouts with increasingly complex designs. The hedges and pergolas of old were replaced by brick walls and trees were felled, relegated to thriving in the woods and hunting reserves, not in gardens. The ancient hill with its spiral path remained, but now at the summit there was an elegant wooden pavilion instead of a sacred druid tree.

The flower-beds were no longer separated in their own closed single-bloom plots, but began to include other flowers, and even shrubs, to form increasingly complex designs.

Knot gardens, an archaic form of the *parterre de broderie*, are typical of this period. According to Gervase Markham (*The English Husbandman*, 1613), two types of knot garden, the "open" and the 'closed', were in vogue. In the 'open', the design is laid out with low bushes cut



Hampton Court Palace: South-West view in an engraving by John Kip, 1705



Hampton Court Palace: painting by L. Kniff (Lasdun, S., 1992, *The English Park. Royal, Private & Public*)

into thin geometric hedges – they could be rosemary, thyme, hyssop or other types of shrubbery – and the open spaces covered with white and grey-blue pebbles. The walkways are grass or earth. In the ‘closed’ knot garden, on the other hand, there are flowers, usually of a single colour, and shrubs, but no pebbles.

Gardens became a must for the upper classes and in the early 1500s Andrew Boorde publishes his book *Book for to lerne a man to be wyse in buylding of his house* in which he approves of the orchard being close to the house, the importance of having an aromatic herb patch, a pond for fish and wide open spaces for archery and ball games. Boorde’s book was published 70 years before another gardening manual came into being, *The Gardener’s Labyrinth* by Thomas Hill (known by his pseudonym Didymus Mountain).

Royal gardens are those about which we know the most. Hampton Court, built in 1525 at the behest of Henry VIII, has a Tudor garden – much smaller than the park that surrounds it – divided into three distinct areas: the *Privy Garden*, *Mount Garden* and *Pond Garden*. But Henry VIII’s real masterpiece was the monumental garden at Nonsuch. Thomas Platter described it in 1599 as a vision that rose majestically from the country landscape, isolated and with a park populated by wooden sculptures of animals of such beauty that they seem real. There were lawns for ball games and tennis. Here the garden was also ‘fenced’. Next to the King’s quarters was a private garden with a knot at the eastern end and a labyrinth of perennially green hedges at the western end. Beyond the King’s gardens, away from the building, was an orchard and a hill topped by a multi-level wooden pavilion.

By Elizabethan times gardens had become very complex and sumptuous compositions adorning magnificent homes. In the mid-1500s, the Italian garden wielded a strong influence and enriched the English garden’s layout with statues and fountains. It must be mentioned, however, that alongside the Italian garden there was also a popular and autonomous trend which was a sort of less elaborate version of the knot with simpler designs. The informality of this trend would give way to the designs being drawn by the colours and lines themselves.



# The Baroque Garden

*"If our sight stop here,  
let imagination pass beyond"*  
Blaise Pascal 1655

## The birth of Baroque

With the exception of the first 20 years, which was marked by libertarian ferment, wars and pestilence, the 1600s saw the advent of national absolutism, with France at the forefront of the movement.

Absolutism did not just overwhelm social and economic structures, but also artistic and cultural expression. Political absolutism coincided with intellectual absolutism, which has a tendency to deny naturalism and Renaissance rationalism in declaring that the representation of reality should be solemn and grandiose, as idealized by the royal court.

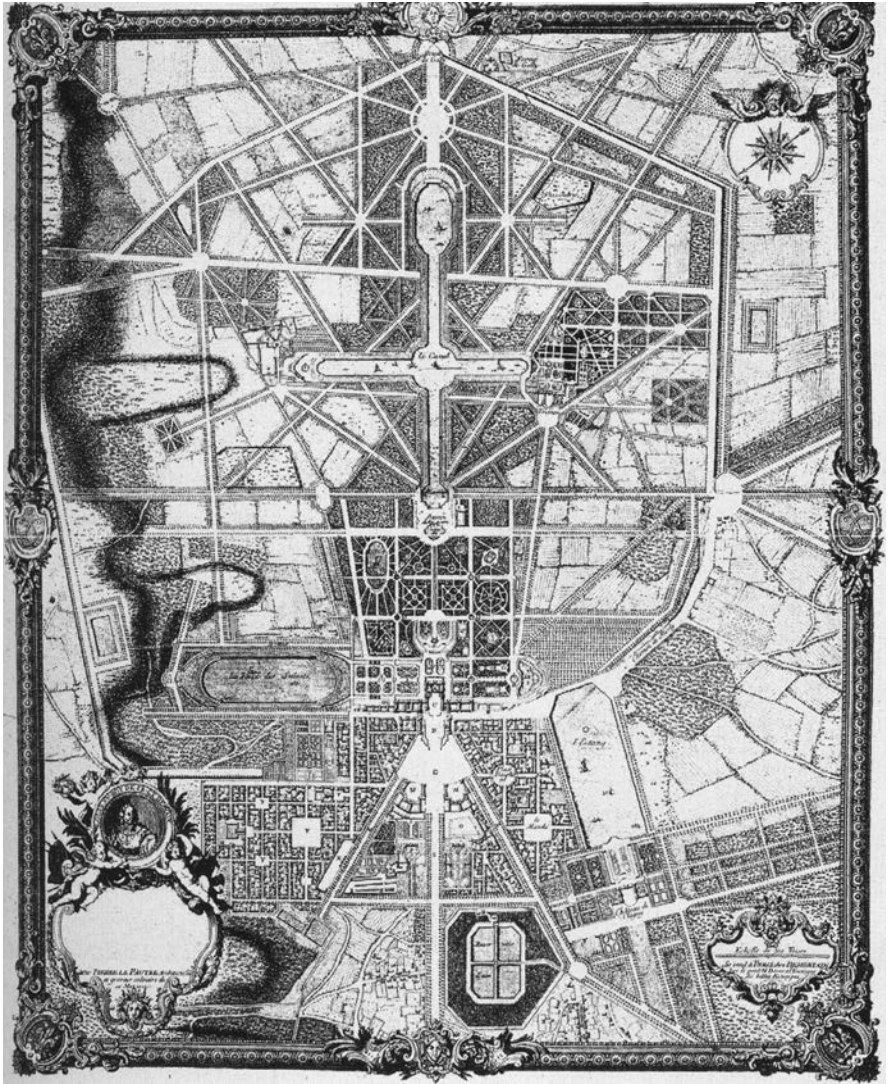
The search for aesthetics was no longer based on harmony and precise rules, but underwent a complex series of changes that gives birth to the Baroque, a unique new culture, which in no time was influencing all the royal courts of Europe. Art is inspired by the sovereign and given to the public at large as a sort of gracious concession for all, creators and consumers, to enjoy. Everyone recognizes something of himself in this art; it reflects the aesthetic ideals of an investiture that comes directly from God and is, therefore, perfect.

Henry IV of France (1553-1610) could be seen as the sovereign of this transition: the complicated political-religious events that lifted

him to the throne and his predilection for Italian culture, which grew even stronger when he married Marie de' Medici, eased the conception of his absolutism and involved him in a mannerist artistic culture which still had strong ties to the Renaissance. His relationship with Maximilien de Sully gave an innovative spark to his politics and led him to found an educational institute for economists, bankers and engineers which would eventually constitute the foundation of every modern national state.

By this time Italian influence is on the wane and the French Academy, founded in 1635, accelerated and reinforced autonomous artistic education. The social changes that overwhelmed France, in which the nobility poor and had to live in the shadow of the royal court, saw the greatest wealth end up in the hands of the highest court functionaries; the only ones with the means to build opulent homes with which to show off their newly acquired wealth and social status. Louis Le Vau (1612-1670), André Le Nôtre (1613-1700) and Charles Le Brun (1619-90) rose to the occasion as a formidable team which would, with its inventiveness and creative talent, dominate the entire *Grand Siècle*. The Château de Vaux le Vicomte was the test bench where Le Vau (the architect), Le Brun (the painter) and Le Nôtre (the landscape architect) experimented with entirely new concepts of space marking a break in continuity with the canons of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian garden.

The ancient mediaeval castle of Vaux le Vicomte had vast holdings including two farms and the village of Vaux itself. In order to transform it, the village was razed and Le Vau replaced it with a new residence located at the centre from which three large successive terraces spread out over a gentle descending slope. The dominating central axis envelopes the entire building making it one of the key features of the project. It divides the entire area into two functional zones, one in front made up of a great square court with service buildings off to the side, and one in the back which is more articulated and designed to be used by the court and its guests. The elaborate and complex space, with alternating *parterre de broderie* and *parterre d'eau*, commands the eye versus the



Versailles: general plan by André Le Nôtre



Versailles, *Bosquet de Trois Fontaines*, painting by Jean Baptiste Martin, 1688

large transversal basin. The perspective continues onwards beyond the grand canal and focuses on a semi-circular space from which three axes depart opening the view out beyond the park's perimeter. The views stretch out reaching dimensions which are visually superior to the actual space itself. The points of interest to focus on, as defined by the Italian garden, are no longer there; the area's surface seems to continue onwards and fade into the horizons of infinite space.

Italian tradition had lost its influence and the castle at Vaux is the first real proof. The talented Le Vau, Le Nôtre and Le Brun trio went on to a new and magnificent project, Versailles, where architect Harduin Mansart was already at work.

The objectives of the Versailles park project were clear from the beginning: to create a park which was a proper symbol of the eternal celebration of power, the image of the king, and also a permanent and opulent stage-setting for the enjoyment of the court and its players. Versailles is a complex articulated on the three elements of the city, the castle and the park. Its unity is established by the triumphal axis which introduces the castle and then continues into the garden and over large ponds. Not unlike Vaux le Vicomte, it is, however, on a much grander scale. As there, the building here also divides the ensemble of the two parts: the city and the park. The first is clear and well-defined based on a trident of grand tree-lined avenues which lead to the castle's enormous square. The second is elaborate, complex and truly magnificent. It is so complex, in fact, that even today in order to describe the park at Versailles it is easier to go directly to the "instructions" which Louis XIV gave to visitors in his *Manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles*.

The sun, and the mythology surrounding it, is the very essence of the garden and present in its iconography: unique, surprising and luminous, it is the engine that gives life to all things, the Sun and the King, the absolute ruler, Louis XIV. Everything here was created around him and when he arrived the water fountain swelled to even greater heights. The garden came truly alive only when the sovereign was present; the strict rules of court ceremony governed over every-

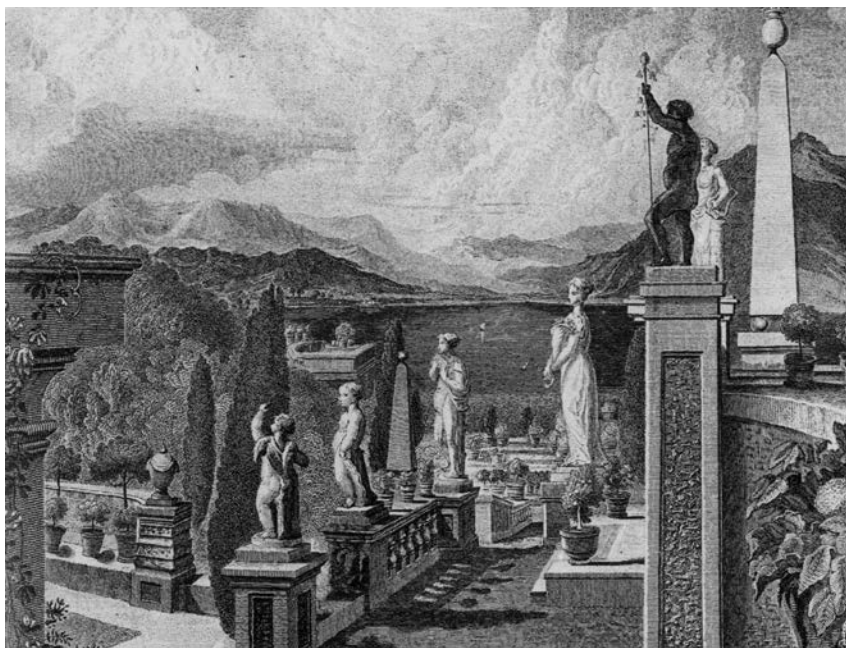
thing, including the behavior of the members of court, and the mutation of the elements which created the scene.

Le Nôtre went on to transform almost all of the great parks of France: from the royal gardens at St. Germain, Fontainebleau and the Tuileries, to those at Marly, Chantilly and Sceaux. His influence later crossed the channel when he was invited to England by Charles II to work on the gardens at Hampton Court, St. James and Greenwich.

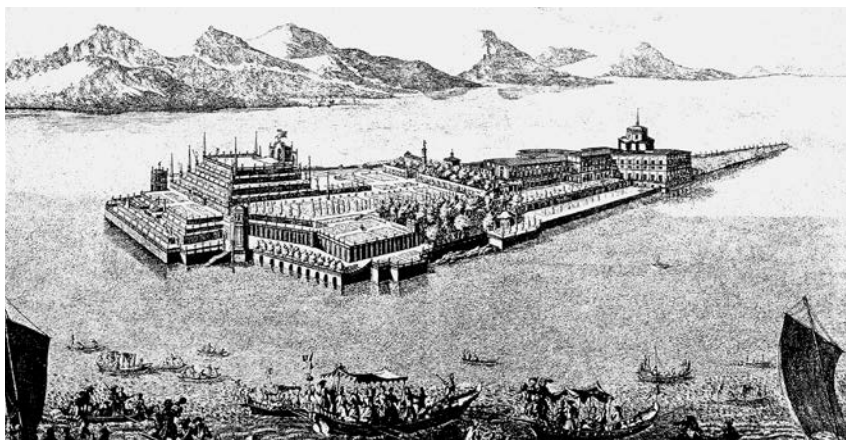
### **Mannerism in Europe**

While in the first half of the of the 17<sup>th</sup> century gardens were still being designed with the Italian model in mind, the spatial revolution brought about by Le Nôtre swept over the rest of Europe in the second half.

In papal Rome, gardens with a 1500s design continued to dominate the scene with their single axis perspective and visual rapport with the surrounding countryside. Nonetheless, their size and relationship to the landscape was changing and leaning towards the French example (Villa Aldobrandini). It is in the architecture and art (Bernini, Borromini and Pietro da Cortona) of the city that the temporal power of the popes was put on show with the most enthusiasm. It is there that the popular language of Baroque art became the keystone of a power which, although denied by scientific and philosophical theories (Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella and Galileo Galilei), was upheld by the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. The relationship between the Pope and the masses was at its best in Rome. Art must persuade and it must be the means by which faith, which is leaning towards increasingly foreign rituals, is spread. The Catholic and Protestant worlds had gone their separate ways, and the Church in Rome was doing its best to create an image of ostentatious opulence and pomp. Rome was the centre of a colossal cultural boom and an architectural craze which was spreading to the rest of Europe. Gardens,



Isola Bella, Engraving by J. Futler inspired by a Turner's picture



Lake Maggiore, Isola Bella: the Baroque gardens. Engraving by J. Futler and by M.A. dal Re, 1726

in the meantime (Villa Borghese, Villa Ludovisi and Villa Pamphili), remained in the realm of private pleasures dedicated to a life of culture and the Baroque was used to cover over other styles, and essentially imitate Mannerism.

We have, from this period, priceless evidence in the form of a collection of engravings done by Giovan Battista Falda called *Li giardini di Roma, con le loro piante, alzate e vedute in prospettiva* (1683) which gives us a fair glimpse at the gardens and their composition, but also at how people used them.

Flowers were also of great interest during this period and many books on the subject were published: the *De Florum Cultura* (1653) and *Hesperides, sive de Malorum Auriorum Cultura* by Giovanni Battista Ferrari, for example, or Pietro Castelli's *Horto Farnesiano Rariores Plantae Exactissime Descriptae* (1625) wherein he described and catalogued the rich collection of plants growing in the Orti Farnesiani. Duke Franco Caetani di Sermoneta, on the other hand, became famous all over Europe for his two massive volumes on the flowers and bulbous plants of the Cisterna garden, near Rome.

Carlo Fontana was educated and worked in Rome. His notoriety came from the work he did at the Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore, at the behest of the Borromeo family who had also transformed another island a century earlier, Isola Madre, turning it into a garden of Renaissance delight. The transformation of Isola Bella took the better part of 50 years and Fontana began his work there in 1620, with grandiosely opulent architecture conceived as a floating garden. Fontana radically changed this craggy little island by building an impressive structure on it which then reached down into a garden designed with steep terraces bringing to mind the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

The northern Piedmont region was the part of Italy which, partly for its geographical and cultural proximity, was most influenced by the French model; while an autonomous creative vein with cultural references leaning more towards the conceptual than the formal transposition of the models was represented by Florentine gardens (the expansion



of the Boboli gardens with the Viottolone and the Fontana dell'Isola). There were, however, two areas in Tuscany where French influence was strongly felt: Siena and Lucca, where the villas Marlia, Mansi and Torrigiani, for example, constitute a complex system of gardens conducted to the city while being, at the same time, the noble residences and farms of families who conducted their business in the city. While investments had been made in them in order to produce profits, they were also used as residences all year round and, as such, objects to be adorned and cared for to make them pleasant and serve as an indication of social status. The term "viale trionfale-villa" is frequently used to indicate the shaping of the landscape along French lines, with a verdant theatre much like the *bosquet* at Versailles. The finest example of a Baroque garden in Tuscany is located between the cities of Lucca and Pistoia where the steeply sloping garden of Villa Garzoni at Collodi was decorated by Ottavio Diodati with statues, plants and water fountains.

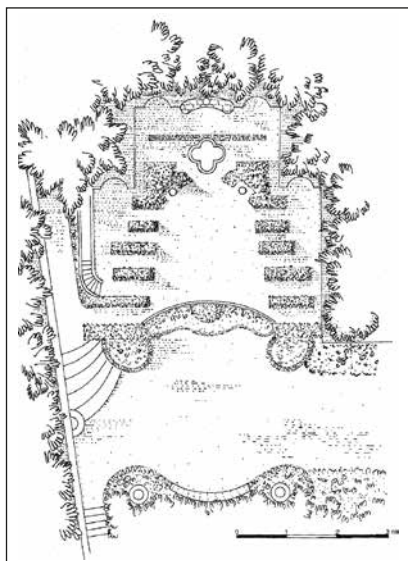
In Spain, the Florentine Cosimo Lotti started designing the Buen Retiro park in 1628, while the French influence here can be seen in the Grangia gardens near Seville, designed by Carlier and Boutelau. The Arabs retained some of their presence in the expansions of the Alcàzar in Seville and, of course, the Alhambra in Granada.

The Italian influence in Austria remained very strong, so much so that in 1613 Markus Sittikus, the Archbishop of Salzburg, commissioned Santino Solari to create the Hellbrunn following the Italian villa model – including ponds, grottoes with sponges and shells, water jets and fountains, one of which is a water table very similar to the one at Villa Lante. He also included automated figures and heronian machines which remind one of Pratolino and Buontalenti, even though these represented figures from daily life and the animal world.

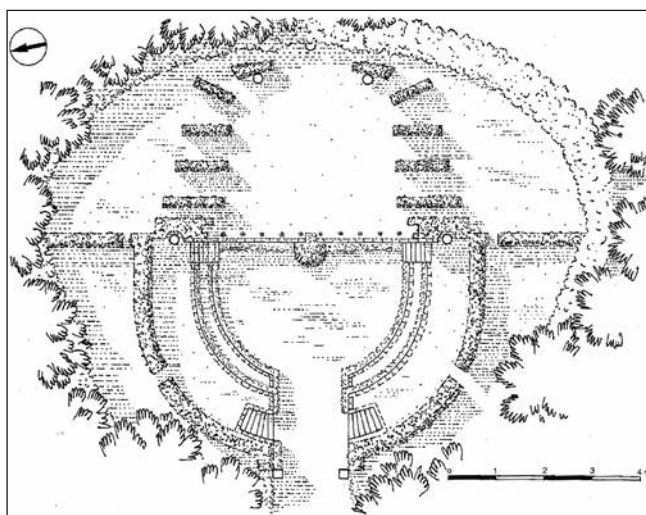
At Heidelberg, in 1615, Frederick V, had his Hortus Palatinus laid out, a culturally complex garden expressing religious tolerance which aimed to pay homage to the political ideals of his era. Salomon de Caus, a French Huguenot engineer exiled in Italy, Holland and England, was called upon to design it. The garden spread over five overlapping



Collodi, Villa Garzoni: general plan of the gardens



Collodi, Villa Garzoni: plan of the Teatro di Verzura (Green Theatre)



Lucca, Marlia, Villa Reale: plan of the Teatro di Verzura (Green Theatre)

terraces next to the castle and gave onto the Neckar valley. The terraces were divided according to renaissance rules with *parterres* marked by pergolas and further enriched with statues, grottoes, gazebos, fountains, labyrinths and Italian-designed hydraulic music machines. It was described by contemporaries as the “eighth wonder of the world” but was eventually destroyed by Louis XIV after the Thirty Years War (1618-48).

We have ample printed documentation about German urban gardens in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Among these is documentation about Nuremberg by Christopher Peller and about Frankfurt by its Mayor Johannes Schwindt, who shows a lovely renaissance-style design with a single axis perspective rich in mannerist décor. By the end of the century French influence had the upper hand and the road to Rococo seemed open, as evidenced by the Grosse Garten in Dresden, which was built between 1678 and 1693 on the basis of a project designed by J.G. Stark. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Garten was further embellished and enlarged, and its layout includes numerous symmetrical axes that all guide the viewer’s eye towards the *parterre de broderie* and water. Marking its perimeter are woods and tree-lined promenades.

### The first idea of democracy

The Dutch garden in the 1600s was quite an original one. It had a generally symmetrical layout, with *parterres* and even divisions, ornamental water ponds and other features tied to the need to drain the land, and many brightly coloured flowers enliven it. There was a lively interest in botany and the botanical garden at Leiden is one of the finest examples in Europe. International commerce was on the upswing and brought to Holland, as well as to England and other parts of Europe, such exotic new species as tomatoes and tulips.

The Dutch garden was a fenced-in garden with flowers that bloomed all year round, as described by Crispin van de Pass the Younger in his *Hortus Floridus* (1614). The trend of shaping the

ground upon which gardens were laid out (landscape architecture) and *treillage* – light-weight wooden trellises – remained in fashion, as did the previous century's pergolas and gazebos. The concept of the ideal garden, in Holland, coincides with the ideals of the bourgeois Republican and Calvinistic suburban home, and were a far cry from the elaborate majestic features which characterized the Baroque trends which, with William of Orange in 1680, nonetheless made a sober appearance.

Early 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland, by now free from Spanish domination, developed its own distinctive style based on the principles of the classic rules of Vitruvius and Alberti, but improved upon by a noteworthy technical and scientific ability, as well as by ideals of a return to nature – both as a useful element and as a symbol of the mystical union between Man and God.

There was no lack of great parks, like the one at Honselaarsdijk, built in 1621 by Prince Frederick Henry, south of The Hague, which covered more than 8 hectares and could be considered the prototype of later “canal” parks.

The political-dynastic ties Holland had with England in the late 1600s, the presence of French exiles and its contacts with near-by Germany, brought with it strong international influences. A so-called French-Dutch style came about based on classical ideals which respected the rules and imposed proportions but which was, at the same time, also strongly influenced by Baroque elements in the form of decorations and the search for motifs and amazing, grandiose ambiances. Gardens, such as the ones in Zeist and De Voorst, became more complex, breaking up into a series of parts: woods, secret gardens and inventive water-based ornaments, as at Het Loo, the garden built for William of Orange and his consort, Queen Mary Stuart.

In England two different types of gardens enjoyed popularity: one was based on the continental model, while the other is autochthonous and celebrates the connection between the cultivated garden and the

natural one, which, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, would see its heyday. It is this natural garden, very popular in the English countryside, that Francis Bacon (1561-1626) wrote about in his famous essay *Of Gardens*.

The English garden was also influenced, during the course of the 1700s, by political events which can be divided into three periods: from the beginning of the century to the reign of Charles I, the Commonwealth era and, finally, the reign of Charles II.

The first period sees the domination of the Italian Mannerist model which was already popular in the 1500's but, thanks to the talent of Dutch engineers, had been enriched with fountains, ponds and grottoes with special water effects (Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, Somerset House in London and Greenwich). Gardens were generally small, but they were everywhere. So much so that a wide range of literature springs up: *A new Orchard and Garden* by William Lawson (1618), and *The Countrie Housewife's Garden*, the first book on gardening written for women, who are finally recognized as the prime users and planters of gardens. There were also technical texts such as *Paradisi in Sole – Paradisus Terrestris* (1629) and *Theatrum Botanicum* (1640), by John Parkinson, James I's pharmacist. Experimentation with botany and plants from far away places were the new rage (just think of John Tradescant's garden at Lambeth and the 1656 Catalogue), and a fashion for collecting exotic plants quickly gripped the entire country.

If Italian-French architecture was still in fashion during Charles I's reign, the cultural severity of the Puritan Revolution and the government of Cromwell would have its affect on large frivolous gardens as well. Some were divided into smaller plots, while others were abandoned, like Nonesuch and Wimbledon. Only Hampton Court was saved: it became Cromwell's private residence. With the advent of the Restoration in 1660 artistic gardening returned to life with a decidedly French flavour, so much so that Charles II invited Le Nôtre to come and "tend" to his royal gardens. Le Nôtre wielded his influence with great style and also involved such personalities as John Rose and George London. A type of garden emerged around a dominating axis that also incor-

porated the building and was accented by parallel lines of trees (*allée*), all on level ground. The *parterres* were evenly shaped, along the lines of the *knot garden*, but much bigger and with more complex designs.

Dutch influence increased with William of Orange (1688) and single plan layouts were criss-crossed by many canals. Topiaries enjoyed renewed popularity and featured all types of geometric and anthropomorphic shapes.

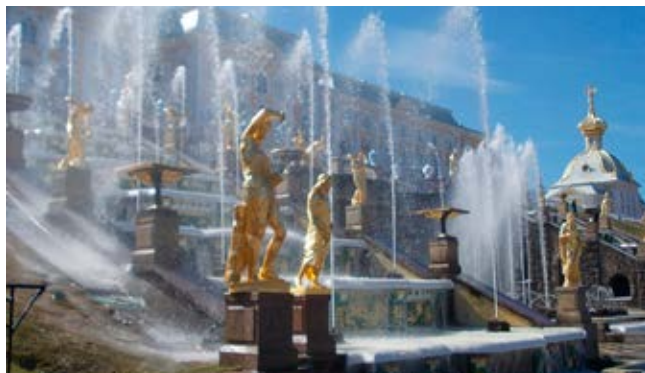
Private gardens were joined by specialized parks, such as the Chelsea Physic Garden (1673) on the shores of the Thames created by the Society of Pharmacists to educate the public at large about medicinal plants. As the fashion for specific plants increased, the first commercial nurseries, such as the Brompton Park Nursery, came into being.

Many important books about gardens were published in this period: John Evelyn, a founder of the Royal Society in 1662, published *Sylva or a Discourse of Forest Trees* (1664) about the social importance of planting trees; *Pomonas or an Appendix concerning Fruit-Trees in relation to Cider* about the importance of selection in the improvement of fruit quality and the *Kalendarium Hortes or the Gardener's Almanack*, which was the forerunner to the popular almanacs which, still today, give monthly advice on planting times, pruning and maintenance of the garden. An even more popular book is John Rea's *Flora seu de Florum cultura*, (1665) which gave advice on how to plan and cultivate a garden.

Practical advice, models and the greenery for making knots, appeared in a 1670 publication entitled *The English Garden*, written by Leonard Meager. The most famous book of this period was, however, *Upon the Garden of Epicurus* (1685), written by the well-known politician and man of letters, William Temple (1628-99). In 1681 Temple retired to his Moor Park estate in Surrey to live the life of an English country gentleman surrounded by books and gardening. In one of his essays he pondered on the idea of growing gardens "according to nature", instead of shaping plants into squares or other forms. In this essay, and it is this which makes it interesting, he gave us the first known description of the Chinese garden which would,



Frontispiece of *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris*, J. Parkinson (1629)



Saint Petersburg, Peterhof Gardens: Samson Fountain and Sea Channel (above), the main terrace and the jets of water (below)



later on, heavily influence the English landscape, and which Temple knew about only indirectly from the tales of travellers.

### **From Baroque to Rococo**

The transition from Baroque to Rococo can be seen in the repetition of the fixed and unified layout, on which decorative elements of a less serious, often frivolous, nature were placed. The garden became a more intimate and pleasant place to enjoy: no longer just the setting for the overwhelming opulence of court life, but a relaxing gathering place for worldly aristocracy, or for the private get-togethers of the new and rapidly rising bourgeoisie.

The rise of the merchant-class bourgeoisie came about slowly but steadily over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It can be labelled, artistically speaking, as Romanticism, and its influence came to an end with the French Revolution. Aesthetic ideals became more human and beauty was interpreted through a fascination and sensuality for life as seen in its daily context, or placed back into the Archaic style with a new intellectual interpretation.

In this setting the Versailles model continued to spread throughout Europe, in particular the Germanic countries and Russia, where Peter the Great (1689-1725) was modernizing his country by imitating all things European. St. Petersburg as a city of business and trade, and the “Russian window on Europe” was one of the most important parts in his modernization plan; together with the transfer of the capital to Moscow in 1712 and the construction of palaces and parks. The best known of these is Peterhof. The 120-hectare estate, near St. Petersburg, was begun by J.F. Braunstein and then handed over to J. Alexandre Le Blond who designed the park on the great terrace of the palace. From the north, the famous Grand Cascade flows downwards among statues and jets of water to form a canal which runs alongside the Gulf of Finland.

Further out of the city are Strelna (Le Blond's project) and the Oranienbaum (based on a D.M. Fontana's design). Half a century later Tsarskoye Selo was built at Catherine the Great's behest. Its formal garden is cut by a canal and partitioned by *parterre de broderie*; it is dotted with woods and Rastrelli-designed pavilions, and lives side by side with Mannerist grottoes and a naturalist romantic English-style park.

Germany, after the long wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, suddenly found itself broken into a myriad of politically independent mini-states whose rulers all ambitiously dreamed of magnificence and power. The result was the construction of many "little Versailles". A series of splendid residences that, however, were in sharp contrast to the country's economic shambles. For the better part of the century the country was in the grips of an architectural culture which sought to give the image of wealth through the extravagance of its form. This form, however, had no connection with any other artistic expression and was a typically German variation of Rococo, good examples are Schleissheim in Bavaria, or Herrenhausen in Hannover. The number of parks multiplied and it would be impossible to mention them all. Each one is magnificent in its own way, from the Belvedere at Weimar, the Augustenburg garden in North Westfalia, to Weikersheim built by Daniel Matthieu at the behest of Karl Ludwig of Hohenlohe in what is now Baden-Württemberg, to Schwetzingen, the symbol of mature Rococo in Germany and the summer residence of the Elector Palatine Karl IV Theodor. This entire project was commissioned to architect Alessandro Galli Bibiena and 'gardener' J. Ludwig Petri by the same Karl IV Theodor. It was based on a central dominating perspective which, starting from the central line of the castle, includes the main Arion Fountain and the grand canal embellished by statues of deer and ending in those of the Rhine and the Danube rivers, all designed by the sculptor Verschaffelt. Ten years later the park was enlarged and the Rococo garden was enveloped on three sides by



Hannover, Herrenhausen: the main perspective of the formal garden



Hannover, Herrenhausen: the labyrinth



Potsdam, Sanssouci: the vineyard and the parterre of Frederick the Great



Potsdam, Sanssouci: the vineyard – a view from the parterre



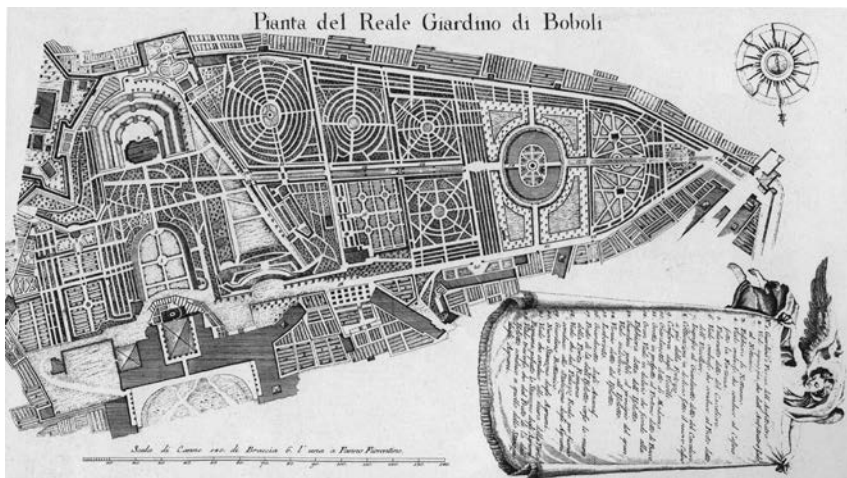
Vienna, Belvedere: aerial photo of palace and gardens

a landscaping project. The two styles, very different in nature, actually complemented one another and gave a romantic grace to the formal and sumptuous style which the German aristocracy had adopted.

The theme of great circular *parterres* and radials that flow outwards from the centre – introducing the escalation from decorative stairs to architectural stairs, and finally to urban and territorial stairs – reaches its apex at Karlsruhe in Baden-Württemberg. The castle here is at the centre of a vast star with 32 radials made of tree-lined promenades which also define the park at the back and the city in front of it.

Prussia was accumulating power and had begun its historical control over Berlin and the Germanic states. From its humble beginnings as a small fortified village along the Spree, Berlin was gradually assuming the characteristics of a capital city. This “Athens of the North”, begun by Frederick I (1688-1713), had by now reached a population of 100,000 and was reinforced by *Friedrichstadt*, the new city next to it. It has a monumentally decorated centre, the *Forum Fridericianum*, with triumphal architectural expressions in the various squares and the Unter den Linden, which ends at the Brandenburg Gate. Frederick II, the Great (1712-96), apart from organizing his city and dealing with his economic woes (the Seven Years War, from which he emerged victorious, had been very expensive), also had a new summer residence built at Potsdam. There was already a small garden and pavilion there that had been constructed by his father Frederick I at the turn of the century. The palace, known as Sanssouci (“without worries”), was located on a hilltop north of the river Havel and was built by G.W. von Knobelsdorff (1712-86). Its style recalled the architecture of the Orangerie and country pavilions, but was at the same time characterized and embellished by 36 statues of Bacchantes, women and men who hold up the cornice with its vase-decorated balustrade.

The Schönbrunn Palace, in Vienna, was built for Leopold I of Austria in 1688 who wanted a palace that could rival Versailles and commissioned J.B. Fischer von Erlach to build it. However, he had to interrupt its construction when war with the Turks began to seriously



Florence, Boboli gardens' plan by Alfonso and Giulio Parigi, in an engraving by G. Vascellini, 1789



Florence, Boboli gardens: Kaffeehaus by Zanobi Del Rosso, in an engraving by A. Lamberti, 18<sup>th</sup> century

drain his coffers. Fifty years later Maria Theresa handed the project over to Nikolaus Pacassi. His design called for a vast parterre along the entire length of the castle's facade dotted with statues and basins. The vast perspective ends in the Neptune Fountain which leads to the softly rising slope of a wooded hill where the Gloriette, a belvedere designed as a huge open loggia, reigns and serves as a visual counterpoint to the palace's rear facade.

The fashion for vast palaces affected Italy only in the Piedmont area and in the Kingdom of Naples, where the large parks at Palazzina di Caccia, Stupinigi (designed by Filippo Juvarra) and the Caserta Palace (designed by the Dutchman Luigi Vanvitelli), respectively, were built.

While large parks were the exception to the rule in 18<sup>th</sup> century Italy as a whole, a new garden trend did take hold in the Lombard region and the Lakes area. Holiday villas began to be constructed which, due to their stunning scenic locations and the complexity of their outdoor areas' were easily comparable to the estates of Northern Europe. Southern Italy also had a concentration of interesting villas in Bagheria, where Sicilian nobles enjoyed beautiful Baroque villas set in luxuriant gardens (Villa Valguarnera, Villa Guarnieri and Villa Palagonia).

Other areas of Italy were also the scenes of important architectural expressions: Villa Caprile, Pesaro, was designed with beautiful high sunny terraces, and in Liguria the grand Villa Gavotti at Albisola (1744) was built. The Cascine Park in Florence, was opened to the public, while at the Boboli gardens the Kaffeehaus was being built (1776) by Zanobi del Rosso, a pupil of Vanvitelli and of Fuga. And it was the same Ferdinando Fuga (1699-1781) who built another Kaffeehaus in Rome in the gardens of the Quirinale, while Niccolò Salvi was at work on the stone and water Fontana di Trevi garden at the foot of the same hill. Giovan Battista Piranesi, meanwhile, was creating total harmony between the internal and city views of the park of the Villa dei Cavalieri di Malta.



## The Romantic Garden

*"In laying out a garden,  
the first and chief thing to be considered  
is the genius of the place"*  
Alexander Pope, 1728-31

### English Landscaping

Over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century French hegemony over all things political and cultural in Europe passed to England. The power structure here consisted of a monarchy assisted by the very important role of Parliament, who, with its own internal dynamics, favours the country's development. Power went back and forth between the Whigs and the Tories, each one of whom favoured their own political connections and agendas, and were in turn influenced by various dissident parties, property owners and the Anglican Church. England could already be considered a modern country in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, belonging to the ruling classes was no longer a birthright but a cultural fact. It is in this political-social climate that England saw the changeover from aristocratic Baroque-Rococo to a more bourgeois Romanticism.

The first signs of this movement came about in the form of a literary trend which saw Anthony A. Cooper (1671-1713), Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and the poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744) as protagonists in a movement where the beauty of nature was countered by the rigid rules applied to gardens which still bore the signs of French and Dutch influence. This period also saw intellectual garden architect Stephen Switzer publish *The Nobleman, Gentleman and Gardener's Recreation*, in 1715 and *Ichonographia* in 1718.

A new method of gardening had already taken shape in the first decade of the century when Lord Carlisle experimented at Castle Howard where Sir John Vanbrugh was working. Vanbrugh was also busy at Blenheim (1709) where the Duke of Marlborough was hiring the finest artists of his time to create a garden: Vanbrugh, Henry Wise and Bridgeman, who described the park as a huge stage-setting with woods, fields and grand complex tree-lined avenues. It was here that the so-called *ha-has*, or trenched fences, were widely used. This innovation called for a moat, often reinforced with palisades to discourage animals from entering, to take the place of perimeter walls so that the entire landscape could be enjoyed. This type of “fencing”, which would become the norm for English gardens, was first developed and put to use by William Kent at Stowe House, which can be considered the first truly significant example of large-scale landscape architecture in England.

This innovation was revolutionary, the garden and the landscape became one. The gardens of Wise and London were a distant memory, and even Bridgeman seems a transitional figure who tried to place natural elements in a classical layout with a balance that recalled the theories of William Temple. William Kent, a painter and architect by training, was the first to interpret this new attitude towards nature and the shifting tastes. He experimented with it at Stowe House, disrupting all of the work that had been done before him, by treating the landscape as a series of paintings and transforming a little valley into a scene from the Elysian Fields.

He placed allegorical buildings in this ambience, like the ancient Temple of the Virtues (beautifully preserved) set opposite the modern Temple of the Virtues (in decadent ruins). There are mythological references to the temples of Concordia and Victory, and there is no lack of patriotic monuments, like the Shrine of the British Worthies.

Kent transformed the painted landscapes of Lorraine and Poussin into three-dimensional masterpieces, which can be enjoyed from diverse pre-set points of view. He abolished the overall layout of the



A view by Pieter Andreas Rysbrack of Chiswick House, 1729



A Stowe view by William Hannan from the 1750s portrays the temple as it originally looked.

project and the composition's perspective focal point and instead used nature itself as a guideline to construct his garden. Stowe is a synthesis of all of these elements. The sequence of squares that is at the heart of the garden's design is joined by a promenade that follows an undulating course, over flat and less flat terrain, bringing movement to the scenery. These fundamental components of Kent's work are found at Chatsworth and Chiswick, Stowe and Badmington, and are rife with the classical touches he had assimilated through his contact with Italy during his many visits there between 1710 and 1719; as well as his detailed study of Inigo Jones' work.

English landscape architecture was not born already in full bloom at Stowe; on the contrary Stowe Gardens experienced all of its evolutionary phases. In 1741, Lancelot Brown (1716-83) arrived at Stowe. He is better known as "Capability" for his amazing ability to interpret the potential of raw landscapes and transform them into enchanting scenes, intelligently decorated with art and poetry. Capability knew how to reach into the soul of a plot of land, see its "genius" and recreate nature in a soft and uninterrupted sequence where the nearby areas were in complete harmony with the distant countryside. He worked with natural ingredients: the earth, trees, water and the natural topography of the terrain, connecting all of the distinct parts and exposing the intrinsic qualities of each place. Brown substituted Kent's sequence of "paintings" with a unified creation in which streams, ponds and lakes were all set into soft grassy conchs with woods which embraced the small architectural touches he placed at the water's edge so that they could be reflected. The entire setting was romantic with both an archaic and classical feel.

The list of Brown's works was very long and we will cite only a few, starting with Stowe, there is also Croome Court, Burghley House (where he spent "25 years with pleasure"), then Claremont, owned by India's conqueror, Robert Clive, followed by Bowood, Blenheim Palace (his most famous work), and the royal gardens at Hampton Court, where he planted the "great vineyard".

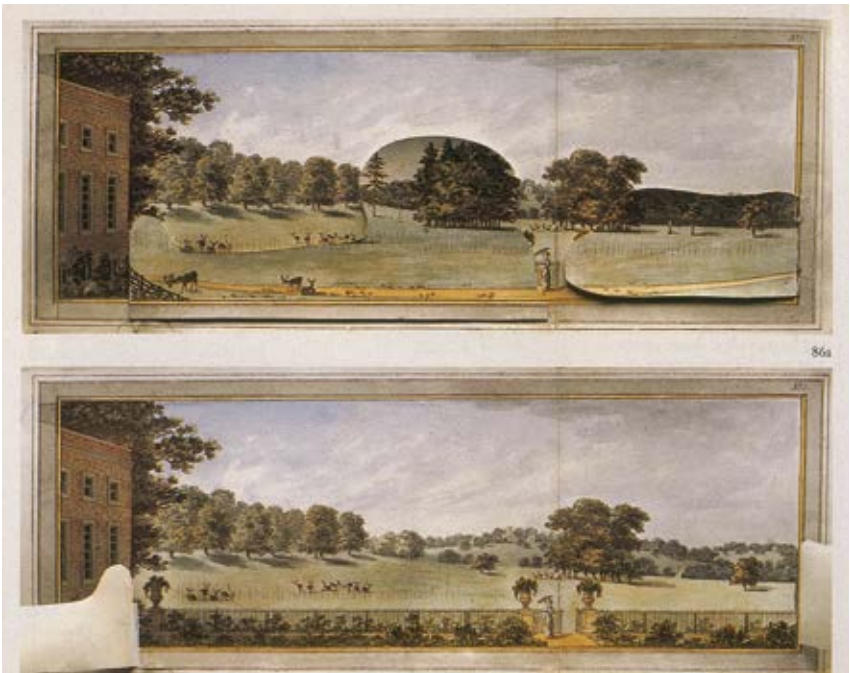
Brown's celebrity is, however, not without controversy. A fervid disagreement with William Chambers on the nature of gardens followed him his entire life, and after his death, his work underwent a revision by Uvedale Price. William Chambers (1726-96) published a book on the Chinese garden in 1772, *Disertation on Oriental Gardens*, which marked the peak of Romanticism in England. In keeping with the times, in which all things Chinese were in vogue, the book is a sort of travel story, rich in observations and reflections on the uses and layout of gardens in China. Chamber translated – and reduced – the art of gardening into something of a scenic adventure made up of close-up views that attempt to impress themselves into the visitor's state of mind. According to Chambers there are three types of garden: the hideous, the pleasant and the surprise; all of them extravagant and full of fantastical effects, all equally amazing and rife with pathos.

The greatest of Brown's successors was Humphry Repton (1752-1818). In his *Red Books* he explained his principles of design, logged the progressive work phases and recorded his rapport with his clients. He also included watercolour sketches of the "before" and "after" of his projects.

Repton demonstrated a great environmental sensitivity and coined the term "Landscape Gardening". He had an innate understanding of his clients' expectations and aspirations, and was keenly aware of the changes the Industrial Revolution was bringing about in the fabric of English society. He applied more rules to his work than Brown did, and believed that shape and lines must be in harmony through either symbiosis, or through contrast. He stated that Gothic architecture should have wide flowing trees next to it to compensate for the vertical lines of its structure, while buildings with horizontal lines should be surrounded by tall slender trees. Repton's gardens were less constructed than those designed by Brown. He used perception mechanisms that enhance movement, no longer the sequences of squares, but as a kinetic vision within the landscape's progress.



Boowod: the new landscape by Capability Brown



Humphry Repton's Red Books: new landscape for Wimpole



Harewood House, central view, the parterre terrace and the landscape garden

Repton designed and laid out a large number of gardens: Durham Park in Gloucestershire, Wimpole Hall in Cambridgeshire (where the temple-on-the-island motif was once again used), and Attingham Park in Shropshire, where he employs the lake-stream-island pattern again. His most famous park, Ashridge in Hertfordshire, is full of innovative ideas: there is an *arboretum* full of exotic plants, a *pomarium*, a monastery garden, grotto, American garden, *rosarium*, fountains and so forth. The concept of specific and diverse areas became a prelude to the “open-air rooms” typical of the Victorian garden.

Exotic plants became more and more popular in gardens and, as a consequence, as objects of scientific and commercial interest over the course of the century. The Society of Gardeners was founded and counted gardeners, nursery owners and garden-loving amateurs among its members. The Society’s publication of *Catalogus Plantarum* sought to catalogue and order all of the plants known to man. And there were others: the botanist, author and collector Philip Miller (1691-1771) of the Chelsea Physic Garden published the *Gardener’s Dictionary* in 1731, the celebrated plant and flower illustrator Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708-70) and, of course, the famous Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707-78), founder of the modern system for the classification of all living organisms and the inventor of binomial nomenclature for botany and zoology.

By the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the garden-as-landscape became the only type of new garden laid out in England, and the gardeners, architects and authors who dedicated their energy to this profession were many.



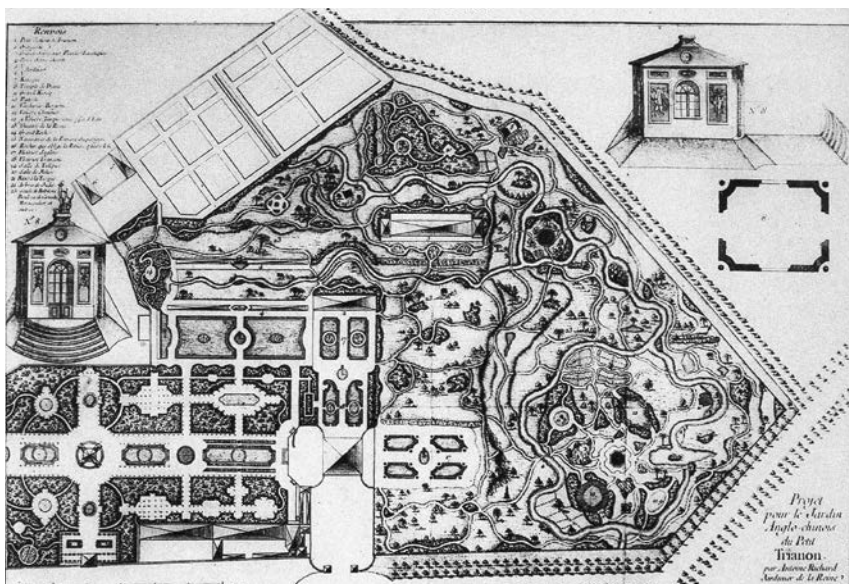
## Public Parks

The importance of verdant open spaces acquired a new role in the urban context of London, and the creation of public spaces marked a prelude to the great transformations to come in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most important of these were still the royal gardens. Kensington Gardens underwent continuous transformation and expansion, and were open to the general public when the royal family was elsewhere. Hyde Park had already been designated as a public park since the 1630s. Parks were located next to the tree-shaded squares that have dotted London since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, and over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century became one with the surrounding buildings. These squares and their gardens were used as private areas belonging to homes or apartment buildings and brought some of the idyllic English countryside into the heart of the city. They became typical of the urban scene which marked the expansion of the city and influenced new construction. The next century would see similar highly valuable, on both a commercial and architectural level, interventions. It was the example of Bath, however, where forms of urban development including crescents and circuses, marked a new trend to be copied all over England and Scotland. The layout of Edinburgh's New Town (1766), the work of Scottish architect James Craig was one example.

With the advent of “pleasure gardens”, a whole new way of conceiving green areas inside the city came into being. These gardens, or commercial “amusement parks”, were at first constructed around thermal and mineral baths as places to relax and have fun. Musicians played, people danced, went to the theatre and strolled about the gardens and along the tree-shaded lanes. At Hampstead, visitors could drink the iron-rich water, while at Vauxhall, the symbol of relaxation – and magnificently described by Thackeray in his *Vanity Fair* – the spa waters were said to have curative properties which helped people with eye problems.



Emenonville in an engraving by A. de Laborde, 1808



Versailles: Petit Trianon's gardens by A. J. Gabriel, mid-18<sup>th</sup> century

The English model was soon copied abroad: New York constructed its own Vauxhall Gardens and Paris followed suit. Paris, apart from its own Vauxhall, also had its Jardin de Tivoli for fun and relaxation. Laid out on a vast parterre with a central tree-lined avenue and a pond, the park also included 12 aviaries, false ruins, gothic tombs and streams that snaked about with little islands; all laid out in a romantic English style. Around the great amusement parks, called *Jardins spectacles*, numerous smaller private gardens (*folie*) were also laid out to attract visitors, friends or paying guests. In a short period of time these took over the entire periphery of Paris.

These formal versions of recreational parks spread all over Europe and the English style is further diffused by an ever-increasing number of publications containing project designs. One of the first such texts on the English landscape was Thomas Whately's 1770 *Observations on Modern Gardening*. Beyond offering descriptions of the various existing gardens, it also offered a series of rules and advice on theory and methodology as a project design guide. It was translated and liberally applied in diverse European situations. It seemed almost paradoxical that one of the first English gardens to be laid out in France constructed in the Le Nôtre sanctuary of Versailles. In fact, the Petit Trianon came about from the transformation of a *menagerie* into a *potager* designed by Gabriel in 1749 at the behest of Louis XV.

In France, court life was coming to an end. The intellectual environment was already being influenced by bourgeois culture, the ideas of Rousseau and the theories of the Enlightenment which wedded well with the trend towards simpler shapes and more natural gardens. Ermenonville is a fine example of this trend. The Marquis de Girardin, for about a decade beginning in 1766, organized his 900 hectares of land into different ambiances according to their original and natural composition. Racine de Monville, in the meantime, created the amazing Désert de Retz near Marly in 1785.

The two Parisian gardens of Bagatelle (Thomas Blaikie, 1758-1838) and Parc Monceau designed by Louis de Carmontelle are less



Caserta: the English Garden in a painting by J. F. Hackert, 1792



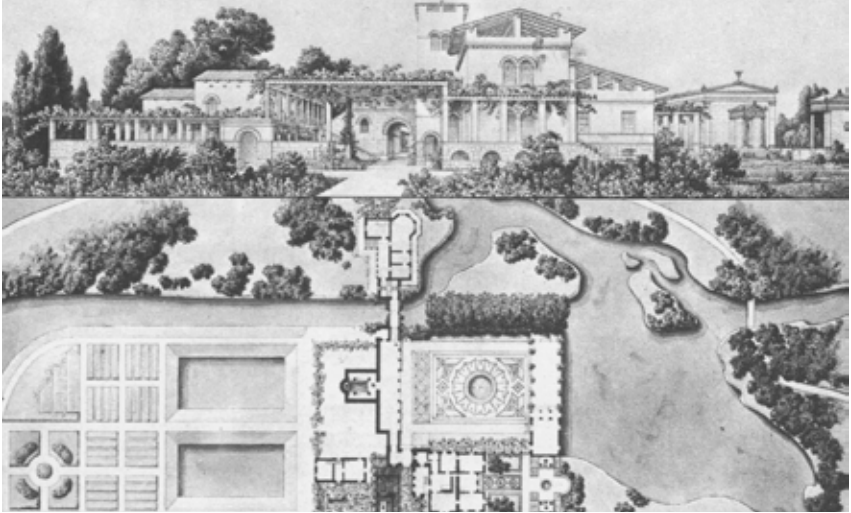
Wilhelmshöhe: a romantic landscape in a painting by J. E. Hummel, c.1799 (Hobhouse's, P, 1992, Gardening Through the History)

fantastical but nonetheless compelling. In the latter, an entire illusionary world is dominated by an imposing colonnade that encloses the Naumachia, while bucolic landscapes dotted with temples, pyramids and ancient ruins cover the rest.

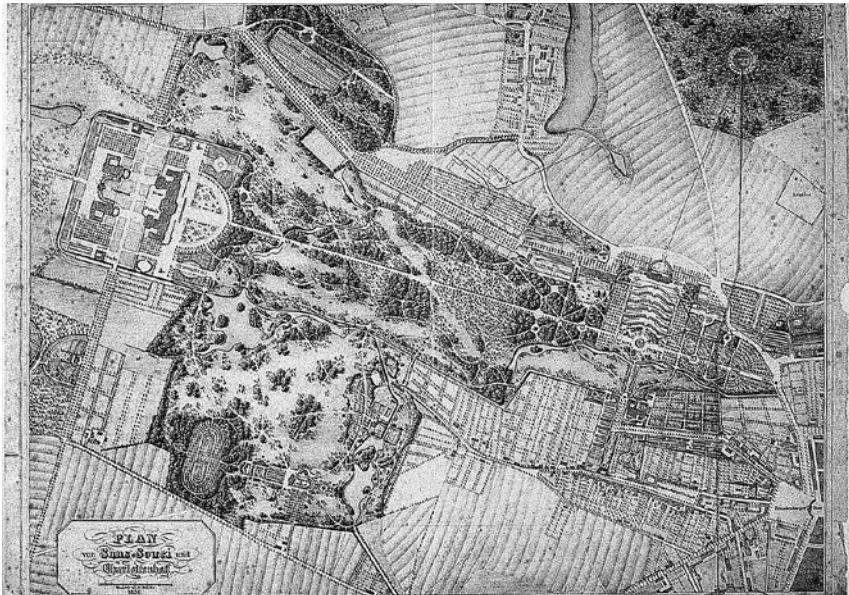
Italy was not immune to the English trend either. Queen Maria Carolina, the sister of Marie Antoinette, had a copy of the Petit Trianon laid out in the grandiose garden of the Reggia di Caserta. Next to it there was a botanical garden, a kitchen garden, a *ferme ornée* in which to experiment with horticulture, and fields on which animals grazed. Flowers here were planted either directly into the earth, or in pots, nurseries and hothouses which also saw an increasing number of sub-tropical species.

The popularity of this type of garden in Italy reached its height only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Ercole Silva's book *Dell'arte dei giardini inglesi* (1801) was published there. A true compendium of the English garden from Bacon to Chambers, it also delved into practical design: the size, variety, beauty, the various landscapes in which it could be laid out, and all of the other details that distinguish it, including particulars about the plants.

The English style was particularly popular in Lombardy in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The area was just recovering from the difficulties of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which had seen pestilence deprive the region of its populace, an economic crisis, and the heavy and austere religious counter-reformation politics of San Carlo Borromeo. In this climate, Austrian domination took hold and the resulting economic recovery created a whole new ruling class made up of military leaders, bankers and the faithful servants of the Empire who were eager to show-off their newly-gained social status. In the countryside around Milan, for example, Giuseppe Piermarini, Lombardy's greatest architect, built, amongst other things, the royal villa of Monza set in a splendid park. Around the stunning Como and Maggiore lakes, villas and grand parks such as those of Villa Carlotta, Villa Bettoni in Bogliaco and Villa Agliardi in Paladina spring up.



Potsdam, Sanssouci: the Hofgärtenhouse, in a drawing by Schinkel, 1835



Potsdam, Sanssouci: the great plan by J. Lenné in an 1836 map

A highly original example of a piazza, if it can be called such, was created between 1775 and 1784 on a swampy terrain near Padua. The intent of the piazza was purely commercial, and Andrea Memmo, the city's superintendent, and architect Domenico Cerato imagined an open grass field located in the centre of a marble and balustrade-edged canal. Four bridges connected the island to land and shops and boutiques were to be built along the water's edge, but fortunately never were. The "piazza", known as Prato della Valle, did become a meeting place for friends and families to stroll about on, for entertainment to be organized and games to be played day and night. It was a small pleasure garden with a neo-classical touch.

Existing gardens in Germany also underwent major transformations. Friedrich Ludwig von Sckell (1750-1823), who was perhaps the greatest northern European landscape artist of his time and whose talent is evidenced in the English gardens in Munich, revolutionized Schwetzingen and the Nymphenburg, where he experimented with a single design that covers 364 hectares. Sckell's design is confident and harmonizes the various shapes of the terrain by creating individual sites and giving movement to the composition using Reptonian solutions.

The park of the Prince Pükler's Muskau at Cottbus, on the border between Poland and Germany, was an exceptional landscape designed according to a series of scenic sequences, using the paintings of Schimer as a starting point. Prince Pükler tried to codify and give rules to his "natural" design, trying them out both at Muskau and at Schloss Branitz, and then gathered his notes into a treatise entitled *Andeutungen über Landschaftsgärtnerei*, which was published in 1834 in Stuttgart. In his treatise, Pükler posed the problem of rules and design schemes, showed how to place trees in a natural and pleasant manner, how to use architecture and different styles, and proposed scientific alternatives to achieve the desired end results.

## Eclecticism

With the popularity of the scenic English landscape gardens, the last great revolution in garden styles was complete, and the beginning of an oscillation between Neo-Classicism, pictorialism and exoticism took over.

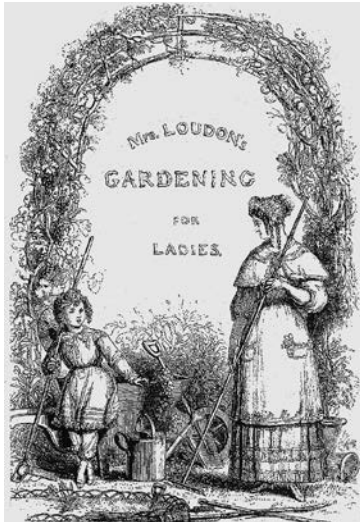
Private gardens began to lose their “exceptional” character and, even though they remained a reflection of their owners’ socio-economic standing, they were no longer something extraordinary or unique. The garden became an extension of the house, an indispensable complement to the dignity and decorum of a proper home. It became a pleasant cosy place where exotic species might be grown, books read, paintings painted and friends entertained. A sort of miniature England spread all over Europe, and pre-existing gardens in both the city and the countryside were radically transformed.

An interesting case of this general stylistic transformation was evident in Florence (Villas Salviati, Pandolfini, Corsi, Corsini, Orti Oricellari, Poggio Imperiale, Gherardesca and Torrigiani), where in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a sizeable English colony resided influencing the tastes and habits of the local citizens.

There was a dominant trend towards romantic settings. Tiny gardens acquired little meandering walkways, while miniature hills and colourful flowers did the rest. Following the lead of Giuseppe Manetti (1761-1817) and Luigi de Cambray-Digny (1778-1843), little landscapes were created embellished with hills, belvederes, niches with benches, basins, statues, and urns with inscriptions placed here and there. Gardens were often even designed around Masonic initiation rites, complete with secret underground passages that led to the “Truth”, from the darkness of the grotto to the Pantheon of Illustrious Men or a Temple of Virtue, and further still to a second grotto with clear gushing waters, or a tower that raises the spirit to the heavens.

Apart from the necessarily small city gardens, there are those on hills: Stibbert, Fabbrocotti and Palmieri, all villas where the mem-

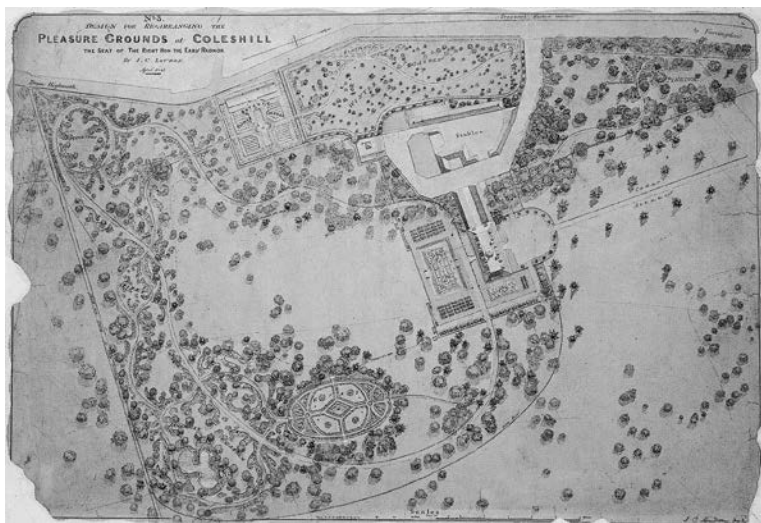




Mrs. (Jane) Loudon, *Gardening for Ladies*, 1840



J. C. Loudon, illustration of *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, 1838



Coleshill, design by J. C. Loudon, 1843

ory of Queen Victoria's sojourns is still alive (1888-1893); or the magnificent mediaeval castle of Vincigliata where, in 1824, John Temple Leader rerouted streams, carved stone quarries into the hillside, built towers and chalets, and where, for the first time in the history of landscaping, he planted cypress trees in groups rather than in lines, forever changing the physiognomy of the hills.

England, therefore, remained the inspirational leader in garden styles. The great wide-open landscaped gardens now gave way to a more eclectic look in which the formal layout of the garden included classical or exotic "open rooms". The various "rooms", or defined areas, and the presence of several different ambiances in the same garden, marked the end of the unity of style and beginning of the principles of the eclectic layout in which the various parts of the garden broke up into a series of different elements. Terraces were constructed, large numbers of potted flowers were placed near to the house, and *treillages* and hothouses were introduced. Even Swiss chalets and pagodas; or gothic tombs, broken Greek columns, huge urns and temples were constructed to embellish the garden.

An argument broke out between John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843), who in 1822 published *Encyclopedia of Gardening* and Quatremère de Quincy, who publicly cast doubt on the aesthetic importance of the landscaped garden as art imitating nature. At the same time, Loudon stirred up a controversy between "picturesque" and "gardenesque" where he claimed it was time to leave behind the "picturesque", which he saw as a confinement of nature, in favour of a style that permits each natural element, above all plants and trees, to be free and grow without constraints of any sort.

Loudon's words were not fully understood and were interpreted as a sort of critical viaticum. The result was a transition to an eclectic style without any artistic unity and led to totally freely-designed garden layouts. Among the gardens from this period worth noting are Alton Towers in Staffordshire, where the Earl of Shrewsbury (1814-27) created a world of fables which Loudon defined in his *Encyclo-*



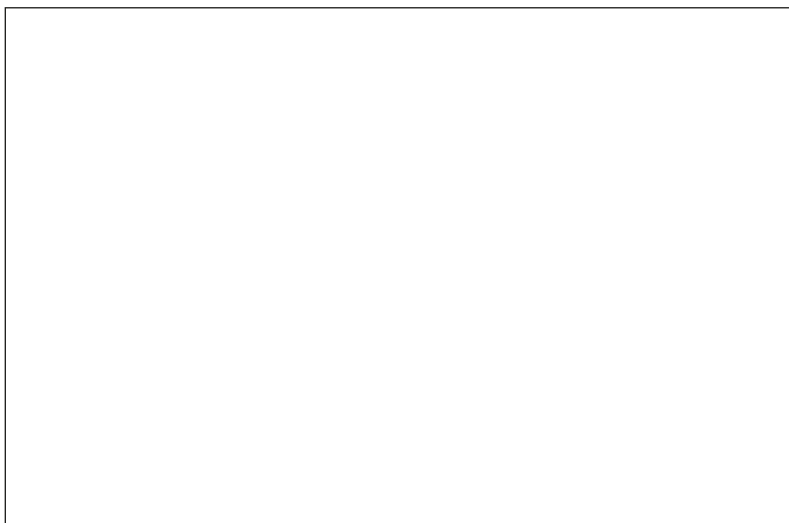
The Elvaston gardens in E. Adveno Brooke, *The Gardens of England*, 1856-7



Alton Towers, The Sundial Garden in E. Adveno Brooke, 1856-7



Paris, Château de Malmaison: the Temple of Love in a watercolor by Gerneray (Hobhouse's 1995)



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*pedia* as a singular anomaly, the product “of a morbid imagination” and the result of having far too much money. The park covers 200 hectares in the Churnet Valley and is filled with an incredible number of buildings made from a vast array of materials and in every style imaginable: from the steel and glass of the gothic hothouse and the pagoda-style fountain of Robert Abraham, to the Corkscrew Fountain inspired by the megalithic shapes of Stonehenge. Not unlike Alton Towers in concept, but covering only eight hectares, is Biddulph Grange, also in Staffordshire. Here James Bateman and Edward Cooke created an incredible sequence of gardens which include the Rhododendron Valley, the Egyptian Garden, the Chinese garden, the Cheshire cottage, an orchard, pine stands, and lanes of cedars and other exotic tree species.

Memories from the past re-emerged at the sight of these decidedly different and individual ambiances, memories of styles dating back to centuries earlier. This trend was further enhanced by the new fashion of restoring such ancient gardens as Levens Hall, Cumbria, which rediscovered the decorative potential of topiaries and the Italianate style, both in buildings and gardens, where the division into rectangular spaces and terraces was re-introduced.

There was also a tremendous interest in all things exotic, and in particular for plants and flowers from far-away places which arrived in great quantities from all over the world. Exotic plants fascinated because of their curious shapes and bright colours and were used to create those interesting contrasts that garden-lovers adored.

With the abolition of the glass tax and the advance of building technology, together with increasingly ambitious gardeners and collectors, hothouses in both public and private gardens became true and proper rooms that also doubled as winter gardens. Charles Fowler, the landscape architect who designed Covent Garden, was among the first to construct hothouses. The most famous landscape architect of the time, however, was Sir Joseph Paxton (1801-65) who began his career as a gardener at the Chiswick Horticultural Garden Society in

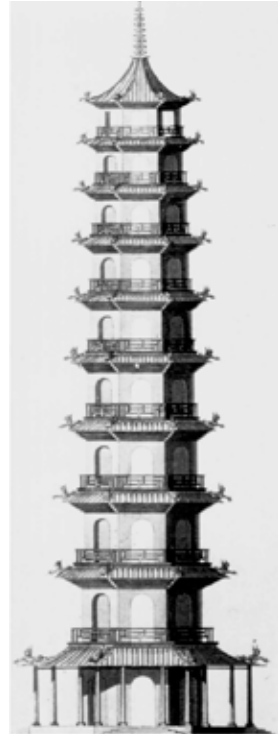
1823 and then went on to work at Chatsworth, Derbyshire, where he brought about many changes. He built the Emperor's Fountain and the Great Stove, as the huge heated hothouse built between 1836 and 1840 was called. In the same park he also constructed a second hothouse especially for the cultivation of the first *Victoria amazonica* imported to England and the structure's design was actually inspired by the exceptional plant's leaves. The Conservative Wall built by Paxton was a series of terraces with white hothouses rising up against the garden's wall. His most famous work, however, is the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, built for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Birkenhead Park was the first modern park designed and created for public use. The area, surrounded by the suburb of Birkenhead, was a large and flat open field, without views, of which 48 hectares were destined to the park, while 24 were sold to be built upon. The main idea of the project was the division of the area into two distinct zones with two lakes around which the terrain was raised in a conch shape with closely planted trees of all types along its borders. But the most interesting feature of the park was its link to the city; the park included both roads for vehicles and strolling paths for walkers both separated from each other. It was copied by Frederick L. Olmsted, who had seen it during a trip to Europe, when he designed New York's Central Park.

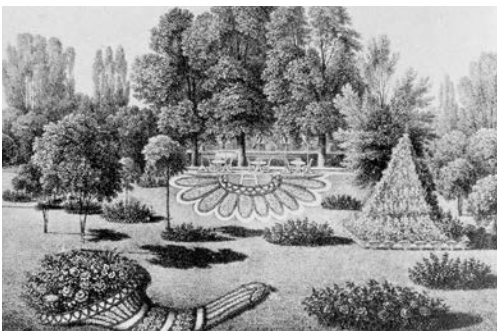
Rare and exotic plants of all types were now available in large quantities from nurseries all over England and the rarest types were cultivated in public parks and botanical gardens, particularly Kew Gardens, whose inventory benefited tremendously from the expansion of the British Empire. Kew Gardens is, still today, the oldest and most beautiful arboretum in the world. First built and laid out in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it expanded over time to include an infinite variety of plants (many of which came from the colonies), numerous pavilions and other buildings, several of which, like the pagoda, the broken bridge, the Bellona and Arethusa temples and the Orangerie, can be attributed to William Chambers. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, with the construction



London, Sydenham Hill: Crystal Palace, 1852



Kew Gardens: Pagoda by William Chambers



Cottbus, Branitz Park: the eccentric landscape of Prince von Pückler-Muskau (1785-1871)



of hothouses and ponds, as well as the addition of 81 hectares, it acquired new sections like the herbarium, library and the plant physiopathology laboratory. It also expanded its educational activities into botany and taxonomy.

The Horticultural Society, which was founded in 1804, was another sign of the widespread interest in botany and its application in the field of gardens. Its original aim was to encourage horticultural activities, and when in 1861 it gained recognition by the Crown, it became the Royal Horticultural Society with new headquarters in Kensington. It influenced the English public in their taste for gardens via its Westminster and Wisley activity centres, led the trend towards brightly coloured informal gardens and brought back into favour the herb and kitchen gardens which, for more than a century, had fallen from grace and almost disappeared.

The colours of flowers and a taste for exotic plants also found favour, and a natural habitat, along the Mediterranean coastline and the lakeshores of southern Europe. A mild form of English “colonization” came about on the Ligurian Riviera, the Côte d’Azur and the coast of Spain as Englishmen who had returned from India, or Southeast Asia, sought climates warmer and by now more familiar than their chilly native homeland. Villas of all types were constructed and the gardens that were laid out next to them were of the “open room” style with various different settings placed together in the same garden. The exotic plants they had brought with them took well to the familiar climate along the coast. Botanical collections in private hands were at an all-time high in this era and the trend fitted in well with the by-now fashionable eclectic style.

There was another aspect of the new garden which merit attention: the kitchen garden. In the Victorian era this garden was rife with moral and ethical overtones, and its popularity was due in great part to John Loudon and his wife, Jane (1807-58) who published over 20 books about plants and gardens written with a female readership in mind. Mrs Loudon was well aware that it was the woman





Blenheim Palace: italian garden (abow) and water parterre by Achille Duchêne, 1931

of the household who ran the domestic economy (flowers for décor and vegetables for the dinner table), and she placed gardening in a feminine realm not just for the layout and care of the garden, but also as a lady's profession. It was the beginning of a cultural movement in which such women as Barbara Bodichon, Anne Jemina Clough and Norah Lindsay, to name just a few, would leave their mark. In the United States, the torch bearers were the Englishwoman Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932), and Beatrix Farrand (1872-1959), an American, both of whom achieved important advances and experienced the consequential notoriety.

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the polemics regarding the merits of formal and informal gardens reached new heights. William Robinson (1838-1935), who took the side of the informal version, argued heatedly with Sir Reginald Blonfield (1856-1942), who upheld the formal garden with a group of enthusiastic supporters including Henri and Achille Duchêne. The latter two studied the history of gardens, in order to find the rules governing the restoration of ancient parks, and the design of "style" gardens and they enjoyed tremendous success as authors and garden designers, the great water *parterre* at Blenheim Palace was the creation of Achille.

The passage, in France, from the formal style to a freer style dates to the early 1800s, under the Napoleonic Empire. After the Revolution, the 17<sup>th</sup> century models were done away with as ideologically tied to the reviled *ancien regime*, and many exiles returning to France converted their classic French gardens into English-style parks. The reasons behind this were not just ideological, they had become accustomed to them during their exile in England and, even better, they were less expensive to lay out and maintain. Napoleon himself had an English garden laid out at Fontainebleau and Josephine de Beauharnais personally oversaw the outdoor area at Malmaison (1798) turning it into the most interesting example of a private French garden of the early 1800s.

## The Advent of Public Parks

*“We want a ground to which people may easily  
go when the day’s work is done ...  
where they shall, in effect,  
find the city put far away from them”*

Frederick Law Olmsted, 1870

### Parks for the people

The advent of the urban park coincided with the evolution from individual manifestations of wealth to the definition of a planned, aesthetic and socially useful area designated for the public at large. The planning of parks became an integral part, sometimes even the compelling motivation, of the great movement to redraw urban settings and give cities an entirely new look. Mediaeval walls were torn down and the old city was connected to the new one with tree-lined avenues surrounded by parks, while inside it spaces were found on which to build public squares and walkways.

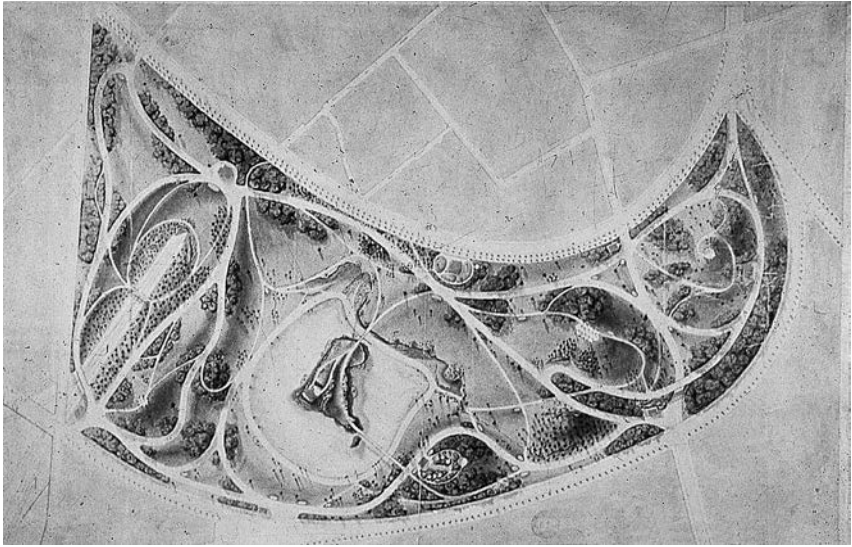
Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social and formal elements which today still define our urban parks came into being. It was a healthy change, the park is the city’s lung and brings fresh air and respite, is a place to which people can come and stroll, exercise and rest. It makes the city more beautiful, builds civic pride among the bourgeoisie, who seek to build their homes near one, and increases the value of the real estate that borders on it. Scientific interest also played its part: botany remained a very popular pastime in this era, and the number of botanical and specialized gardens multiplied all over Europe. Private gardening, as seen in the English model, contributed to the burgeoning

trend of cultivating rare and exotic plants; and the fashion of collecting them resulted in an increase of flower shows as well as the building of structures specifically suited to this purpose. Public parks, and policies promoting the city's image and good name, became popular with public administrations all over Europe. On the whole, London and Paris set the example and such cities as Vienna and Florence followed their lead. Of all the cities in England, London was the most populous and suffered from all the problems of overpopulation brought on by the Industrial Revolution: pollution, chaos and lack of infrastructure (sewers, for example). These problems also existed in such cities as Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Studies conducted on public health, living conditions, and the factory as a workplace, alerted authorities to the fact that the city's health was of vital importance to its social well-being, and that open-air public parks were a fundamental component in achieving the new goal of public health.

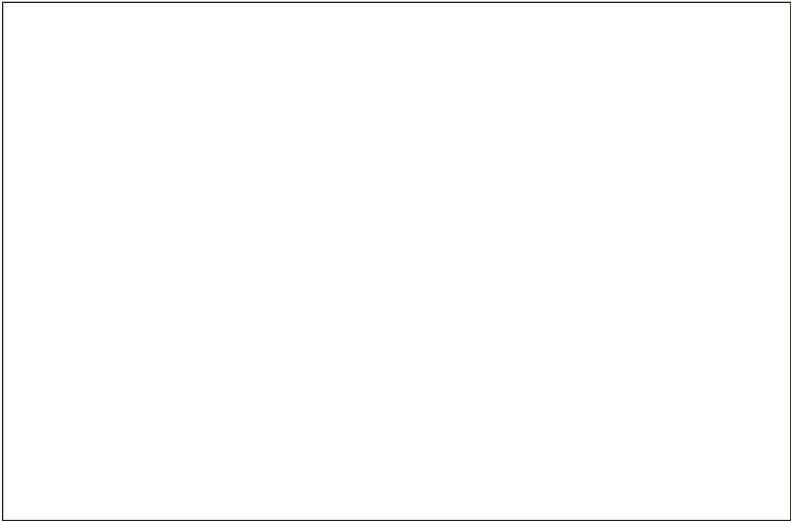
The public promenades no longer sufficed, all cities had to have proper parks for its citizens, and London had a particularly active role in spreading information through his magazines, demonstrating that each park should have a specific public function: cemeteries, arboretums and homes were all valid places in which people could find reprieve from the stress of the city, and which improved the health of the city itself.

In London, John Nash transformed the most famous public strolling area, St. James' Park, and in 1812 he designed Regent's Park on 220 hectares of land belonging to the Crown. The new park's layout was almost perfectly circular and had an open centre around which important homes were built (The Great Circus). The entire area was dotted with trees, hedges, bushes and areas of thicker growth with a great water arabesque. Along the edges other homes were built, on the Terrace and Crescent; while, to the south, Regent's Circus acts as the ending point of the park's axis. A similar plan was also tried in Milan (1886-94), but it failed for lack of funding.

Paris, under Napoleon III, underwent a much more complex urban "revolution" which affected the architecture and roads of the



Paris, Park des Büttes-Chaumont by Jean-Charles Alphand and Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps



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London, Hyde Park



Berlin, Tiergarten in a 19<sup>th</sup> century painting

city's green areas and great parks. The city, in fact, experienced a major urban facelift and, at the same time, was enlarged, as civic engineers and public health experts wrestled with the problem of modernizing the great city. Napoleon III, who had risen to power with the consensus of the people, was the President of the Republic and felt the need to give his reign a heritage of great public works fully supported by all Frenchmen. With the help of Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809-91), the Prefect of the Seine, an enormous urban sanitation programme was initiated. More than 400 km of sewage pipes are laid, public transport was rendered more efficient with the foundation of the *Compagnie Générale des Omnibus* (1885), and the old and decaying historical centre of the city was transformed by razing the decrepit buildings and replacing them with new public buildings, tree-lined avenues, squares and parks. All of this was made possible by Haussmann's organizational talent and far-sightedness, as well as new laws which permitted the appropriation of land, both agricultural and buildable (1885), by the state.

Inside the city walls Jean Charles Adolphe Alphand (1817-91) directed the activities which brought about 40 green areas, 24 of which were proper squares, and opened Parc Monceau. The two great royal forests outside the city, Bois de Boulogne to the west and Bois de Vincennes to the east, were re-designed for public use, while south and north of the city two smaller parks, Montsouris and Buttes-Chaumont became the models on which the rest of Europe based its parks. Alphand founded a "school" which turned out such great figures as Jean Pierre Barillet-Deschamps, Edouard André, Luis Varé and the Bühler brothers.

Alphand's school was far from the early English pictorial-based romantic tradition, although it must be said that many of his co-workers did seek the contrasts and scenic effects suggested by Repton's ideas. Alphand believed that a garden must not and cannot imitate nature, but that as a work of art it must be able to create artificial settings and landscapes which can satisfy the aesthetic sensitivities of its users. As a graduate of the Ecole National des Ponts et Chaussées, Alphand loved moving earth, hydraulic mechanisms and

grand works in general, and was talented enough to use his abilities with great poetry and technical finesse.

The Alphand school, and its “graduates”, was held in high esteem all over Europe. Barillet-Deschamps, for example, worked on the Valentino Park in Turin, the Bühler brothers designed the masterpiece of water and trees at La Tête d’Or in Lyons, while Edouard André laid out gardens all over England: Sefton Park in Liverpool and the Woodhouse Park in Leeds. André then went to Lithuania, where he designed a landscape of dunes on the Baltic Sea for Count Tyszkiewicz Palanga, and to Rome, where he worked at the Villa Borghese.

In his book dedicated to Alphand, *L’Art des Jardins, Traité Général de la Composition des Parcs et Jardins* (1879), André wrote about everything from the history of the garden, to aesthetics and man’s relationship with nature; he classified types of gardens and gave practical advice on how to study the earth, move it, lay out terrain and what sort of décor to use. Still today this book is a precious source of information about the garden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He included many interesting examples of real gardens and comments evaluating, comparing and criticizing the work of his peers.

The French model became popular once again in Vienna (1859-72) where the city was expanded and the ancient walls were torn down to make room for wide avenues lined by monumental buildings and gardens, and in Florence, where the so-called Piano Poggi (named after the project’s architect Giuseppe Poggi) prepared the city to be worthy of being the capital of Italy (1865).

There are not many public parks in Italy. The bourgeoisie did not seem able to do what the aristocracy had done before them. Nonetheless, some private gardens did open to the public: Villa Reale in the Chiaia Riviera, in Naples, for example, while in Rome, Colle Pincio was redesigned and restored by Giuseppe Valadier (1762-1839), who for the first time, in a way reminiscent of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, blended the city’s green areas and nature with its buildings.





New York, Central Park: general plan (left), and some view

Berlin has a different story. Having been basically founded and expanded only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is no contrast between an old and a new city. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the city's green areas had been based on three main features: the small but now gone Lustgarten, the promenade under the lime trees of the Unter den Linden and the Tiergarten hunting reserve on the left shore of the Sprea River.

The plans for Berlin in the first half of the century included many green areas and a great romantic spirit. The first *extra moenia* expansion can be attributed to Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), an architect-artist who saw the city's growth via isolated "pure, perfect and autonomous" architectural elements placed in a natural green setting, and was concerned with how to blend the stiff buildings with the free-flowing forms of nature. He was credited with the organization of the landscapes and construction of many of the villas along the Havel, between Potsdam and Berlin, and the creation of two masterpieces in the Charlottenhof Park, the expansion of the Sanssouci Park: the *Hofgärtner* and the *Charlottenhof Schloss*.

After Schinkel's romantic influence, and a later very orderly city plan ordered by the police chief in 1826, in 1840 a project for the "Green and ornamental areas for Berlin and its suburbs" developed by Peter Josef Lenné (1789-1866), the greatest German landscape architect who, in 1824, was the director of the Berlin gardens. The city plan was aimed at guiding the city's expansion beyond its walls and rendering it a beautiful place as well. The most interesting part is the area to the south-east, where Luisenstadt will later be, which represents the first great expansion of the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Lenné was particularly sensitive to the theme of the public park (Volkspark), and in this spirit he redesigned the Tiergarten, which has a first design project dated 1819 and a second one 1840. In both, Lenné kept the straight avenues that went through the woods as designed by Von Knobelsdorff. In the first plan there is an irregular and intricate succession of paths, streams and woods; while in the second (1832-40), a freer incisive theme, which connects to the pre-existing

one with meandering promenades and well-defined open spaces with streams and ponds imposed. The woods and the open spaces further give onto *Volkssaals*, organized spaces with monuments and statues of national heroes aimed at enhancing the educational and patriotic, and therefore popular, value of the park.

One cannot mention Lenné without also mentioning the Neuer Garten and Charlottenhof Park, the expansion of Sanssouci at Potsdam. Lenné was commissioned to create Charlottenhof in 1826 at the behest of the future King Frederick William IV, who wanted an addition to the relatively primitive Sanssouci garden. The project's layout called for a wide tree-lined axis perpendicular to the pre-existent vineyard-castle system around which an English-style landscape would be made complete with lawns and woods and small gracious architectural embellishments.

Lenné, like Loudon, was adept at blending the commands of the Prince with the needs of the bourgeoisie and the working class. The parks were made to be used in a multitude of ways, crossed by promenades with an always clear layout. They were designed to be used by horsemen, strollers, coaches and carriages, and their popularity is evident in the fact that they are still in use in much the same way today, without great modifications.

## In the United States

At this point it is important to cross the ocean to the United States because, over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the relationship between man and nature here underwent certain particular changes which would have an affect on Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

American colonial establishments, going back in time, came about and grew up around the *common*, a usually rectangular area on which the animals grazed and where the military put its soldiers through their paces. Open areas and the common were, beginning in

the 1800s, the heart and soul of the city, often rife with the religious symbolism that identified its citizens and their beliefs.

In larger cities, however, the influence of the European model, used by William Penn in 1692 to plan the layout of Philadelphia, was gaining popularity. The city's five great squares are clearly reminiscent of Georgian London and, a hundred years later, the design for Washington by Pierre Charles L'Enfant (1754-1825) also followed European lines, even if it does have many original features.

Country cemeteries are a fine example of true American innovation. When a law was passed forbidding burials in city churchyards for sanitary reasons, new suburban cemeteries came into being which sought to offer an ideal and romantic burial ground that would place the dearly departed in an earthly Garden of Eden, or in a garden of Eternal Peace. The first rural cemetery to be laid out was designed by the United States Horticultural Society at Mount Auburn in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The U.S. was also an enthusiastic participant in the field of scientific research. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries numerous botanical gardens were developed and in 1818, the U.S. Horticultural Society was founded. The cemetery they designed was intended as a service to the citizens of Auburn and was meant to re-create the Romanticism of English parks. It included a 32-hectare arboretum with indigenous and exotic plants, and was intended, with its soft country-like landscape, as a contrast to the severe rigidity of the city's urban grid layout. Death, in the rural cemeteries, was seen as a sublimation of nature, that element which unites all citizens of this new society where equality for all, especially in death, was a new credo.

Rural cemeteries were soon the most frequented suburban public parks in America and, in 1849, A. Jackson Downing, one of America's greatest landscape architects, wrote that the attraction of these cemeteries lay in the desire on the part of the masses to contemplate the natural beauty of the place and escape from the inhabitability of the city. In architecture, as in the setting proposed for cemeteries,

Downing saw a common ground between the fascination of nature and that of art. The transposition of these ideas of the city came about in the garden-suburb, seen as an open field dotted with individual homes and Downing theorized about the relationship between little isolated buildings and the ambience that surrounds them.

While still remaining within the aesthetic canons of romantic landscapes he, for the first time, proposed the official zoning of these open areas and their importance as a fundamental element of urban control and planning.

Downing's ideas were "borrowed" and organized into a system by Frederick Law Olmsted, who championed a vision in which horticultural aspects, health and sanitation (read burial) needs, aesthetic and economic gain – the surrounding buildings and their commercial centres – all live happily together.

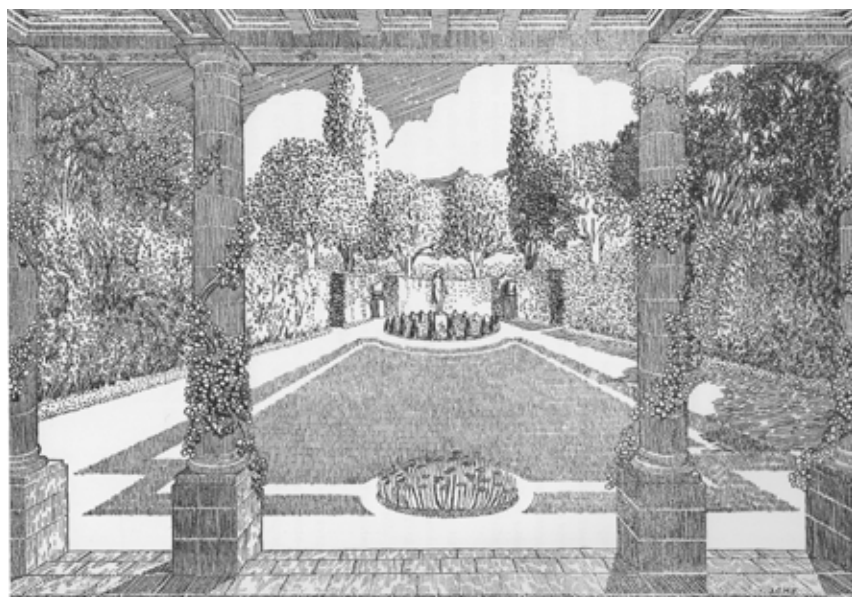
With New York City's Central Park, F. L. Olmstead reversed the tendency begun with the rural cemeteries, which are located outside the city and seen as a sort of archaic Eden in clear contrast to the materialism of the city. The idea of a romantic and artificial 'naturalization' of cities took hold in Olmsted and his successors. Another instance of this was the Garden Suburbs, which a few years later would also become popular in Great Britain. There Ebenezer Hower created his Garden City, in which all of the advantages of a city (social and commercial opportunities, work and advanced technology) could be found alongside those of the countryside (parks, tree-lined avenues, clean air and a healthy environment). The search for a balance between constructed spaces and open spaces reached the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a fully mature trend, as seen in such movements as the American *City Beautiful* and the English *Public Walks*, the utopia of Owen and Fourier and the urban projects of Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker. One could say that the image of an ecological city had come of age.



Florence, Settignano, Villa Gamberaia: the water parterre, c.1900



Cap Ferrat, Villa Ile de France: the front garden



J. C. N. Forestier: a 2.600 square-meter garden, walking from the lawn to the rose garden, 1920



Paris, Park de Bagatelle, Iris garden by J. C. N. Forestier

## On the shores of the Mediterranean Sea

It could be said that the culture of excellent landscape architecture in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe reached its finest expression in England and the Mediterranean, and that Paris retained its central importance in the construction of Alphonse-Castelnau-style gardens. Many Englishmen – as well as Russians and Germans – continued the trend, which began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and built sumptuous villas on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The preferred locations were the Côte d’Azur and the Ligurian Riviera: Cannes, Cap Ferrat (Somerset Maugham), Cap d’Antibes (Rothschild), Menton, San Remo and Bordighera (Hambury) were, as Edmondo De Amicis described it in 1906, “an English paradise”. These towns were invaded by villa-building foreigners who laid out gardens rich with inventive styles and exotic botanical collections. The Portuguese and Spanish coasts were also very fashionable, as was the coast of southern Italy (Ravello, Amalfi, Ischia) and the northern lake region (Villa Taranto and San Remigio on the Lago Maggiore).

Russell Page (1906-85) who described his ideas in a book entitled *The Education of a Gardener* (1962) was one of the most famous landscape architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and worked all over the world – France, Spain, Egypt, India and the United States. The Agnelli family (FIAT) called him to work on Villa Perosa, and the Rossi di Montelera to Il Carpeneto near Turin.

Tuscany is where the highest concentration of these grand villas can be found. The gardens laid out next to them ranged in taste from romantic – with lakes, islands with temples and little buildings of all sorts, winding paths – to classical revival, where topiary art regained favour, as at Sir Harold Acton’s Villa La Pietra, or with water *parterres*, as at Villa Gamberaia, Florence. Then in Lucca, at Bagni di Lucca, for example, there where many artists and scholars. Sir George Sitwell wrote his *Essay on the Making of Gardens* (1909) in Castello Montegufoni. Cecil Pinsent designed the garden of The Tatti with Bernard Be-



renson and lived and worked full time in Tuscany where much of his work, in a Victorian-influenced neo-classical style, can be admired.

## The Latin garden

Jean Claude N. Forestier (1861-1930) best represented the garden in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as he masterfully blended Haussmann – like technicality, English style with a touch of Mediterranean, inventing a new and emerging 20<sup>th</sup> century trend. Forestier, in his lifetime, lent his talents to a full range of gardens and parks and worked all over the world: Paris, Cuba (Havana 1924), Spain (the Maria Luisa Park in Seville, 1929, and the Montjuic Park in Barcelona, 1916-29), Morocco, Italy and the Côte d'Azur.

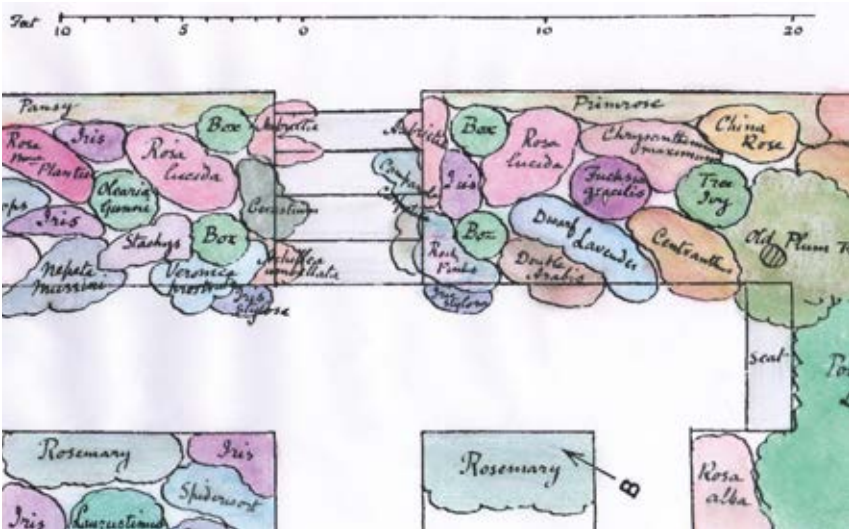
Public projects and private gardens, city plans for major urban areas and décor for small intimate spaces, everywhere he worked Forestier studied the problem of the synthesis between geometric shape and Romanticism, the relationships between places (the garden and the city, for example) and that of the choice and selection of the species of plants he installed.

The rapport between the freedom of composition and the order of the layout was clear in both his public and private works. He left behind a marvellous document dated 1920 entitled *Jardins, Carnet de plans et de dessins* in which he organized his projects according to their problems and size: they ranged from 550 square metres to 5,000 square metres. The smaller gardens had a simple design based on a lawn with a pergola to which one could add basins, flower beds or false terraces. When he had more space to work with the layout was articulated in sections which were all based on the same three basic compositional elements: the pergola, terrace and lawn.

In Spain, Forestier did not limit himself to parks and gardens but planted the seeds of a new open-air culture which was characterized, especially in fervently nationalistic Catalonia, by the search for an



Autumn colors by Lilian Stannard in Jekyll, G. and Weaver, L. 1981, Arts and Craft Gardens



G. Jekyll, Millmeade, Surrey: planting plan, detail

identity that can sum up the Mediterranean culture. The theme of Mediterranean-ness was also expertly espoused by Nicolau M. Rubiò y Tuduri (1891-1981).

Rubiò did not just study the compositional aspects of a garden – its usefulness or its relationship to the house, or even the rapport between art and technology – he was interested in finding a sense of identity, of culture that had been lost over time. The concept of a “Southern” or “Latin” garden came about through his efforts. He attempted to layout a garden which could also interpret and transmit the language, and the messages, of the many civilizations that had left their mark along the coastlines of the Mediterranean Sea. The rediscovery of the vital cultural importance of this sea, so very central to the ancient world, was the reaffirmation of the “severe authority” of classical style as opposed to the more seductive anarchy of Romanticism, of which Gaudí is a prime example. Rubiò looked the ancient world directly in the eyes and the Mediterranean gave him a concrete basis with which to mould nature in perfect harmony with the knowledge of the sensitivity and limits of mankind.

Although one can catch glimpses of an English-style “landscapism”, Rubiò always used this style in a local context, keenly aware of the local environment and climate of the South: the green, grassy or ivy lawn became the canvas on which to place various species of plants, and topiary, offering a sort of contrast between geometry and “landscapism”. His geometric layouts often corresponded to a freer scenario, and, vice versa, an apparent liberty of layout could contain a contrasting formally planted group of trees. Flowers, for example, never dominated the scene but were planted in a gradual succession of hues, or a single colour, seeking essence and continuity (learned from Forestier). He strove to recompose natural contrasts rather than stressing or dramatizing them.

One of the most interesting figures of the times was Dimitri Pikionis (1887-1968), a man with strong ties to the traditions of his homeland, Greece. He managed to blend its poetry with ancient Greek history, mixing together pieces of demolished buildings with

priceless archaeological remains and indigenous plant species which are easy to care for in an arid land. His best known works were public spaces with strong historical and symbolic significance which kept the logistics of mass tourism in mind. In Athens he worked on the Acropolis and the Philopappos and Lycabettus hills, finding just the right tone and balance between refined ancient culture and the need for tourists to enjoy them.

Pietro Porcinai (1910-86), on the other hand, was less tied to Mediterranean values and more involved in discovering the identities of individual places. He sought just the right balance between environment, climate, landscapes and essences. His ideas are best summed up using his own words: “The real garden does not destroy, but enhances the land on which it is laid out. Phyto-sociology is the study of how plants associate with one another – they actually have likes and dislikes. Only if they are in agreement can the result be considered truly beautiful.” He applied seemingly minimalist concepts and the proper balance of plants. Elements of nature and simple compositions make Porcinai’s gardens true masterpieces, whether they are huge landscape projects like the Brennero highway (1967), public parks like Pinocchio at Collodi or laying out and restoring private gardens like those of Villa Verdi in Busseto or the Villa L’Apparita in Florence.

We have inverted the traditional sequence which places, rightfully so, the roots of modern landscaping in the “English” garden in order to underscore the importance of some of the figures involved in the Mediterranean area who are, in some ways, less known. Nonetheless, the importance of landscape architects such as Sir Geoffrey A. Jellicoe and Dame Sylvia Crowe, as well as Gertrude Jekyll, cannot go unmentioned.

Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) is an icon and a legendary artist of gardens not just because she laid out some 350 of them, or because she wrote an incredible number of books – *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* (1908); *The Art and Craft Garden* (1900); *Wall, Water and Woodland Garden* (1901) nor because she represents the

crowning of a professional career which a century before women first undertook under the guidance of Jane Loudon, but because above all she was able to give life to the “poor” tradition of gardens: the cottage garden, which had remained deeply embedded in the hearts and souls of all Englishmen.

One of the secrets of her success and her modern outlook can be attributed to her work with the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944), with whom she began a close working relationship in 1889. Their collaboration was a perfect example of the integration of architecture and landscape, and can be seen in both the large scale and small compositions where the carefully planned rapport between a building and space is imbued with a profound sense of cohesion. Their artistic and professional relationship was a winning combination from the start. They first worked together at Hestercombe in Somerset, and then continued with such complex projects as Dyke Nook Lodge or unusual projects like Castle Drogo in Devon. This imposing building, the last castle ever built in England (1915-20) was beautifully counter-balanced by an intimate “open room” garden full of flowers. Her special focus on, and sensitivity to, the colours of flowers was the result of complex artistic training, involved a precise knowledge of botany and defined a style and an approach to work that became a point of reference for an entire generation.

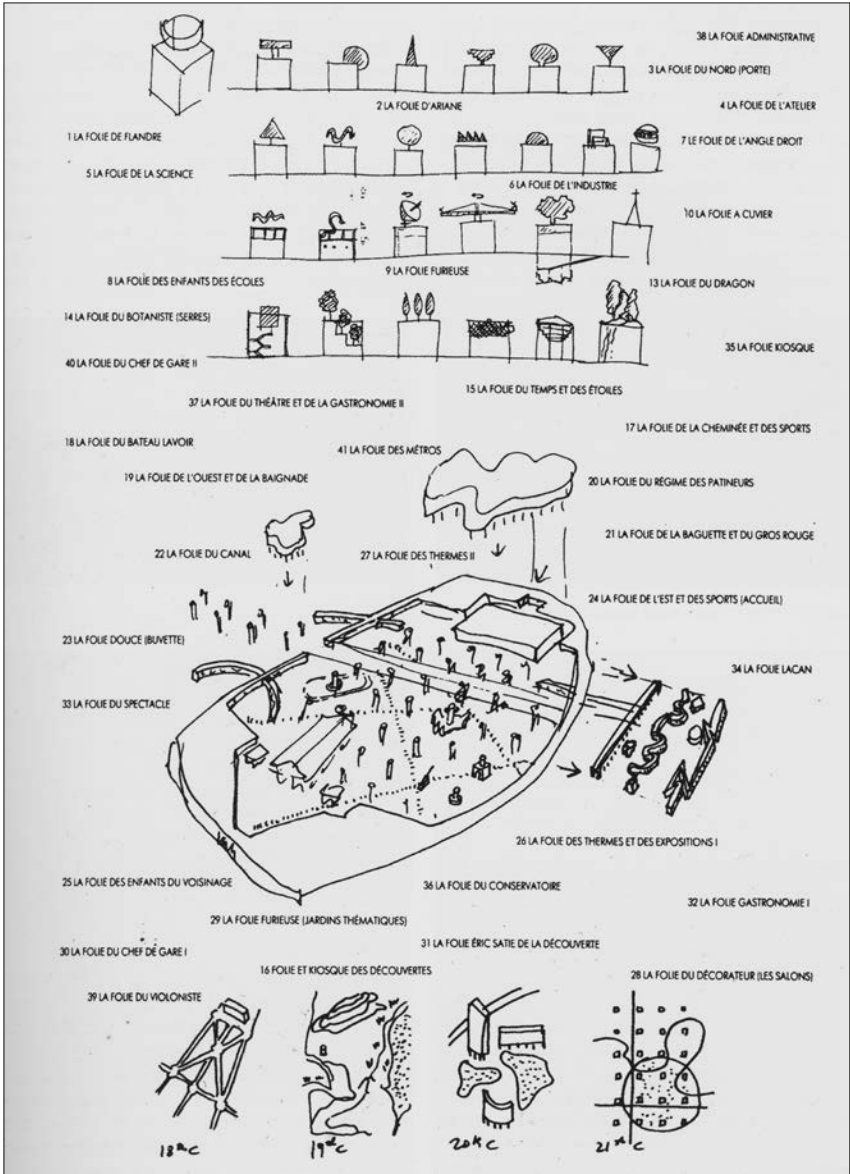
Such famous people as Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) were enchanted by the colours and compositions of Jekyll, and her influence can be seen at Sissinghurst Castle, home to Sackville West’s most splendid garden.

Another important landscape artist of the times is Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-96). His works, his books – many of which were written with his wife Susan – and his involvement in public institutions bear witness to a complex and articulated cultural sensitivity. At the heart of his approach was the importance of the theme-scene, both as a method for the conservation of natural environments, as well as a manner in which to change already laid-out parks, which undergo

constant changes in use-destination to satisfy the new needs of modern society. Wherever he worked Jellicoe applied the main principles of the central importance of art-nature, with which he identified the architecture of the landscape as a form of noble art in which one can recognize “the constant flow of time and space”, the very essence of ever-changing nature.

In a not dissimilar manner Sylvia Crowe (1901-97) offered the theme of the art-garden as a constant examination of feelings, intuition, man’s need to understand the forces that shape nature and the creative genius inherent in mankind. She found the answers to these “questions” in compositional simplicity and the harnessing of tranquillity: the absence of tranquillity results in a lack of harmony and leads to the failure of a garden’s intent.

The theme of abstraction in gardens, like that in figurative art, was a particularly hot topic in the 1920s and 30s. As a consequence of André Vera’s theories on the control of art over nature, a current of thought gained popularity which opposed both the neo-classical revivalism of Duchêne and the English-style romantic approach to nature. In that same cultural trend we find Robert Mallet-Stevens and, even more so, Gabriel Guevrekian, who represent the triumph of pure artistic layout and fields of colour over any romantic, evocative or figurative equation. The Exposition des Arts Décoratives in Paris in 1925, and the garden laid out for Vicomte de Noailles in Mons (Hyères), are prime examples. Nature as such has been abolished, feelings have been banished: everything must fit in with an orderly and controlled world where emotions are cerebral and translated into short, broken lines. The layout of the composition is deprived of its organic and vital content, it is all pure design, free from the shackles of time and space, it is where the garden becomes art in its purest form.



Paris, Park de la Villette: ideograms and follies

## The park and the city

Olmsted's idea of naturalizing the city, as he had done with Central Park in 1834, in New York City, crossed over the ocean to Europe, and in particular Holland, just after the First World War. At that time there was a lively debate between organicists and rationalists over the large-scale urban reorganization of the Amsterdam woods.

There were only two parks in Amsterdam in the 1930s – the Vondelpark, which opened in 1869, and the zoo to the east, built on ancient fortifications – even though the city itself is already very large. The city needed to solve the problem of providing its citizens with more parks and quality areas in which to live. The plan the city's administrators came up with was based on the separation of the old city from a new area containing vast open spaces between one community and another. The result is three major nature areas: the Amsterdamse Bos (woods) to the south, the Watergraafsmeer to the east and the Rembrandt to the west. Other areas to be developed came about later and the city assumed a star-like layout in which agriculture, polders and parks lived side by side.

The city has changed and in its centre the economic and social relationships, as well as the needs of the citizens, have undergone a radical transformation. Free time spent outdoors is no longer the exclusive right of the bourgeoisie, but a need and pressing right of all of the city's inhabitants.

Finely decorated and romantically laid out green areas no longer suffice. Vast areas are needed to satisfy the needs of the ever-increasing population. The Amsterdamse Bos – laid out on 900 hectares and able to host up to 100,000 citizens – can be considered a prototype of environmental planning created for the enjoyment of all the citizens. In order to function as it should, this model needs three basic features: a) easy access for vehicles (public and private), b) multi-use areas inside the park and c) the right logistical composition to host a huge number of people at the same time without causing congestion or crowding.



The influence of Amsterdamse Bos was such that the model most copied was based on simply modifying a natural environment on which, in some cases, French-style monumental directives were used to create vast perspectives or, less common, romantic English-style versions were created.

There were, however, exceptions to this type as parks were adapted to fit into the climatic or environmental realities of the various geographical areas. Parks in South America were naturally dominated by an exuberant array of plants and colour schemes, as with the parks by Burle Marx or Luis Barragán. In California, huge refined parks were laid out by Lawrence Halprin, whilst Mediterranean parks were characterized by the turn-of-the-century mediation between the culture of classical layouts, with their formal arrangements, and compositions based on freely growing trees.

With stylistic simplicity also came the need to offer citizens adequate amounts of open-air spaces and parks. The concept of urban standards, that is, the guarantee of a certain amount of park space for each inhabitant, came about just after the Second World War in all of Europe. The recovery of open-air spaces, until 20 years ago, was a priority of local governments. Today the focus has changed to the search for the quality of the open spaces, not just their existence. The dilemma is how best to design these open spaces, how to enrich them with aesthetically pleasing and functional features to make them both useful and pleasant. The search for “quality” is now the most important aspect of designing a park, it must be rendered useful for a wide variety of activities – games, sports, relaxation – able to be enjoyed by young and old alike, near homes and offices and easy to get to. Sports fields have been invented, playgrounds for children and specialized gardens laid out. The next puzzle to resolve is how to connect them all to one another in a complementary manner, how to find the common thread which would run through the city and enliven it.

It is in Scandinavia that we find the finest examples of great urban park systems. The philosophy behind their “design” can be

summed up in a phrase by Sven-Ingvar Andersson when he stated that “*nature comes first*”. Erik Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940), Carl Theodor Sorensen (1893-1979) and Olger Blom (1920-1996) took this short and powerful comment to heart when they designed their great public projects. It was not just the design itself that counted, but the sum total of nature-place-landscape. Only through the interpretation and integration of these three components could harmony emerge from a composition, no matter on what scale or where the park lies. This makes finding or extrapolating a basic project-type just about impossible, although the most famous example is, without a doubt, the Asplund Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm.

Summing it all up, public parks have, in the short span of a single century, gone from being an affirmation of power, to status symbol, to the city’s “lung” to, finally, a birthright of all citizens.

The Parc de la Villette, in Paris, marks the beginning of a new trend we could call “anti-naturalist”. Bernard Tschumi’s project is highly original in that his concept of structure is based on the deconstruction of the classical “construction blocks” hitherto used. Instead of following a hierarchical sequence of paths and architecture, his park is defined by the crowds that move about within it, that go from one structure (*folie*) to another. This movement is lightly underscored by trees which are planted on a geometrical grid that outlines the space. There are three independent systems at work here: the objects (points/places/*folies*), movement (lines/*promenades*) and the flat surfaces underfoot.

There is, therefore, a noted contrast between the formal unity of the composition, in which everything (the views, paths and objects) is defined in a static way, and the real unity, which is determined by the movement of the people within the park, the use of the park itself. Tschumi often stated that this park is not located in some verdant landscape but in the working-class neighbourhood of a semi-industrial part of the city and has several important buildings (Science City, La Grande Halle, the Zenith and Music City) inside it. For this reason, he

insisted, it was not possible to create a verdant green park in which one could forget the city and its vulgarity, nor could he create a park which could be considered the city's "lung". La Villette is a park which is one with the city as we know it today, complete with all of its distortions of sound, overpopulation and chaos.

Paradoxically, in this new way of creating a park, in its very negation of the past, there is actually a rediscovery of the past. Think of the vast open and empty spaces of public squares, the Campo di Marte as in Florence or the Commons in the USA, all of which were created expressly with the masses, and their movement, in mind, for the great public celebrations, for military parades or protests. The dominating idea of the cancellation of the ritual celebration areas represented by the classical garden and 19<sup>th</sup> century park, however, remains, and a historical feeling is recalled which, although no longer tied to shapes and the effects of size, still interprets the dynamism of nature, life and mankind.

The open air space policies adopted by Barcelona in the 1980s offers its citizens areas in the centre, at the waterfront and in parks. The plazas and parks form a system which gives the city, from its centre to the outlying areas, big open areas of fresh air for the inhabitants to enjoy. The entire urban layout can be defined by single projects still based on the great Haussmann model of streets, straight avenues, details and décor in which all the elements are part of a singular harmonious composition. One goes from the narrow plazas in the ancient Gracías neighbourhood down *ramblas* and *paseos* all the way to the Mol de la Fusta on the waterfront and the Villa Olímpica. Or one can go up the hill where old quarries have been turned into fascinating parks, like the Crueta del Col. Public open air spaces are the city's most important urban feature, they define it, enliven it and make it a liveable city for all of its citizens. The green areas also define the city's social life and make it compatible with the activities of daily life, placating conflicts and finding those things which people and their history have in common, their values and uses.

Barcelona represents an important step because it proposes, although with different styles, today, as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a parks system which is also the layout of the city itself, not separated from it. It reaffirms the principles of unity between full and empty spaces, the harmony of buildings with their trees, spaces with monuments and spaces for daily life activities. In our cities in Italy we still have to achieve this goal. In our hunger for construction gardens have been set aside, or so reduced as to be insignificant. With the effects of stress, climate change and ever increasing pollution the role of gardens should once more assume a vital role in city life, a vital role in our culture and in our daily lives. In Paris, like in Barcelona, in smaller towns and in great urban centres the importance of open-air spaces are the defining points of city layout, the park, garden and tree-lined avenue should not be isolated or “special”, but the fundamental features of urban existence.

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