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Above: *View of the interior courtyard of the Ebell of Los Angeles, The Mott Studios, 1931.* Photo courtesy of the Ebell of Los Angeles.

Right: *The interior courtyard of the Ebell of Los Angeles, 1933.*

All photos in Libby Simon's article are courtesy of the Ebell of Los Angeles photo archives.

The Ebell of Los Angeles

Libby Simon



In the mid-1920s, the decision to relocate the Ebell Club to Wilshire Boulevard, which is considerably west of downtown Los Angeles, was a shrewd move on the part of a group of genteel ladies.

Named for Adrian Ebell, a German professor who traveled around California forming study groups of women, the Ebell as an institution was intended to be a substitute for the university education that most women were largely denied. The Los Angeles club was one of the largest members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, founded in 1890 during the Progressive Movement.¹ In its heyday in the 1920s, the club had 2,500 members, rivaled only by the Friday Morning Club, an earlier women's club in downtown Los Angeles. Offering talks and classes ranging from art and literature to parliamentary law and social science, the club attracted the wives of the city's elite.²

When the Ebell Club was originally established in 1894, downtown Los Angeles was the business and social center of the city. The first Ebell clubhouse was on South Figueroa in the tony West Adams neighborhood, a convenient location for members who lived southwest of downtown. As the club grew, members began to

consider plans for expansion on Figueroa, but reconsidered when Los Angeles began a development of downtown farther west. Instead, they purchased a lot on Wilshire just east of Vermont at Shatto Place, within easy walking distance of five streetcar lines

The growth of Los Angeles exploded in the 1920s, fueled by major industries, including petroleum, manufacturing, aviation, and the film industry. The city's population swelled from a half a million in 1920 to more than 1.2 million in 1929. In the rush to expand commercial zoning on Wilshire, the value of the Ebell's Wilshire/Shatto property soared, which prompted bankers to advise the club to take the profit and secure a lot even farther west. Mrs. Grantland Seaton Long (Pearl), who served as president of the club from 1922 to 1924, negotiated the purchase that would establish the Ebell's new home at Wilshire between Lucerne and Fremont Place, safe from the boulevard's commercial zoning that extended as far west as Western.

The new Ebell became a cornerstone of gentility and culture for the neighborhoods of Windsor Square, Hancock Park, and Fremont Place. A committee was organized to choose an architect,



and Henry Hewitt was commissioned to design the new building. Writing in the March 1925 newsletter of the *Allied Architects Association*, Hewitt described his architectural vision: “We are Mediterranean in climate, in vegetation and sunlight. This whole glorious sweep of coast from Malaga to Messina is ours to draw inspiration from.”³

The Mediterranean Revival-style building was a large cast-in-place, two-story concrete structure surrounding a courtyard. Inside were the famed Wilshire Ebell Theatre (a 1,270-seat auditorium renowned for its acoustics) with a rare 3/13 Barton pipe organ, the clubhouse with a large lounge, and dining rooms, and there were works of art throughout.

Hewitt’s dream and architectural vision were cut short when he died suddenly in January 1926 at the age of 51. The Ebell commission was then awarded to architect Sumner Hunt, whose wife was a club member (as was Hewitt’s). Mary Chapman Hunt also served on the committee that had originally selected the architect for the building.⁴ How much of Hewitt’s work made it into the final design of the Ebell Club complex is unknown, but Hunt’s work reflected a similar aesthetic, as evidenced in his design for the Southwest Museum and the Los Angeles headquarters building of the Automobile Club of Southern California.

The club membership insisted that a female landscape architect be hired, and Florence Yoch and Lucile Council were chosen to design the interior courtyard garden and the exterior landscaping.

Above: Exterior view of the Ebell of Los Angeles at the corner of Lucerne and Wilshire Boulevards, ca. 1930.

Born in 1890 in Southern California, Florence Yoch was the youngest of six daughters. Her father, Joseph Yoch, came from Berlin to the United States at the age of three. His father was a stonemason, contractor, and farmer who eventually made his fortune in coal mining. Joseph took over the mining business at the age of nineteen. After selling the business, he moved his family from Illinois to Santa Ana, California, in the late 1880s. Florence’s mother, Catherine Isch Yoch, was a teacher before she married and “active in political and social affairs.”⁵ The Yoch family helped establish Laguna Beach as a cultural resort, building the Laguna Hotel and a wharf.⁶ The Laguna Hotel hosted art exhibits and rented cottages to visiting artists and became a social gathering spot.⁷

Yoch spent most of her childhood outdoors and was inspired by the country settings of her family’s rides to their summer home in Laguna Beach. Owning an adjoining ranch in Santiago Canyon, her family was friendly with Polish actress Madame Helena Modjeska who lived in Modjeska Canyon in a house designed by Stanford White. Visits to her home, “Arden,” now a National Historic Landmark, exposed the young Florence to people in the arts and in horticulture. In fact, Theodore Payne, who later became well known as the premier native plant specialist, worked as a gardener at Arden from 1893 to 1896.

Yoch studied landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, and then enrolled at Cornell University in the College of Agriculture in 1912. She finished her education in 1915 at the University of Illinois with a bachelor of science in landscape gardening.⁸

In 1918, according to a *Los Angeles Times* article, Florence was chosen as the new temporary field secretary for the Women’s Land



Army of America in Southern California. The WLAA, modeled after the British Women's Land Army, was established to employ women in agriculture. Working in farming, dairying, fruit picking, and canning, the mostly college-educated women helped in the war effort.⁹ That same year, Yoch started her own landscape firm, and Lucile Council joined it as an apprentice in 1921.

Born in Massachusetts, Council had studied at the Cambridge School of Domestic and Landscape Architecture.¹⁰ The two formed a partnership in 1925 and worked mainly in Pasadena, San Marino, Beverly Hills, and Montecito., "Florence Yoch was the principal designer, and Lucile Council was in charge of the office," writes James Yoch in *Landscape the American Dream*. Lucile was also the "plant organizer and finder."¹¹

When Yoch and Council began work on the Ebell project, Yoch had already completed gardens at Rancho Los Alamitos in Long Beach, the Wilshire Country Club, Il Brolino in Montecito, and The Women's Athletic Club in Los Angeles. Although the original Ebell landscape plans have never been found, the Los Angeles Ebell's archives are a researcher's dream. Besides having the original architectural plans of Hunt & Burns and receipts for every plant, every pottery piece, and every item purchased from nurseries and shops, the archives also contain all the service and labor invoices. The receipts show quantities, sizes of plants, unit prices, along with a breakdown of labor and construction costs.¹² Also found in the archives is the Yoch-Council contract, dated September 14, 1927, for a total of \$10,000 (equivalent to \$132,662 today).¹³

The Ebell Club was officially opened with a musicale tea hosted by the members in October 1927.¹⁴ The Wilshire Ebell Theatre opened in December of that year. The Ebell of Los Angeles site

was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 6, 1994. It was listed a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument and declared an Official American Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1982.¹⁵

Exterior Landscape

At the Ebell, the Yoch-Council design is still in evidence. On either side of the rarely used main entrance at Wilshire Boulevard, two olive trees lead to an elaborate wrought-iron front door. Nurseryman W. H. Smitter of Pasadena provided eight orchard-grown olive trees, which were planted around the Ebell exterior. Now 'Iceberg' roses join the olives and a lawn slopes down to the sidewalk.

Originally planted as shrubs, the pittosporum have grown into trees. Photos from the Ebell archives show eucalyptus and cypress planted along Lucerne. However, of the 10 eucalyptus and 11 Italian cypress on the original plant list, none remain, though the original olive trees still exist at the corners of the building as do the original olive trees that were planted on either side of the entrance to the famed Ebell Theatre.

Interior Courtyard

The interior courtyard is enclosed with clubrooms along two sides, and runs north and south, with the entrances along an open arcade and loggia arches. The courtyard is rectangular, with a central lawn area and concrete steps and paths on either side, as the property slopes down towards the south. An upper, open patio along the west side is furnished with outdoor tables and seating. A hexadecagon-shaped memorial fountain with a statue by artist Henry Lion was erected in 1930.



A large Cocos palm, moved from the old Ebell grounds at Figueroa Street in 1927, was removed along with other palms from the original Yoch-Council plantings in 2013. At the time of planting, the large old palm was fitted at the top with its own sprinkler sprayer. According to the records, Dr. Albert E. Chisholm installed the one sprinkler for a cost of \$16.45, which included \$10 in labor.

In the late 1920s, a flat of *Ajuga reptans* was \$2.00, and the olive trees were \$100 a piece. A crape myrtle purchased from W. H. Smitter of Pasadena by Yoch and Council for \$110.00 was placed in the northwest corner of the courtyard. A crape myrtle remains in this area today.

Roses such as ‘Irish Fire Flame Rose’ from Earl M. Wagner in Hollywood and ‘Belle of Portugal’ and ‘Silver Moon’ from the Jannoch Nurseries in Pasadena were placed in the side planters. The irises ‘Monspur’, ‘Princess Beatrice’, and ‘J.J. Dean’ were from Southern California Iris Gardens. Tulips were procured from the Holland Bulb & Nursery Company in San Francisco, including ‘Moonlight Girl’, ‘Orange King’, and ‘Blue Aimable’. Most of these plants no longer exist in the garden.

“A few years’ growth of vines and thickening shrubbery—potted plants and tubed trees on the terraces—gay awnings and summer

frocks—and one can picture this patio as a most enchanting spot, under the warm blue skies of sunny Southern California,” reflected a *Pacific Coast Architect* writer about the interior patio garden in 1927.¹⁶

In his book *California Gardens: Creating a New Eden*, David Streatfield writes that in the 1920s, Los Angeles, unlike the rest of the country, had few landscape contractors. Landscapers formed their own crews and used them for their entire careers. “One advantage of this system was that the members of these crews became thoroughly familiar with their employers’ preferences,” says Streatfield, and “that experience reduced the need for elaborate specifications and guaranteed a more reliable level of craftsmanship.”¹⁷ According to Art Seidenbaum, Los Angeles in the 1920s was growing so fast that “23 firms in the area [were] calling themselves landscape architects, 15 of them with nurseries and design staffs.” Some 90 nurseries served the area’s horticultural needs.¹⁸ At the time laborers worked for as little as 50 cents an hour for hauling dirt to as much as \$1.37 hourly for finished concrete work. Gasoline prices were 20 cents a gallon. On one of the “Labor Summaries,” laborers for a week in September of 1927 were 95 percent Hispanic.

Yoch and Council continued to landscape public gardens in the region, such as Occidental College in Eagle Rock and the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, as well as residences for film industry luminaries George Cukor, Jack Warner, and David O. Selznick. These movie industry connections led to Yoch’s designing the movie sets for “Gone With The Wind,” “The Good Earth,” and “How Green Was My Valley.”

Yoch and Council remained partners in their business and personal lives until Lucile’s death in 1964. Florence continued to work until her death at 81 in Carmel on January 31, 1972. In her 53-year career, she completed over 250 projects, all the while developing an

Above (left to right): *The hexadecagon-shaped memorial fountain in the Ebell Club’s interior courtyard with a statue by artist Henry Lion, erected in 1930. Haskell Studios Photography, ca. 1930.*

Patio arcade in front of the Ebell Club, along Lucerne Boulevard, ca. 1930.

Interior courtyard garden from the upper patio, ca. 1930.



elegant, yet casual Southern California style. From their extensive travels through Europe, Yoch and Council combined the classic Spanish and Italian style of garden design with the natural landscape of Southern California. These women became an important link, a transition from the traditional and formal to the 1960s' modern style and the desire for outdoor living.

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The author would like to thank Libby Motika for her writing and research on women's clubs in Los Angeles and the early architectural history of the Ebelle Club.

Libby Simon, formerly an animation artist and currently a CGLHS board member, is a graduate of UCLA Extension's Landscape Architecture program. Now designing residential gardens, she has also been involved in historic preservation, having completed Historic American Landscape Surveys of the San Gabriel Mission, the Los Angeles Ebelle garden by Florence Yoch and Lucile Council, and the Old Zoo at Griffith Park.

The Glamorous Gardens of Tommy Tomson

Part Two

Steven Keylon



The last issue of Eden introduced landscape architect Tommy Tomson (1900-1986). Born in Zanesville, Ohio, Tomson was a primarily self-taught landscape architect whose early work included the Jantzen Estate in Lake Oswego, Oregon, as well as the Santa Anita Racetrack. In Part Two, Steven Keylon continues with several Tomson projects executed prior to World War II that highlight the diversity of his landscape work.

Pan-Pacific Auditorium

As part of President Roosevelt's New Deal, the Housing Act of 1934 created the Federal Housing Administration, which was designed to help trigger new construction by making it easier for people to qualify for mortgages. It also created programs to finance home renovation and modernization. In 1935, Tommy Tomson's brother-in-law Cliff Henderson announced a National Housing Exposition, to take place in Los Angeles, which would help showcase how these new programs might

assist potential homeowners. His plan included a Pan-Pacific Auditorium. This was to be the largest home show in the West and one of only three in the country.

Henderson guaranteed the directors of the Exposition that 250,000 people would attend the show, but upped that to 350,000 when unprecedented hoopla preceded its opening, saying "an attendance of 500,000 is not beyond the realm of possibility."¹ In cooperation with the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Henderson sponsored a competition for the design of the structure with a \$1,000 cash prize. Relative newcomers Charles Plummer, Walter Wurdeman, and Welton Becket won the competition with their design for a startlingly forward-thinking structure—a Streamline Moderne marquee featuring "the upward thrust of an enormous airplane wing, with vertical prows of pylons jutting partly through the marquee and gripping four 100-foot flagpoles."² The structure was to be painted in deep terra

cotta and coral tones with white accents. According to Becket "the result both day and night will be one of colorful magnificence, a new architecture keeping pace with the tremendous advances of modern science and industry."³

Tomson began working immediately on the site plan for the 12-acre parcel. In addition to the large auditorium structure, five full-sized model show houses would be built, two of which were to be given away as grand prizes at the Exposition's end.⁴ Tomson's landscape plan featured a wide plaza with a pair of fountains at the entrance of the auditorium. However, due to time and budget constraints, these two fountains were reduced to a single fountain, on axis with the front doors of the auditorium and flanked by a pair of rectangular lawn panels, each planted with a mature, multi-trunk olive specimen and surrounded by outward facing benches. The five model homes would be on display across the large open plaza.



The task of building the Exposition from bare ground in just 56 days “required the planning and landscaping of grounds, the running of pipelines, of services, the building of fences, and the thousands of details which tumbling over one another drive men to distraction. Tommy Tomson scurried about the lot trying to coax lawns, hedges, outdoor theaters, et cetera, into being while warding off trucks, and packing boxes.”⁵ Tomson was supervising the installation of the landscape right up to the day the show opened, May 18, 1935, to a great fanfare of the 500-member Tenth Olympiad Chorus.

After the Exposition, Tomson reworked the open plaza for permanency by creating a driveway near the entrance, adding California pepper trees and shrub masses against the buildings, which softened the impact of the massive structure. The Pan-Pacific was a much-loved icon to generations of Angelenos. Over time the structure hosted trade shows, roller derbies, wrestling matches,

political rallies, and ice shows—and was even ballyhooed as the “world’s largest indoor ice rink.”⁶

Landscape Architect to the Stars

Writing in 1941 about the excesses of Hollywood homes, Leo C. Rosten observed;

In Hollywood, as in Istanbul or Sioux Falls, the rich hasten to express their wealth, and betray their fitful groping for status, by erecting homes of unnecessary magnitude and splendor. For wealth is a psychological sovereignty and those within its boundaries live in obligatory palaces. Houses are the most visible and enduring signs of great fortune; in all times and places architecture has served as a primary symbol of social station.⁷

The Hollywood set, who had turned out in full force for Santa Anita’s opening

season, were impressed by what they saw and soon everyone wanted a Tommy Tomson garden. Most celebrities, though admired by the public for their beauty and taste, were notoriously insecure and relied on others to provide that taste. Tomson earned a reputation as the landscape architect who understood what would best showcase the personality of these members of the “Movie Colony,” giving them a backdrop as glamorous as any movie set, a garden ready for photo sessions or lavish

Left: Tommy Tomson in the garden of his Pacific Palisades residence, 1940. Courtesy Duchess Tomson Emerson, Tommy Tomson Archives (hereafter cited as TTA).

Left center: Pan-Pacific Auditorium, 1941. Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library.

Above: Tomson’s rendering of the site plan for the National Housing Exposition of 1935 shows the Pan-Pacific Auditorium and adjacent plaza with several model homes on display. Courtesy Duchess Tomson Emerson, TTA.



parties. More than once, his clients engaged Tomson first, getting started on the landscape before deciding on an architect.

Tomson remarked on his time working with the Hollywood elite that “the great architects at that time were schooled in old-world design and designed what was best for the sunshine climate of California.”⁸ Tomson’s landscapes were contemporary versions of traditional gardens, but done in a fresh, timeless, and playful way. Modern in their indoor/outdoor relationship, these gardens offered generous opportunities for recreation and exercise, for living in the open air year-round.

By the mid-1930s, the over-the-top Spanish Colonial Revival and Mediterranean-inspired estates of the previous decade had given way to a new, more restrained

style that combined modern function with historicist detailing. The style, which came to be known as Hollywood Regency, was theatrical and glamorous, and effortlessly balanced contemporary and traditional, formal and casual.

One of the most successful of Tomson’s movie colony creations was the residence of actress Joan Bennett, the ultimate 1930s film star. In 1936 Bennett commissioned architect Wallace Neff to design a house in Holmby Hills on a knoll overlooking the Los Angeles Country Club. It was a French revival mansion with “drop-dead glamour, Hollywood Regency style.”⁹ Actor Douglas Fairbanks Jr. quipped that the house was “the beautiful Joan expressed in bricks and mortar.”¹⁰

In the WPA-produced *California: A Guide*

to the Golden State, the house is described as a “two-story white painted brick mansion of Norman design surmounted by two large chimneys.”¹¹ The 14-room, 13,000-square-foot house and garden cost nearly \$100,000. A circular driveway lined with boxwood hedges delivered guests to the front door, which was framed by an artfully pruned pair of magnolia espaliers, one of Tomson’s favorite motifs. Pittosporum tobira accented broad, colorful beds of pansies, while even more espaliered plantings graced the curved, whitewashed brick walls surrounding the motor court.

At the rear of the house, on axis with the front door, was a formal rectangular swimming pool and pool pavilion, seen across a vast expanse of lawn. To give this monumental space a more human scale, Tomson broke this lawn up with an inset geometric



“frame” of flowerbed plantings. These were in line with the main body of the residence, enclosed by low boxwood hedges, filled with seasonal color (tulips in the spring), and anchored at each corner by a mature, multi-trunk tree. A decomposed granite pathway ran alongside a whitewashed brick garden wall on one side of the lawn, which was planted with an array of flowering shrubs and plants and balanced with more espaliered magnolias, all of it enclosed by more low boxwood. This garden wall separated the main lawn from a more informal playground for children. Joan Bennett lived here for decades, saying the residence “was the realization of a dream. It remains the warm focal point where all of my children grew up. They still recall with affection the days spent there.”¹²

Tomson’s work for members of the movie

colony reads like a Hollywood Who’s Who. His clients included moguls like Harry Cohn, William and Edith Mayer Goetz, Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick and wife Jennifer Jones, and Myron Selznick. Directors, producers, and agents such as King Vidor, Mitchell Leisen, William Perlberg, and Sam Jaffe also commissioned Tomson landscapes for their new homes. Tomson’s long list of actor clients included Robert Montgomery, Charles Boyer, Frank Sinatra, Gene Autry, Loretta Young, Virginia Bruce, Ray Milland, Ronald Colman, Red Skelton, Buster Crabbe, Joan Crawford, Henry Fonda, Fred MacMurray, Margaret Sullavan and agent/producer husband Leland Hayward, Jack Morgan, Lloyd Nolan, Grace Moore, and Basil Rathbone.

One unforgettable client was Paulette

Goddard, who insisted that she interview Tomson in her black-painted bedroom, and another was a beautiful actress—whom he refused to name—who told him as they stood in her new home, “Tommy, this lipstick will not rub off.”¹³

The Splendor of Union Station

Considered the last great train station to be built anywhere in the world, Los Angeles’ Union Station, which opened in May, 1939,

Left: The motor court of the Wallace Neff-designed residence of film star Joan Bennett, 1936. Photographer: Maynard L. Parker. Courtesy Huntington Library.

Above: Actress Joan Bennett walking in the back garden of her Holmby Hills home. Courtesy Marc Wanamaker/Bison Archives.



was also one of the first to be extensively landscaped. Over two decades of often contentious planning the design team continued to fight hard for the inclusion of the landscape, now considered one of the most important elements in the overall success of the 45-acre site.

Designed by architects John B. and Donald D. Parkinson to represent the “Californian” style, the station combined Mission and Spanish Colonial Revival design elements with Moderne detailing. The Parkinsons were joined by color consultant Herman Sachs and landscape architect Tomson, who explained that in designing the landscape for the station, he “took into consideration the fact that it would be, for many, the real first glimpse of Southern

California. I wanted to make it as different from the East as possible; to portray California as it really is.”¹⁴

To achieve this goal, Tomson and Robert W. Hamsher, a nurseryman specializing in the successful moving and planting of mature, fully grown trees, searched Southern California for the best specimens, choosing species associated with the romantic feeling of “Old California.” While a few were natives (coast live oak, sycamore), the others (olive, pepper, eucalyptus, citrus, and palm) had become associated with the romance and drama of the California missions and Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 novel *Ramona*.

To enhance the massing of the architecture

and tall clock tower Tomson placed five soaring groups of twin *Washingtonia robusta*, planted in his signature “V” pattern along the front façade, while the lower arcades were planted with magnolia. The large parking lot was fully landscaped, with hedges planted to minimize the sight and sound of automobiles from the surrounding roads. Tomson enclosed the site with 40 fully grown Mission olive trees.

The true artistry of Tomson’s landscape was exemplified in the two patios, one on either side of the waiting room. The design team considered the South Patio, a busy outdoor reception room with access from every side, “the heart of the whole project.” Circulation for the station was planned to separate departing passengers from those



arriving and to maximize the experience of arriving passengers—a carefully choreographed, almost cinematic journey led them from the train, through a pedestrian subway and into a reception lobby. From here, arriving passengers could glimpse through the wide arches surrounding the lobby a dramatically idealized exotic landscape representing everything they had dreamed about Southern California. They had only to walk a few feet to enter this paradise, where Tomson had developed "a beauty spot intended to do nothing short of 'selling' California instantly to new arrivals."¹⁵

The landscape of the South Patio featured a large parterre garden with four mature California pepper trees, planted in beds of grape ivy, accented with birds of paradise,

and enclosed by low dwarf myrtle hedges. Towering twin and single palms, framing views towards Los Angeles City Hall, were joined by Nevidillo olive trees and espaliered magnolias. Abundant color was provided by trumpet vines in scarlet and lavender as well as orange cape honeysuckle.

On the opposite side of the station was the North Patio, a quieter, more intimate space meant to serve as an outdoor extension of the adjacent waiting room. Here Tomson designed a landscape that was a delight for all the senses, planting for color, fragrance, texture, and form. The doors from the waiting room were framed by a pair of California native oaks. An allée of lemon-scented eucalyptus led to a colorful, tiled

wall fountain, behind which were planted four California sycamore trees. Two large panels of turf were dotted with informal groupings of jacaranda trees and bordered with rows of Washington navel oranges on the outermost edges, underplanted with fragrant beds of star jasmine. Along a service road, Tomson experimented by planting a long row of Fuerte avocados, which were pruned and trained into a low hedge. A sculptural pair of *Monstera deliciosa* added bold texture. The North Patio garden was intended to be an informal space for children to play, and for departing passengers to get their last dramatic taste of all that was glorious about Southern California.

Swimming Pool Innovations

Because many of Tomson's glamorous gardens featured creatively styled swimming pools, he was asked to create pools in the 1930s and '40s for the West's most luxurious hotels and resorts, starting with the Sand and Pool Club at the Beverly Hills Hotel, the Crystal Plunge and Suntan Beach at the Ambassador Hotel, followed by pools for the exclusive Town House on Wilshire and the magnificent Mission Inn in Riverside. Tomson's more dramatic pools in the '40s and '50s included an enormous figure-eight-shaped pool at the Shadow Mountain Club in Palm Desert, a heart-shaped pool for the Royal Palms Hotel in Phoenix, and a spectacular mountain-top pool for the Garden of the Gods resort in Colorado Springs. For Cliff Henderson, Tomson created one of the first biomorphic, kidney-shaped pools, this one featuring a "desert island" in the middle, planted with twin palms in the Tomson "V" pattern. For Frank Sinatra's Palm Springs house "Twin Palms" (named for the Tomson "V"), Tomson conceived a piano-shaped swimming pool, the adjacent pierced roof of the breezeway leaving shadows in the pool suggesting piano keys.

In the beginning, swimming pools had been the exclusive luxury of the wealthy, prohibitively expensive because of the intensive labor and hand plastering involved. By the late 1930s, however, the Paddock Engineering Company had developed an inventive

Left: According to Tommy Tomson, the landscape for the South Patio of Los Angeles Union Station was designed to give visitors "the spirit of California in one big moment." Tommy Tomson Archives, courtesy Duchess Tomson Emerson.

Above: Tomson's design for the swimming pool exhibition for the Paddock Engineering company consisted of one full-sized pool and five miniature pools, 1940. Photo by "Dick" Whittington. "Dick" Whittington Collection, Special Collections, USC Libraries.



method of spraying Gunite, making pools significantly more affordable. To advertise this innovation in affordability, in 1940 Paddock hired Tomson to create a novel exhibit at the corner of Ventura and Sepulveda Boulevards in the then wide-open San Fernando Valley. Here “pools are now displayed with the same appeal to the prospective owner as automobiles are exhibited in a showroom or merchandise in a department store.”¹⁶ The half-acre site had one full-sized turquoise pool designed like an inverted dome and fully equipped with “submarine light,” diving board, tile trim, and complete filtration plant—the cost estimated at \$2,000 to \$2,400 (roughly \$34,000 to \$40,000 in today’s dollars).¹⁷ Adjacent to this, Tomson designed five miniature pools in varying shapes, complete with tiny diving boards, lights, chromium-plated ladders, coping, and walks—all to scale. The exhibit ranged from a formal, elaborate white marble pool to Paddock’s famous “Blu-Opal” pool and even included a naturalistic pool meant to resemble a mountain lake, freeform in shape and surrounded by

earthen berms, ringed by giant, partially submerged boulders, and planted with a miniature forest of woodland trees and shrubs. Set into a large panel of turf, the exhibit was surrounded by fragrant *Pittosporum undulatum* trees and low hedges, and accented with bright pansies.

The office itself was planned to function as a bathing pavilion with a shower and dressing rooms, as the facility was used frequently for diving exhibitions and bathing beauty contests. Other areas featured displays with multiple options for paving materials, showcases for pool equipment and accessories as well as outdoor furniture.¹⁸ The exhibit was a great success, remaining in place for several years.

The Pendleton’s Beverly Hills Jewel Box

In 1941, Tomson capped an extraordinary decade of glamorous residential gardens by creating the setting for a jewel box of a house near the Beverly Hills Hotel that was to become the talk of the town. New

York interior designer and antiques purveyor James B. (“Jimmy”) Pendleton and his high-society wife, known as Dodo, bought a four-acre parcel from writer Dorothy Parker and hired Tomson and up-and-coming young architect John Elgin Woolf to plan their new home and gardens. The ultimate in Hollywood Regency, these were modeled on drawings of pavilions at Versailles, shown to the designers by Pendleton’s mentor and renowned arbiter of taste, interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe.¹⁹ The Pendletons wanted an exotic atmosphere as fanciful and unpredictable as the legendary parties they threw (often created by artist Tony Duquette). Tomson and Woolf conceived a modern house and garden with a strong symmetrical, axial arrangement, accented with extravagant neoclassical touches, all of which were designed around a theme of ovals.

Entry into the oval gravel motor court with its center fountain was through gates guarded by a pair of antique sphinxes and surrounded by a whitewashed brick wall.



The one-story, gray-painted house turned its back on the street, presenting a symmetrical, blank stucco wall punctuated by a pair of oval niches displaying classical urns. This composition was topped by a stylishly exaggerated mansard roof. Through a pair of tall lacquered doors protected by a slender-columned portico, an oval entrance hall opened onto a living room dominated by a unique surprise: “An unbelievable feature is the living-room fireplace with a window over the mantel where the chimney should be. How the smoke is detoured to the roof top is a secret and a conversation piece for a bright little fire burns merrily in hot or cold weather just to make the whole thing more mysterious.”²⁰ Instead of the expected framed landscape painting hanging over the mantel, the view through this startling, slightly surreal fireplace window was tantalizing glimpses of Tomson’s fantastical and inviting garden.

Near the house Tomson created a broad terrace, enclosed by a pair of long rectangular pools, each with a single fountain

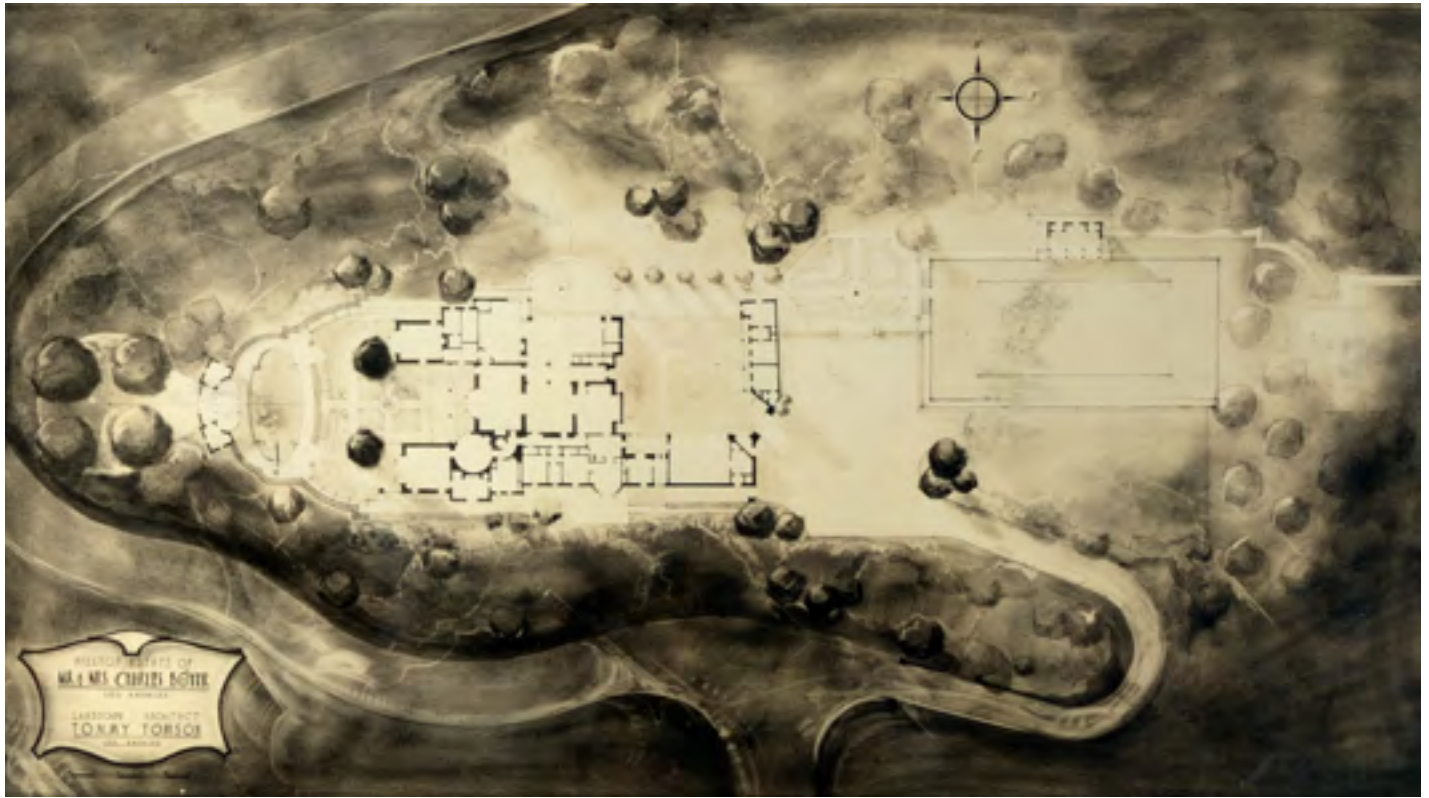
jet. These pools radiated from dining and bedroom windows, animating views out towards the garden. Referencing the grand fountains of Versailles in an abstract way and mirroring the shape of the entry court, the rear garden was dominated by a large oval swimming pool, surrounded by flagstone paving and set into a large panel of gently sloping, sun-dappled turf. A narrow pipe was incorporated into the coping at the pool’s edge and with the flip of a switch the pool became a fountain with small jets streaming into the center. A sumptuous neoclassical pool pavilion, with yet another fireplace, stood like a folly across the pool, and was described as “a casual supplement for the austere house—a place for lounging after a swim, for sunburned informality.”²¹

Breaking up the symmetry of the garden, Tomson incorporated an enormous existing California sycamore whose exaggerated lean provided interest to the lawn and shade to an outdoor dining patio. Mrs. Pendleton wanted lots of flowers, primarily in a

limited palette of lilacs, mauves and violets, so a large formal rose garden was included, and trelliswork walls inset with more oval niches were planted with lavender trumpet vine. Harmonizing with the house’s muted warm gray and cool violet palette, outdoor furniture lacquered a deep green was upholstered in lavender-tinted gray fabric. Tomson enclosed the property with fast-growing lemon-scented gum and other eucalyptus species, with Lombardy poplars and Italian cypress nearest the house to emphasize its scale. He believed that the “best setting for a ‘moderne’ house is in a grove of tall trees. Thus the horizontal

Left: Tommy Tomson’s rendering for the Pendleton garden, 1941. Courtesy Duchess Tomson Emerson, TTA.

Above: Designed in collaboration with architect John Elgin Woolf, the oval pool and pool pavilion reference classic French gardens, but in a contemporary way. Fred R. Dapprich photograph for *Vogue*, November, 1942. From the John Elgin Woolf Papers, Architecture & Design Collection, AD&A Museum, UC Santa Barbara.



feeling in the house is contrasted with the verticality of straight, slim trees.”²²

Legend has it that as the finishing touches were being added to the chic house and garden, architect Woolf walked into the motor court one rainy afternoon to find two women huddled, getting a sneak peek at the house and garden everyone was talking about. They turned out to be Greta Garbo and her friend Gladys Belzer, a well-known interior decorator and mother of Loretta Young. The house, which was featured in the November 1942 issue of *Vogue*, was considered by many to be “the most attractive small house in Beverly Hills.”²³ In the 1950s, actress Norma Shearer brought a very young film producer, Robert Evans, to the Pendleton house, saying as they entered the gate, “It’s so unlike Los Angeles. You feel like you’re in the South of France when you’re here.” The house made such an impression Evans bought the house 10 years later, and lives there to this day.

Conclusion

In 1937 Tomson, who had been a member of the national ASLA since 1934, joined a small group including Fred Barlow Jr., Katherine Bashford, Hammond Sadler, and Ralph D. Cornell to form the Southern California Chapter of the ASLA. He served as its president in 1941.

After Pearl Harbor, Tomson wanted to serve his country but was considered too old for active service. He went to Maui to plan the layouts of air bases for the Army Air Corps. He continued his work in Southern California, designing the layout and landscapes for airplane factories Vultee and Vega as well as the landscape for Park La Brea, the largest garden apartment community in Los Angeles.

After World War II, while still sought-after for his exceptional residential design, Tomson did the site planning and landscapes for many non-residential projects, including factories such as Anheuser-Busch, the Garrett Corporation, and General Motors. In the late 1940s, Tomson worked on significant expansions of the Ambassador and Beverly Hills Hotels with architect Paul R. Williams, and in 1950 he designed the landscape for the new Statler Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Other non-residential work in the early post-war period included a dozen branches of California Federal Savings and Loan, the Los Alamitos Race Track, and the Marlborough School for Girls. His most significant project, however, done in collaboration with the Henderson brothers, was the site plan and layout of the entire city of Palm

Desert, touted as “the Smartest Address on the American Desert.” Tomson laid out 16 miles of paved road (a novelty in the desert in 1946) and 14 miles of water mains. In addition to the city’s master plan, Tomson created the layout and landscape for the Shadow Mountain Club and the landscaping for numerous Palm Desert residences.

The success of Palm Desert led to his involvement in the planning of the high-desert resort town of Apple Valley and the Apple Valley Inn with architect Hugh Gibbs. Another important Apple Valley project was the mountaintop home for Newton T. Bass, designed in collaboration with master Mexican architect Francisco Artigas, who would become Tomson’s closest friend for the remainder of his life.

In 1960 Tomson decided to retire, and to celebrate, he and wife Dorris took a long around-the-world trip. A photograph of a fez-topped Tomson sitting on a camel with the Sphinx and pyramids in the background commemorates a dream come true for the child originally named Golden Sands of Zanesville, Ohio.

High on a hill overlooking Palm Desert, Tomson’s last creation was “Hacienda Dos Gallos,” a romantic estate for Dorris and himself, designed in collaboration with his good friend, architect Francisco Artigas. “I’ve retired to hard labor,” Tomson told his friends as he built the Hacienda himself brick by brick. Sited on a four-acre lot, the Hacienda, complete with chapel and blacksmith’s shop, resembled a transplanted Spanish farmhouse. The shop was outfitted with antique anvil, forges, and tools for Tomson to create wrought-iron wares. The large motor court had a “ruined” aqueduct on one side that was actually a fountain. Of the landscape, Tomson observed, “I sort of did some reverse land planning by putting the buildings where the vegetation was. It was God who actually did the landscaping here!”²⁴ Dorris and “Tomasito” (who was often dressed in sombrero and charro suit) enjoyed entertaining friends and family (which by now had grown to include four grandchildren), splitting their time between the golden sands of their homes in Malibu and Palm Desert. In 1974 Tomson and Dorris celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Tomson’s beloved Dorris died January 31, 1983.

At the end of his life, reflecting on his long and successful career, Tomson inscribed in his well-worn copy of the landscape textbook he had bought in 1922, listing some of his accomplishments—“Santa Anita. Union Depot. Park La Brea. 1,000 others”—ending with this humorous

summary: “No fame – But a good game.” Tommy Tomson died on August 23, 1986.²⁵

Endnotes

1. “Great Housing Gains Forecast,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1935, A1.
2. Untitled clipping in Tommy Tomson scrapbook, ca. 1935. Tommy Tomson Archives, hereafter TTA.
3. Ibid.
4. In addition to a Wallace Neff-designed Honeymoon Cottage, the other prize would be the *Los Angeles Times* demonstration home, a modern salmon-brick-and-white-tiled roof structure by architects H. Roy Kelley, Edgar F. Bissantz, and Harold G. Spielman, landscaped by Katherine Bashford.
5. *Progressive Contractor*, May 1935. Clipping, TTA.
6. Untitled magazine clipping, TTA.
7. Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1941), 199.
8. Typewritten remembrance, ca. 1970, TTA.
9. John Chase, *Glitter Stucco & Dumpster Diving*. (New York: Verso, 2000), 63.
10. “Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra, and Other Old Hollywood Stars’ Homes,” *Architectural Digest* online. www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/old-hollywood-at-home-marilyn-monroe-franksinatra-joan-crawfordslideshow
11. Mabel R. Gillis, State Librarian, *California: A Guide to the Golden State*. (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1939), 199.
12. Alton Clark, *Wallace Neff, Architect of California’s Golden Age* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1986), 143.
13. Typewritten remembrance, ca. 1970, TTA.
14. Tommy Tomson, “Design Your Hillside Garden,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1938, 128-129.
15. “Beautification of Depot Mapped,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1938, A8.
16. “Swimming Pools – A Southern California Exhibit,” *Architect and Engineer*, October 1940, 55-56.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Tim Street-Porter, *The Los Angeles House* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1995), 118.
20. Lucille Leimert, “Confidentially,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1946, A5.
21. “1001 Ideas In a Small House,” *Vogue*, November 1942, 71.
22. Tommy Tomson, “Design Your Hillside Garden,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1938, 128-129.
23. Lucille Leimert, “Confidentially,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1946, A5.
24. “Home with the Tommy Tomsons,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 17, 1971, V26.
25. Inscription written in Tomson’s copy of Hubbard and Kimball’s “An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design,” TTA.

The author would like to thank Gailyn and Aram Saroyan, and Marianne and Ron Furedi for reading early versions of this article and offering helpful suggestions to improve it.

Los Angeles-based landscape historian Steven Keylon is the CGLHS treasurer and a member of the editorial board. He is a frequent contributor to Eden.

Left top: *Tommy Tomson’s rendering of the site plan for the Beverly Hills residence of film star Charles Boyer.*

Left bottom: *To celebrate retiring in 1960, Tommy and Dorris Tomson took an around the world trip.*

Courtesy Duchess Tomson Emerson, TTA.

CGLHS ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Dear CGLHS Members,

Thanks to your support, the California Garden & Landscape History Society assembled a solid record of accomplishments in 2015. Here are some of the year's highlights:

INITIATED a partnership with UCLA Library to create an online finding aid and web-based index for *Eden*, our quarterly journal; project definition is to begin in winter 2016.

LAUNCHED a long-term cooperative partnership with The Huntington to co-sponsor a lecture series about the cultural landscapes of California each spring and fall. The first lecture, held in November 2015 and presented by CGLHS Director-at-Large Carolyn Bennett, introduced the broad ideas and values of cultural landscapes and included images of historic gardens from around the world as well as California gardens. Seventy-eight participants attended. Discussions for additional programming are in the works.

HOSTED one of our best-attended conferences ever in San Diego, "Cultivating Identity: Balboa Park as Cultural Landscape." The fascinating array of speakers included CGLHS member Vonn Marie May and Vice President Nancy Carol Carter; Elizabeth (Betsy) Barlow Rogers, the first Administrator of Central Park and the founding president of New York City's Central Park Conservancy; and Professor Robert Z. Melnick, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon.

COMMENCED planning for our 2016 conference, which will be held in Chico on September 23-25. This conference will focus on the historic contribution of the Bidwell family and the region's ranching and agricultural traditions of experimentation and development, and will feature a special visit to a private canyon garden in nearby Forest Ranch.

POSTED on our website, past President Thea Gurn's love letter to CGLHS, published in the summer issue of *Eden*, in which she shares her memories of past CGLHS conferences and what they have meant to her. Thank you, Thea!

INSTITUTED thrice-yearly Board of Director's meetings, one each in three different parts of the state, to better plan for increasing benefits for our members.

PUBLISHED more than a dozen original articles on the historic California landscape, including contributions to the understanding of our conference topic in San Diego.

EXPANDED our member outreach through events at the San Francisco Mint in March (including a raffle prize for a tour of the Thomas Church-designed Donnell Garden) and the Palo Alto Gamble Garden in April, and through development of a new promotional CGLHS postcard.

Thanks to YOU, our members, this has been another great year for CGLHS!

Best regards,

Kelly Comras, CGLHS President



Top left: CGLHS members and landscape architects Lisa Gimmy (left) and Ann Christoph, FASLA (right) at The Huntington on November 2, 2015. Photo by Kelly Comras.

Top right: CGLHS member Carolyn Bennett launching co-sponsored lecture series with CGLHS and The Huntington. Photo by Kelly Comras.

Center: Conference attendees got a private tour of the historic botanical building in Balboa Park during the 2015 CGLHS conference. Photo by Virginia Kean.

Bottom left (left to right, top row): *Eden* Editorial Board meeting on April 24, 2015 with CGLHS President Kelly Comras, Phoebe Cutler, *Eden* Editor Virginia Kean, and Libby Simon; left to right, bottom row: Recording Secretary Ann Scheid and Treasurer Steven Keylon. Photo by Hudson Lofchie.

Bottom right: CGLHS members Thea Gurns (right) and Victoria Dillon (left) in front of the botanical building at the San Diego conference in Balboa Park. Photo by Virginia Kean.

MEMBER REPORT

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO ALL OF OUR MEMBERS, DONORS, EDEN CONTRIBUTORS, AND VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE HELPED ENSURE THAT CGLHS WILL CONTINUE TO CELEBRATE THE BEAUTY AND DIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA'S HISTORIC GARDENS AND LANDSCAPES FOR MANY MORE YEARS.

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JANUARY 30, 2016
2:45 to 4:00 PM

WALKING TOUR

Please join your CGLHS Board of Directors on a walking tour of the historic garden district of Preservation Park in Oakland.

Free to first twelve CGLHS members. RSVP to info@cglhs.org for registration confirmation and meeting details.

Above: Victorian-era homes in Preservation Park. Photo by Daniel Ramirez. Courtesy of TheCultureTrip.com



APRIL 20, 2016
7:30 PM

“RUTH SHELLHORN: MIDCENTURY LAND- SCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA”

Documentary film, lecture and book signing by Kelly Comras—a CGLHS event in partnership with the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens.

Free with RSVP to info@cglhs.org

Above left to right: Niven garden in South Pasadena, 1987. Photo by Robert M. Fletcher.

Fountain pool framed by aloes and Sago palms, Bullock's Fashion Square Santa Ana, 1979. Photo by Kelly Comras.



SEPTEMBER 23-25, 2016

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Book your lodgings now:
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Mention California Garden & Landscape History Society for group discount.

Above: Private garden near Chico's famous Bidwell Park, a potential tour stop for the 2016 conference. Photo by Phoebe Cutler.