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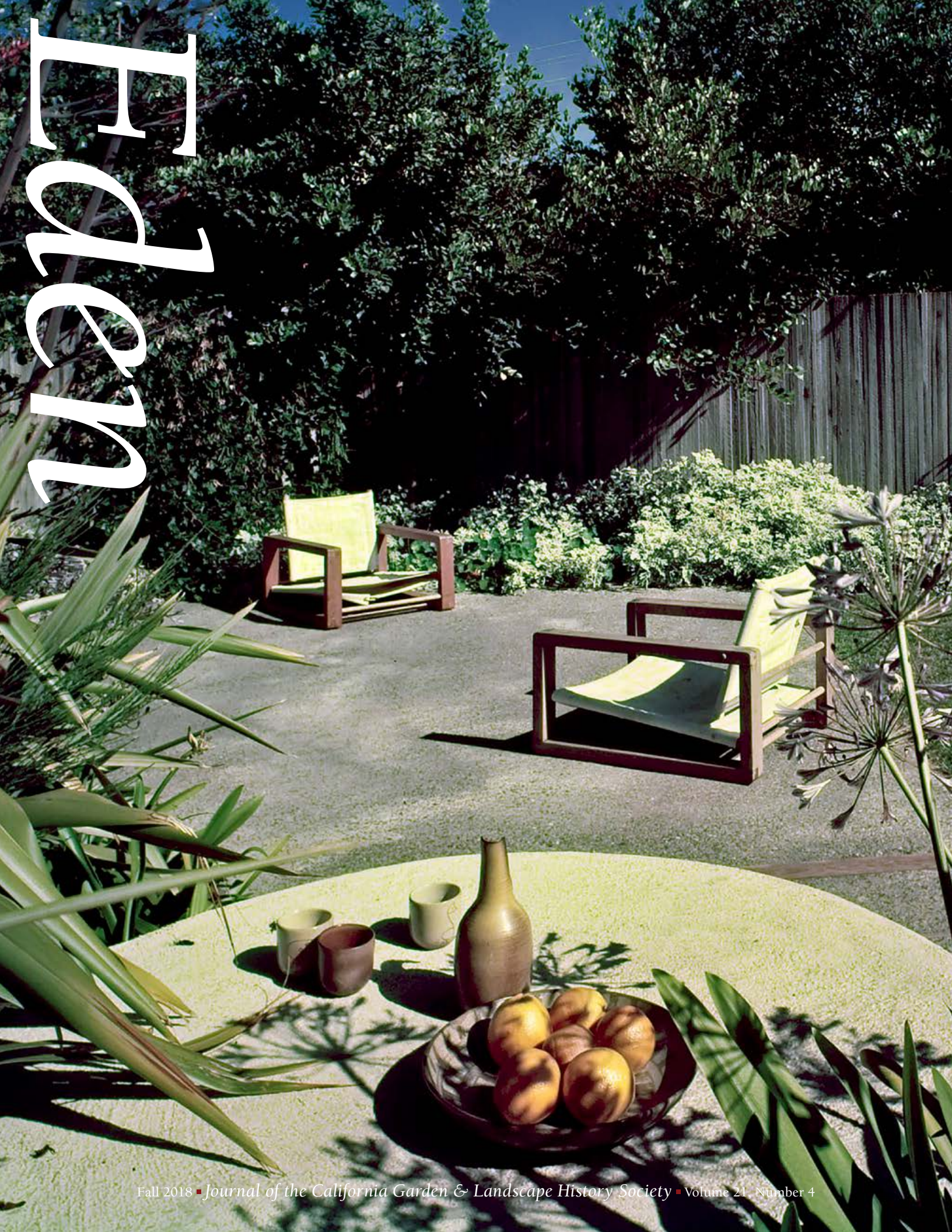

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Opposite: Marin Art and Garden Center (MAGC)
Above: A Maud Daggett sculpture graces the pool of the Edward Finkbine garden in a landscape by Helen Van Pelt, Pasadena, 1924. Photo from California Southland.

Helen Dupuy Van Pelt: Quiet Pioneer

BY MARLEA GRAHAM

Helen Van Pelt (1885-1972) decided to become a landscape architect when only a handful of women were working in that field. With a portfolio of jobs ranging across the country, from Chicago to California, Oregon and New Mexico, Van Pelt managed to achieve a sixty-year-long career, its epitome being her role in the creation of the Marin Art & Garden Center and the Marin Conservation League. Moreover, for much of that time, she supported herself and two children. Her success came from the mastery of her chosen field, a talent she furthered by aligning it with the forces of the various women's organizations that proliferated during her era.[1]

Previous spread: The formal garden at 'Brucemore,' the estate of George Douglas, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, ca. 1912. Photo courtesy Brucemore Estate archives.

Above: Portrait of Miss Helen Dupuy, from her Smith College Yearbook, Class of 1907.

Right: Students in Edward J. Canning's class in Horticulture, 1904. Photo courtesy Smith College Archives.

Very few of Van Pelt's commissions involved commercial or other large-scale projects. She seems to have followed the advice of U.C. Berkeley's founding landscape professor John W. Gregg, who told another aspiring female landscape architect to concentrate on residential work as the woman's particular sphere. Unfortunately, domestic commissions seldom receive much publicity. Worse, they are particularly vulnerable to erosion over time, as larger estates are subdivided and new owners prefer new styles of landscaping. Consequently little of Van Pelt's work remains extant today. Because she left no cache of private or professional papers, much remains unknown about the scope of her work. Her own alumnae notices provide the bare outline of what is known about Helen Van Pelt.

EARLY LIFE: EDUCATION AND APPRENTICESHIP

Helen Agnes Dupuy was born in Chicago, the eldest of four daughters, on December 28, 1885. Her parents both had college educations. The family settled in Ravenswood, designed in 1868 to be Chicago's first commuter suburb and annexed to the city in 1889. Among the family's closest friends and neighbors was Ossian Cole Simonds (1855-1931), the internationally famous landscape gardener of nearby Graceland Cemetery. Helen Dupuy's first exposure to professional landscape gardening could only have come through the connection to Simonds. She attended Chicago's Lake View High School, and very briefly, Lake Forest College, then Smith, from which she graduated in 1907.

At Smith, Helen had the opportunity to absorb the legacy of F.L. Olmsted & Co., the firm hired in 1890 to create a new landscape plan for the campus. The college's president, Laurenus Clark Seelye, had engaged the Olmsteds "to lay out the entire campus more symmetrically and artistically for the location of future buildings and to carry out a plan of a botanical garden arranged so that it should offer as far as possible the best facilities for scientific study and form, at the same time, an attractive feature of the landscape."[2] Although Helen's early class selections showed no evidence of a burning desire to become a landscape architect, in her third and fourth years she developed a marked interest in botany, earning top marks every semester in horticulture classes from botany professor William Francis Ganong, as well as gaining practical experience from the campus head gardener, Edward J. Canning.

Following graduation in the spring of 1907, the Smith College Monthly reported "Helen Dupuy will study landscape gardening." While the inspiration behind this decision remains unclear, the implementation was straightforward. The young Miss Dupuy began a five-year long apprenticeship in the office of O.C. Simonds. Whether and how much Simonds might have influenced her choice of profession remains undetermined, but she seized this rare opportunity, bypassing alternative courses offered at MIT and the Lowthorpe School in Groton, Massachusetts. Few landscape architects were willing to accept a woman as an apprentice at this time, and the firm's incomplete archive (including Simonds' papers at the Sterling Morton Library and family-held correspondence) contains no record of Helen's employment. Simonds biographer Barbara Geiger learned of Helen's presence in the firm from the Brucemore estate's head gardener, Deb Engmark, who closely examined the garden diaries of Simonds' client, Mrs. George Bruce Douglas.

What did Helen learn while working for Simonds? In his book *The Prairie Spirit of Landscape Gardening* (1915), Wilhelm Miller included Simonds as one of several practitioners of a distinct "Prairie Style" popularized by Jens Jensen, though Simonds himself disclaimed there was such a thing. Simonds did advocate design that emphasized local landforms and familiar, especially native, plants. Geiger noted Simonds' belief that "the landscape gardener seeks first to appreciate the natural beauty of a place, and then makes the most of these features in his design. He has a reason for everything, even though it may only be that 'it looks well.'" Extrapolating from his article, "The Landscape-gardener and His Work," Geiger paraphrased Simonds:

> The landscape gardener needed to know soils, drainage, road construction, architecture, botany, horticulture, climate, and the 'social habits of the people' who would use the locale...[and] be able to arrange the entire construction in a pleasing manner and provide scenic vistas. He must...plan for an ever-changing work of art that would grow and fluctuate with time. His engineering skills had to encompass not only the materials and conditions with which he worked, but also the convenience, comfort, and safety of the humans for whom the project was planned. As an artist, the landscape-gardener needed to know how to plan for colors at different seasons and at varying heights.[3]

Taking a brief leave from the Simonds firm to further her education, Helen toured Europe in the summer of 1909, traveling under the protection of her maternal aunt, Sarah Van Pelt. Judging by her later slide lectures, she visited gardens in England, France and Italy. The *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* (October 1909) reported that "Helen Dupuy, who has just returned from Europe, will continue her study of garden designing this winter and expects to work under Mr. Canning, head gardener at Smith, for six months beginning in March, to develop the horticultural side of the profession." Perhaps it is only coincidental that the class announcement for the 1909-1910 horticulture class added the study of "elements of landscape gardening" to its description.

Christopher Vernon gives some insight into the Simonds firm, writing "Simonds is known to have given new staff members 'apprenticeship of service in the cemetery and on private landscape work on which he was engaged.' J. Roy West (1880-1941), who was Simonds' partner after 1910, assisted him in training these younger men." West is described by Geiger as "a congenial man who was known for mentoring new staff members." Despite her five years with Simonds, only two jobs are documented as involving Helen during her time there: Brucemore, the estate of George Bruce Douglas in Cedar Rapids, Iowa (now a National Trust property), supervised by West; and, independently, a summer retreat on the lake at Charlevoix, Michigan, for the Robert Stuart family. Douglas and Stuart were cousins and partners in what later became the Quaker Oats Company.[4]

PASADENA: PERIOD I (1912-1914)

Though the Simonds papers are silent, a Smith College publication reported in 1916 that Helen Dupuy worked in Chicago from 1907-1911, and in Pasadena in 1911-12, and also possibly in Santa Barbara where another former Simonds apprentice, Ralph Stevens, eventually returned to build his own practice. Forty-plus years after the fact, Santa Barbara plantsman Peter Riedel recalled (perhaps not quite accurately), that a "Mr. Deusner...was planting the Jones place in Montecito for... Simonds at that time [c. 1914]." The "Jones place" was the 'Pepper Hill' estate of David B. Jones. Historian David E. Myrick added a somewhat flawed confirmation, misidentifying Simonds as "Simmons" and as an architect rather than a landscape architect, who was hired by Jones "to inspect the site and prepare plans for the house," possibly as early as 1911-12. However it came about, Helen Dupuy and Charles W. Deusner, identified as Simonds' office manager, apparently met and fell in love in California. The marriage announcement in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on November 7, 1912, explained: "The marriage is the result of a romance of landscape gardening. The bride... became interested in landscape work as a profession and went to California to lay out the

gardens of some big estates. There she met Mr. Deusner, who also is a landscape gardener, and their betrothal followed."[5]

This marriage probably did not endear Helen to Simonds, since it deprived him of both a seasoned employee of eleven years, Charles Deusner, as well as an apprentice in whom he had invested five years of training. This alliance also would not have made it any easier for other women to obtain apprenticeships, since the risk and results of propinquity with fellow employees was one of the very arguments made against hiring women. Helen and Charles Deusner immediately left Chicago for California to practice on their own, at first settling in Los Angeles but soon moving up to Pasadena, where they lived and worked until the end of 1914. Nothing more is known of them during this period. After leaving Pasadena, the couple settled on a small farm in Batavia, Illinois, growing belladonna plants for pharmaceutical use, for which there was a special demand during World War I. During this period Helen became an active member of the Woman's National Agricultural and Horticultural Association (later known as the Woman's National Farm and Garden Association). She served on committees, organized a conference, and gave a lecture on "Landscape Architecture as a Profession for Women" and on the cultivation of medicinal plants. She also gave birth to a daughter, Mary Dupuy Deusner.[6]

PASADENA: PERIOD II (1919-1928)

By August 1919, the Deusners were selling the Batavia farm and moving back to Pasadena. Helen's son, David Newhart Deusner, was born there on March 26, 1920. In that same month, the Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin announced that "Mr. and Mrs. C.W. Deusner...have resumed the practice of landscape gardening in Southern California, with an office at Pasadena." Despite this seemingly auspicious new start, there was trouble in paradise. By September, 1920, Helen and Charles had separated, and Helen sued for divorce. According to Geiger, Deusner returned east to work for Simonds again, supervising the creation of the Morton Arboretum. Helen remained in Pasadena and was soon granted a divorce.[7]

LA MINIATURA AND MORENO HIGHLANDS

From 1922 through 1927 Helen continued her Pasadena practice alone, with the bulk of her work focused on small residential gardens. Newspaper reports of the period indicate that Helen was now using the women's network to find clients by giving talks to garden clubs and similar organizations. The earliest known, and also the most famous of her Pasadena commissions, was her design for the grounds of La Miniatura, the house Frank Lloyd Wright created for Alice Millard in 1923-24. Helen's training with Simonds made her a perfect fit with Wright's own ideas about landscape. Though Wright's son, Lloyd, is sometimes credited with designing the grounds, Wright biographers Charles E. and Berdeana Aguar noted that "the only site plan for La Miniatura bears the name of Heila [*sic*] Deusner..." Their biography added that Wright called the site "a ravishing ravine...in which stood two beautiful eucalyptus trees," requiring minimal excavation or grading and allowing the preservation not only of those existing trees, but "much of the natural vegetation, including shrubs, vines, and ground cover."[8]

A much larger project, the planting plan for the Moreno Highlands subdivision was publicized in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1926-1928. Helen had obtained the commission intended to beautify the "rolling hills" of the fashionable subdivision overlooking Silver Lake. This commission apparently exhausted her, for biographer Rockwell D. Hunt noted that she left Pasadena for Carmel in 1928, where she spent time in "rest and recuperation." However, Helen maintained that she was still engaging in landscape work, in "partnership with a delightful Scotchwoman, Mrs. Jane Todd." She designed the plan for Carmel's Devendorf Park and Todd planted it. In November 1929 Helen announced she had legally changed her last name from Deusner to her mother's maiden name of Van Pelt and "moved my office to San Francisco because there were such excellent business prospects, and I prefer the exhilarating climate." The onset of the Great Depression may also have played a part in this move.[9]

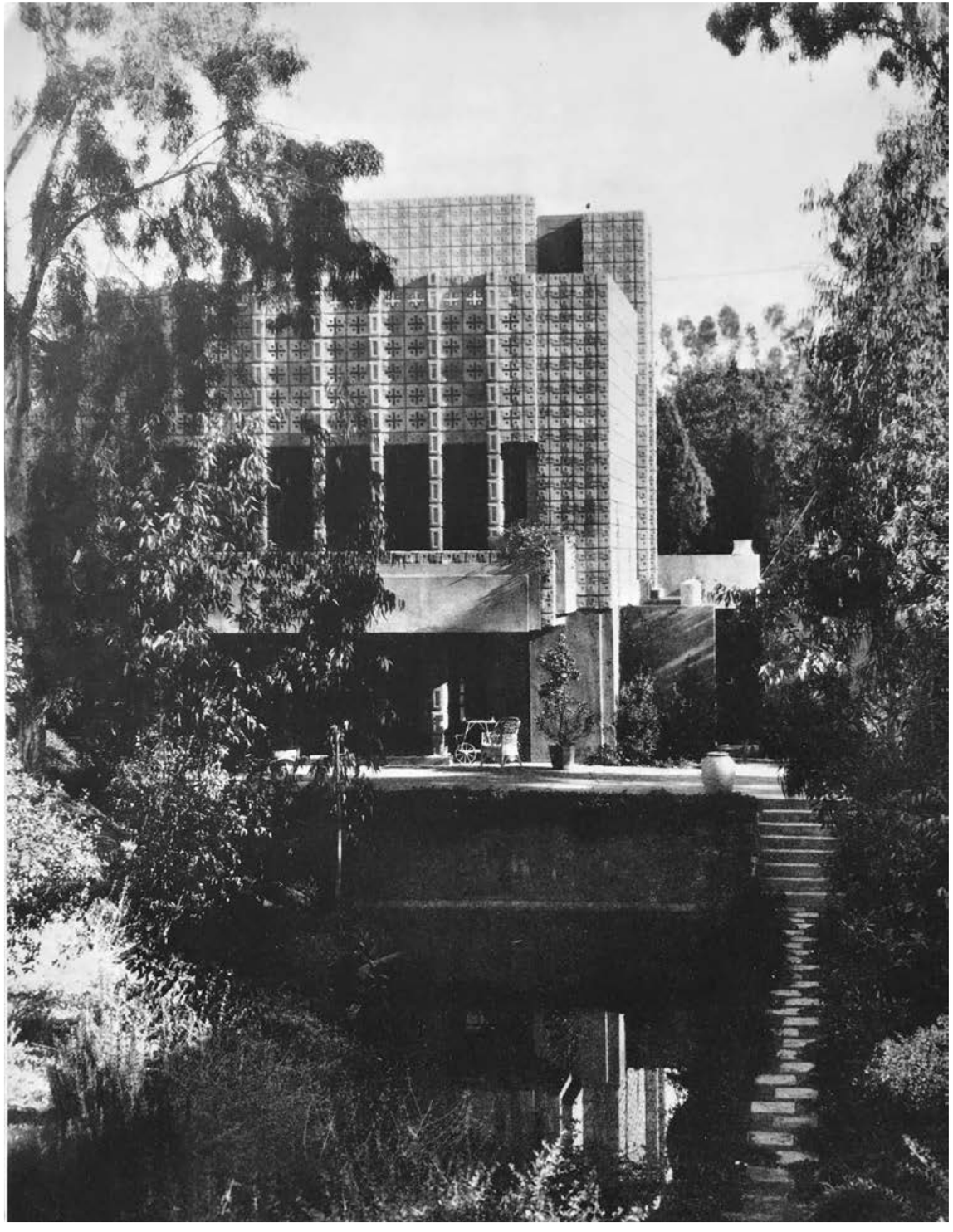
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: 1929-1951

ARDEN WOOD, THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION SANATORIUM AT SAN FRANCISCO

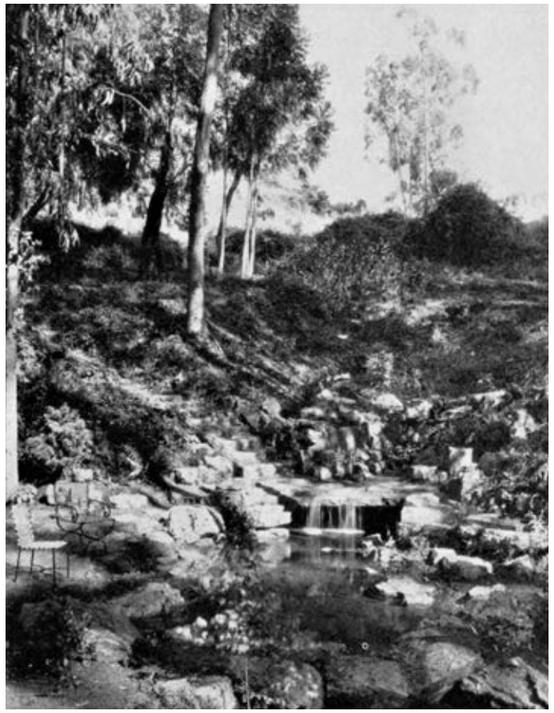
Helen's conversion to Christian Science may have helped her obtain the commission to landscape Arden Wood, the Christian Science care center in San Francisco. This project remains the most significant in Helen's career largely for the professional publicity it generated. Articles appeared in *Architect & Engineer* (July 1930), *California Arts & Architecture* (September 1930) and *Architecture and Allied Arts* (Autumn Edition 1930). The descriptions of her work were glowing: "Mrs. Helen Van Pelt, as landscape architect, has tamed the forest and converted it into a park in the immediate vicinity of the building." It may have also led to her admission in 1931 to membership in the American Society of Landscape Architects.[10]

INSTITUTION FOR WOMEN AT TEHACHAPI

In 1932, Helen received what would be her largest commission: creating and executing plans for the first women's prison, the California Institution for Women, near Tehachapi, California. Located in Cummings Valley some 120 miles north of Los Angeles, the land purchase comprised approximately 1,650 acres, though the money appropriated for the project would barely cover the landscaping around the cluster of buildings. Designed to resemble a quaint European village or bucolic college campus, three "cottages" were set among wide expanses of trees and flower beds. Meant to provide job training in agriculture, industrial sewing, and laundry work, the prison was the culmination of many long years of campaigning by assorted California women's clubs and organizations, with the San Francisco Civic League (later, the League of Women Voters) being the most effective. Helen's contacts with various women's clubs likely led to her receiving this commission. The *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* (February 1932) noted "Helen (Dupuy) Van Pelt...is now laying out the grounds of the new Woman's Prison for California." The *Bakersfield Californian* (Feb. 22, 1932) reported that "Mrs. Helen Van Pelt, landscape architect of San Francisco, will be



Opposite: "La Miniatura," the Alice Millard House, Frank Lloyd Wright architect 1923-1924; Helen Deusner, landscape architect. Photograph from the catalogue for the 1937 Contemporary Landscape Exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art.



Above: An advertisement for Helen Deusner's Pasadena practice, 1924. From *California Southland*

This page: Helen Van Pelt's landscape for Arden Wood, the Christian Science Sanatorium, San Francisco, 1930. Photos from *California Arts & Architecture* magazine.

Opposite page: The Institution for Women at Tehachapi, 1935.

the engineer in charge of the work. She has already familiarized herself with the topography and climatic conditions of the mountain prison site." Helen wrote to Smith classmates that she was quite proud of the fact she was apparently "the first professional landscape architect [male or female] to be employed on a state job, which is doing some pioneering for the profession, which is worthwhile!" Badly damaged by a 7.3 magnitude earthquake in 1952, the buildings were razed and replaced in 1954 by a men's prison, now the California Correctional Institution.[11]

THE GARDEN CENTER MOVEMENT AND THE MARIN COUNTY GARDEN CENTER

The Garden Center Movement began with the organization in 1929 of the National Council of State Garden Club Federations (now National Garden Clubs, Inc.) by thirteen existing state garden club federations. The idea originated with Mrs. Frederick T. Fisher of Hackensack, who proposed a garden center where people could come and learn more about gardening to her New Jersey State Garden Federation in 1929. The national organization soon promoted the concept throughout the country. California formed its own federation of garden clubs in 1932 and started publishing a newsletter, *Golden Gardens*. The federation quickly took up the idea of garden centers, and Van Pelt, the first state chairman, immediately pushed for a garden center for Marin, where the Marin Garden Club had been meeting since 1931. The *San Anselmo Herald* reported in 1934: "A garden center is in the process of formation in Marin County. This nation-wide movement has gained great strength in the East and a number of centers have been established on the Pacific Coast. Marin County is fortunate in having Mrs. Helen Van Pelt...to aid in the formation of the local unit." The *Mill Valley Record* added that Santa Barbara and Pasadena "have at this time, the only established garden centers in California. Marin County will be the first in Northern California to affiliate with this outstanding movement," and while Marin wouldn't have the first garden center in the state, it would be the first county-wide center in the United States. "The headquarters of the center will be in Gerstle Park at San Rafael." The former Gerstle mansion had already been in use as the headquarters for the Marin Art Association. The facilities would now be shared by these two groups.[12]

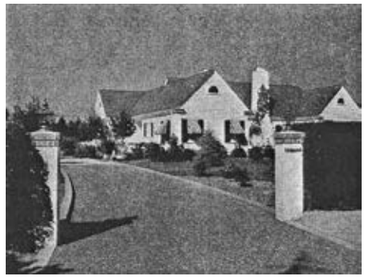
MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

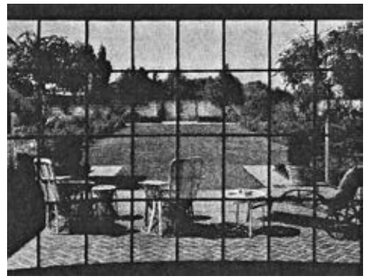
In 1934, Helen, along with three other members of the Marin Garden Club, Caroline Livermore, Sepha Evers, and Portia Forbes, began what would be her most important and long-lasting accomplishment, the founding of the Marin Conservation League. This organization grew out of the fear that the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937 would pose a threat to the preservation of Marin County's natural beauty. During Helen's period of active involvement (1934-1951), the organization was responsible for the preservation of Stinson Beach, Samuel P. Taylor Park, the beaches of Drake's Bay and Tomales Bay, the Audubon Canyon Ranch, Bolinas Lagoon and the Richardson Bay Wildlife Refuge. The League also halted the commercialization of Angel Island, later assisted in the creation of the Point Reyes National Seashore, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Marin Open Space District. Helen was elected as a vice president of the organization, and even after she left Marin County for New Mexico, she held the title of "honorary vice president."[13]

VAN PELT & KNIGHT

Geraldine Knight [Scott] (1904-1989) later recalled: "At the end of the summer in 1933, Helen van Pelt asked me to come over to do some drafting for several days. I stayed six years." A 1926 graduate of the U.C. Berkeley College of Agriculture's Landscape Division, Knight was soon made a partner in Helen's business, but apparently felt she was doing the majority of the actual work while Helen was socializing to bring in new clients. Though the partnership did not last long, the two women continued sharing office space until 1939, when Knight left to marry urban planner Mel Scott. Commissions received during the Marin period were not confined to that region; residential clients ranged as far away as Fresno, Berkeley and the San Francisco Peninsula. The Leon Levy residence in the Old Fig Garden district of Fresno remains a particularly noteworthy work, as it is the only such garden known to have preserved some portion of the original Van Pelt design to the present day. Those who attended the April 2013 CGLHS "Fresno Frolic" may recall visiting the garden.[14]

Business had scarcely recovered from the Depression when the advent of World War II severely limited private landscape work, and government projects often went to men. (Women also got some of these projects, *c.f.* Katherine Bashford). Helen kept busy with the Marin Conservation League, and as chairman of the Defense Gardens Committee, part of the Women's Division Civilian Defense organization for Marin County, including supervision of Victory gardens for 75,000 shipyard workers at Marin City.





Left: The Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Levy, Fresno, originally printed in *Sunset* magazine, 1936.

Opposite page: In 1948, The Marin Art & Garden Center put on a show, "Art in Action." This cartoon by Kevin Wallace appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 6, 1948.

MARIN COUNTY GARDEN CENTER RE-IMAGINED

As early as 1941, Caroline Livermore began working to preserve the Kittle estate in hopes of making it the new home of the Marin County Garden Center. By 1943 she had brought together eight local organizations (including the Marin Art Association) to purchase the property. The center was incorporated in 1945 as the Marin Art & Garden Center. By summer 1947, the Marin Garden Club was "knee deep in blueprints for its permanent garden at the center, which will be a memorial to members who have died—the late Mesdames Leland Lathrop [wife of Mrs. Leland Stanford's younger brother], Willliam Finnell and Miss Martha Korbel [of the pioneer Sonoma vineyardists, Korbel Winery]. Helen Van Pelt is also designing this garden, which will be a drawing card at the [fall garden] show." The Center would also house the Marin Dance Council, Marin Music Chest, Marin Nature Group, Ross Valley Players and an affiliate group, Pixie Park. This Center will be hosting the annual CGLHS 2018 conference in November.[15]

NEW MEXICO YEARS (1950–1959) AND THE RETURN TO PASADENA (1959–1972)

In 1949, Helen's son, David, graduated from the U.C. Berkeley College of Agriculture's Landscape Division and left for New Mexico in 1950 to work for the National Park Service in Santa Fe. Helen followed her son (and two grandchildren) to Santa Fe for an eight-month "visit," while probably trying to decide whether to make the move permanent. She chose to settle in Albuquerque and remained there until about 1959, keeping remarkably active with teaching, lecturing and landscaping projects. During the hottest months, she made frequent trips back to Marin County and San Diego to visit old friends. By 1956 her son had moved his family back to Marin, but Helen remained in Albuquerque for another three years, though no records of work done in that period have been found.

Helen returned to Pasadena in 1959, remaining in the greater Los Angeles region until her death in 1972. Though listing herself in city directories as "retired," she posted an advertisement in *Golden Gardens* magazine, offering her services as a lecturer and landscape consultant. When her obituary appeared in the San Rafael newspaper, it contained no surprises. Her most significant works were all named: the founding the Marin Conservation League, her part in creating the Marin Art & Garden Center, Arden Wood, the state women's prison, and the Millard house in Pasadena. The *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* (November 1972) added only one new detail: she had died after a long illness.

Helen Van Pelt cannot be described as a great or iconic landscape architect; nor was she, even in her own day, particularly famous, yet she managed to accomplish a decent body of work while single-handedly raising a family. Her professional focus remained largely on the small residential garden, but she handled larger projects in a competent manner. She unquestionably contributed to the acceptance of women in landscape architecture. Nevertheless, her contribution to the establishment of both the Marin Art & Garden Center and the Marin Conservation League remains her most lasting legacy. She was a quiet pioneer. ◧

The author would like to give particular thanks to Ann Scheid for first suggesting that Helen Van Pelt's career deserved more attention; also for providing some early and vital clues to follow up.

ARTISTS IN ACTION—Just faintly recognizable are some of the Marin county artists caught here in the act of preparing their Art in Action center for next week end's show. . . . In the left foreground, Potter John Ingram Wallace crouches at Painter Giacomo Patri's feet. Landscape Architect Helen van Pelt confers with Artist-Manager Herman Hein, while an unidentified chairlady listens, in next trio to the right. Sculptor Ward Montague saws wood under the tree, and the adults consulting in right foreground are Sculptress Ida Day Degen, Handicrafter Kamma Zethraus and Artist Ross Chevalier.

Endnotes

1. Because Van Pelt used three different professional names during her career—Helen Dupuy, Helen Deusner and Helen Van Pelt—she is most often referred to in this paper by her first name to avoid confusion. No family connection has been found between Helen Van Pelt and the garden book writer, Helen Van Pelt Wilson (1901-2003), though the two were often confused by others.

2. Laurenus Clark Seelye, *The Early History of Smith College*, 1871-1910 (Boston, N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1923).

3. Barbara Geiger, *Low-Key Genius: The Life and Work of Landscape Gardener O.C. Simonds*, (U.S.A.: Ferme Ornée Press/Urbpublisher, 2011). Simonds' article was originally published in the journal *Park & Cemetery*; portions of it were later reprinted under this different title for *Garden & Forest*.

4. Christopher Vernon, *Graceland Cemetery: A Design History* (Amherst, MA: UMass Press, 2012). Helen's work for the Douglas and Stuart families was documented in "What Women Are Doing," *New York Sun*, Sept. 29, 1912. Geiger, p. 146: "Miss DuPuy [*sic*] visited Brucemore by herself several times from 1910-1912 to prepare the planting plans [for the formal garden]." The Stuart's summer home was featured in *House Beautiful* 27, no. 4 (March 1910): 109-111, but the photos do not yet show that formal garden.

5. *Catalog of Officers, Graduates, and Non-graduates of Smith College*, 1875-1915, (April, 1916). Peter Riedel, *Plants for Extra-Tropical Regions* (Los Angeles: California Arboretum Foundation, 1957): 124. David E. Myrick, *Montecito and Santa Barbara: The Days of the Great Estates* (2nd ed., Pasadena, CA: Pentrex Media Group, LLC, 2001). "Society & Entertainments," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1912.

6. *Annual Register of the Alumnae Association of Smith College with Report for 1912*: 74 and the 1913 *Los Angeles City Directory* list two different Los Angeles addresses for the Deusners. *The Woman's National Agricultural and Horticultural Association Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May 1914): 8 lists a Pasadena address. The February 1915 issue had Mrs. Deusner's address as that of her parents in Chicago. The *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (April 1915) published Helen's new address in Kentucky, but by August, the Deusners had settled on a smaller property in Batavia. The September 1917 issue reported Helen's talk on "Landscape Architecture as a Profession for Women." In December 1917 it mentioned her slide talk on the cultivation of drug plants and her involvement with the Land Service Committee. The August/September 1918 issue listed her as a landscape architect, a grower of belladonna and a recording secretary for the Illinois Woman's Land Army. Helen's contribution to the *Smith College Class of 1907 Reunion Book* (1917): 48-49 notes that she "managed a conference in 1916," and the birth of her daughter on Aug. 13, 1916. "The Crude Drug Situation in the United States," *Bulletin of the Garden Club of America* 23 (January 1918) described the drug shortages the United States was experiencing due to the interruption of raw material exports from the usual European suppliers. The sale of the farm was advertised in *Country Life* 36, no. 4 (August 1919): 10.

7. Deusner was a graduate of the Missouri Botanic Garden's School of Gardening. *Architect & Engineer* 61, no. 2 (May 1920):113 added that the firm name was C.W. and H.D. Deusner, "with an office at 15 North Euclid Avenue, Pasadena." The same announcement appeared in four other professional journals and the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (July 1920): 325. "Hostility of Mate Brings Wife Freedom." *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1922.

8. A number of Helen's Pasadena commissions have been identified through newspaper accounts and articles that she wrote for *California Southland*. Advertisements for Helen's business appeared in the same publication. Photographs of her work were also featured in Winifred Starr Dobyns' *California Gardens* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1931). Lloyd Wright's landscape plan for the 1926 Millard studio addition can be found in Sam Watters' *Houses of Los Angeles, 1920-1935*, Vol. II (New York: Acanthus Press, 2007). Following Helen's death, the *San Rafael Daily Independent* (July 31, 1972) correctly reported that Helen had created the landscape plan for "a Pasadena home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright;" the *San Francisco Chronicle* carelessly changed this to "the garden of Frank Lloyd Wright's Pasadena home," and several newspapers across the country repeated this error. In the oral history for Thomas Church, Landscape Architect (1978), Robert Royston remarked that "Helen Van Pelt...was respected because she'd done a couple of gardens for Frank Lloyd Wright." Wright never owned a home in Pasadena, and no evidence has been found that Helen designed more than the one garden for Wright. Charles E. Aguar and Berdeana Aguar, *Wrightscapes: Frank Lloyd Wright's Landscape Designs* (New York, et. al.: McGraw-Hill, 2002).

9. Rockwell D. Hunt, ed., *California and Californians* III (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1932). *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (November 1928). "Matron Feted in Palo Alto," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 1, 1928. Helen's children adopted the last name of Van Pelt for the rest of their lives, though apparently their change was not done officially. David was required to make the official change when he enlisted in the army during WW II. *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (November 1929): 92. "Legal Notice," *San Anselmo Herald*, April 2, 1942.

10. Helen was raised in the Ravenswood Congregational Church, but the *General Register of Lake Forest College*, 1865-1931 (1931): 60 noted that she was a member of the Christian Science Church. When exactly this conversion occurred is undetermined. Her association with the California Garden Club Federation may have included a friendship with its founding president, Elvenia J. Slosson, who was an ardent Christian Scientist. This conversion did not last; a few years later, Helen became a participant in the Oxford Group movement. John Bakewell, Jr., "A Christian Science Sanatorium," *Architect & Engineer* 102, no. 1 (July 1930): 58-68.

11. "New Prison Contemplated," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 11, 1931. "Goodbye San Quentin," *Times*, May 15, 1932. "Rites Open New Women's Prison," *Times*, May 23, 1932. *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (February 1932): 212. "Bill to Permit New Prison Use to Be Speeded," *Santa Rosa Press-Democrat*, Dec. 25, 1932. Kathleen A. Cairn. *Hard Times at Tehachapi: California's First Women's Prison* (2009).

12. There was no hint that Helen was in any way involved with the formation of the Marin Garden Club; she did not move to Marin until 1933. "Promotes First Garden Center in This Country," *Kansas City* [MO] *Times*, July 11, 1929; Julie A. West, ed., "The Diamond Years, 1931-1932 – 2006-2007, Seventy-Five Year History of California Garden Clubs, Inc., (CGCI website article, June 2009). "New Marin Garden Club Formed This Month, Has an Ambitious Program," *San Anselmo Herald*, Oct. 15, 1931. "Changes in Membership List," *Landscape Architecture* 23, no. 4 (July 1933): 262. "Mrs. Helen Van Pelt Calls Meeting of Marin Garden Club Monday," *Herald*, Nov. 15, 1933. This article was written by Helen and included her title as "Chairman for Garden Centers of the Federated Garden Clubs of California" as well as her argument for the creation of a Marin Garden Center. A few months later, she was suggesting that San Francisco should also have a garden center, and gave a talk promoting the same to Portland, Oregon gardeners as well. See *San Anselmo Herald*, Jan. 4, 1934; *Mill Valley Record*, March 2, 1934; *Herald*, May 3, 1934; *Herald*, April 17, 1931.

13. "Conservation League to Plant Tree at Center," *San Rafael Independent Journal*, March 4, 1954. "Conservation Job Gets Harder, League Told," *Independent Journal*, March 31 1959. "The Conservation Story. It All Started with Four Women," *Independent Journal*, March 7, 1964. "Taylor Park Stands as Tribute to Tenacious Women," *Independent Journal*, Oct. 5, 1974.

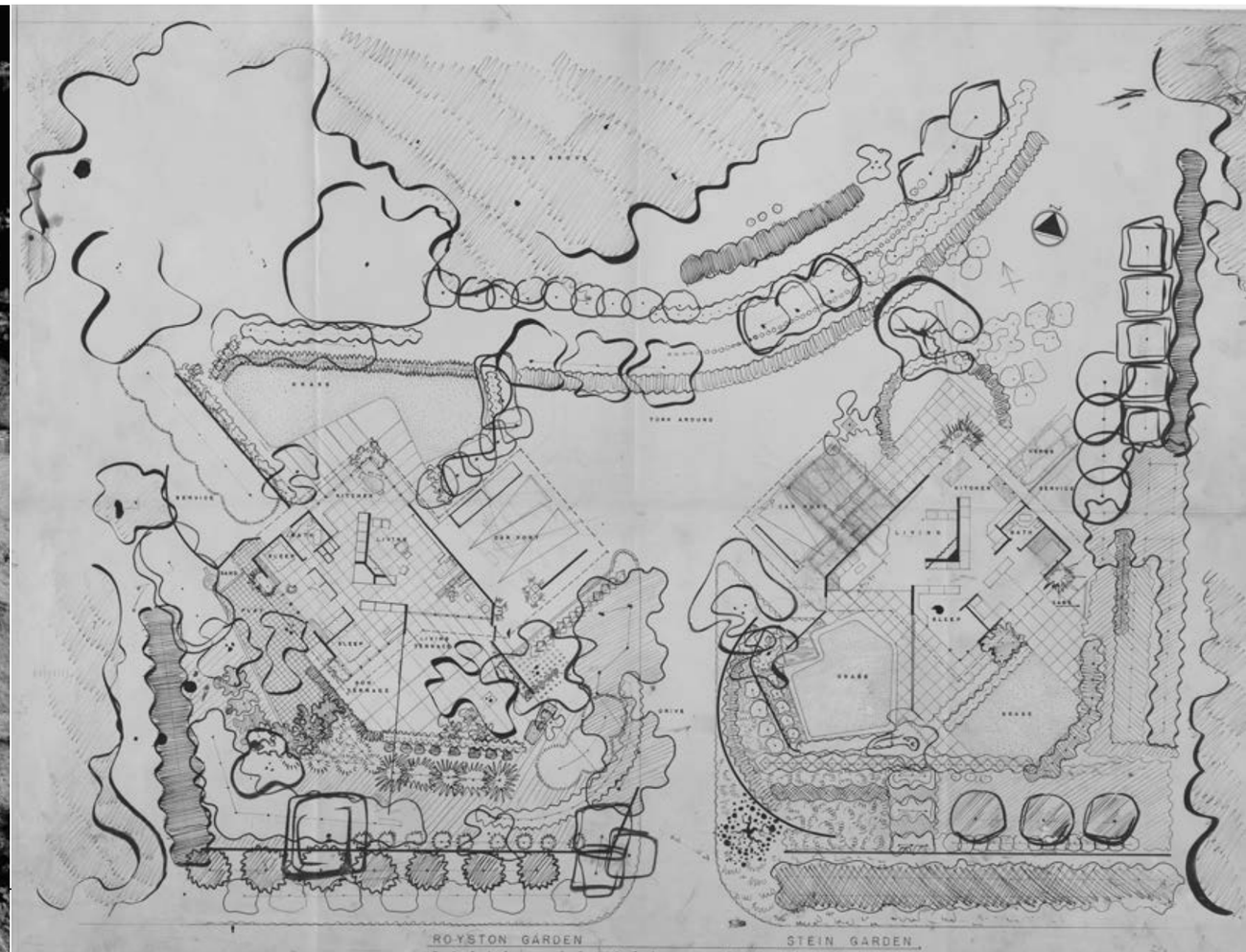
14. Suzanne B. Riess, Jack Buktenica and Reed Dillingham. "Geraldine Knight Scott, 1904-1989: A Woman in Landscape Architecture in California, 1926-1989." Oral history transcript, 1976-1988. Bancroft Library, Regional Oral History Office (Berkeley: Regents of the University of California, 1988). Scott claimed that she, along with Van Pelt, was responsible for starting the Marin Garden Center, but was never mentioned in this capacity in the newspaper accounts, only as an occasional speaker or class instructor.

15. "Gardeners Aim at Fall Show," *Sausalito News*, July 10, 1947.

In His Own Backyard ~ Part 2

THE EVOLUTION of ROBERT ROYSTON'S MILL VALLEY GARDEN ~ 1947–PRESENT

BY JC MILLER

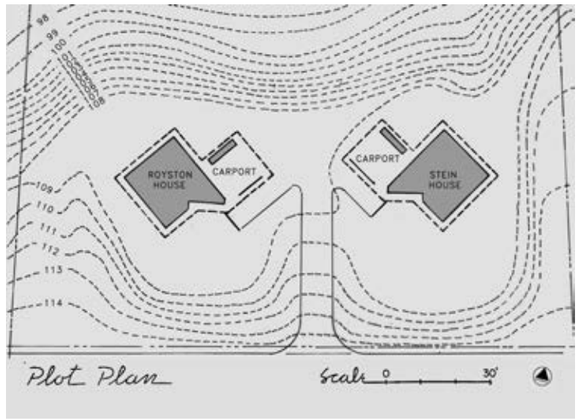


During his lifetime, landscape architect Robert Royston filled dozens of sketchbooks with ***plein air*** drawings of the natural landscape, concept sketches, detail studies, and doodles. As important as the act of drawing and his sketch books were to his creative process, his imagination went well beyond two-dimensional depiction. He rendered his ideas in physical form with prototypes built in his small workshop and in the creation of his own garden that evolved continuously under his hand for over sixty years. The space outside the Royston home was an ever-evolving testing ground for his ideas about planting, spatial composition, construction materials, furniture design, and the needs of family living. Innovative from the start, the garden morphed over the decades in response to shifts in personal need and the inevitable changes wrought by time. A setting for a remarkable range of activities, the garden at the Royston home accommodated a life lived to a great degree out of doors. Such a lifestyle would become synonymous with California in the popular imagination by the latter half of the twentieth century, but in the immediate postwar period it was a concept that was just beginning to emerge from the work of a new generation of designers that included Robert Royston and his friend and architect colleague Joseph Allen Stein.

In 1945 the nascent firm of Eckbo Royston & Williams shared office space at 50 Green Street in San Francisco with young architects Joseph Allen Stein and John Funk.[1] Personal friends as well as professional colleagues, the principals of both firms would go on to work collaboratively on a regular basis gaining a reputation for thoughtfully detailed and innovative single family residential projects. The group held a generally progressive outlook on social and political issues as was evidenced by their participation in Telesis, a voluntary association of architects, landscape architects, planners, and related design professionals whose forward-looking discussions and studies would have a significant influence on urban design in the San Francisco Bay Area during the postwar period. Given these connections, the cooperative development of homes for their families on a shared piece of property was a natural undertaking for Royston and Stein.

In 1946 Stein located a hillside parcel that he felt would meet their needs. Located in then sparsely populated and semi-remote Marin County, the nearly three-acre site was situated on a wooded north facing slope with views across the valley toward Mt. Tamalpais, a regional landmark. After visiting the lot, Royston agreed that it was ideal for the project, so it was purchased and plans were begun for two houses. The gardens that resulted were remarkable, not only for the innovative modern design that nurtured both families, but also for the influence that they would have on residential landscape design for nearly a decade. The architecture of the homes received nearly immediate positive professional attention, appearing in both *Architectural Forum* and *Arts & Architecture* by mid-1949. Concurrently, Royston's gardens drew critical praise and were published frequently, first locally in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Marin Independent Journal* newspapers and then regionally in *Sunset* magazine. The gardens appeared regularly throughout the 1950's in homeowner-oriented books from the Lane Publishing Company, the parent company of *Sunset*.

Site grading completed the foundation line of the Stein home is visible in this photo taken by Joseph Stein. His wife and their future neighbors, the Royston's, take in the view while seated on formwork for the precast wall panels. Note the proximity of the neighboring home.
Collection of the author.



A recreation of the grading plan diagram for the Royston/Stein residences. The placement of the buildings at a 45 degree angles in relation to the street, driveway, and roughly rectangular building areas mimics the arrangement of spaces within the homes, adding subtle complexity to the composition.

Previous spread: Twin houses on a shared lot in Marin county California – the Royston and Stein residences circa 1949. This photo was taken from the hillside behind the Stein home. The Royston home is visible in the background with Mt. Tamalpais in the distance.
Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of William Higgins, AIA

The concept plan that Robert Royston prepared for the gardens depicts subtle relationships between forms within each garden and between the two. University of California Berkeley, College of Environmental Design Archives (CEDA). Robert N. Royston Colelction. Drawing by Robert Royston.

At both homes the primary entry is a gate that opens into a garden room. The entry sequence leads the visitor through a walled space open to the sky before moving him or her indoors. Photographer unknown, likely Robert Royston. Collection of the author.

The Royston and Stein collaboration resulted in architectural and landscape spaces that were highly integrated and complex. In this image the entry garden at the Stein home is seen shortly after installation. The opening between the free standing panel wall and the building is the open gate that is the home's front door. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of William Higgins, AIA

Left: Working with a limited budget Royston developed imaginative design solutions and made non-standard material choices for his new garden. Low retaining walls were made from surplus precast concrete laundry sinks, the play terrace was surfaced in redwood pieces obtained from a tree trimming company, and easily-propagated placeholders such as geraniums, iris, and agapanthus dominated in the planting plan. Photographer unknown, likely Robert Royston. Collection of the author.

Opposite page: In this photo, taken shortly after construction was complete in 1947, the gardens are not yet fully planted. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of William Higgins, AIA.

SITE PLANNING AND DESIGN

At about the same time that the Royston and Stein residences were being designed, Robert Royston was exploring the idea of two homes on a single lot for brothers Tom and Allen Hudson in Berkeley[2] He approached the design of his own garden and the garden for the Stein household in a similar fashion, thoughtfully separating busy and quiet areas, attending to views from the site to the landscape beyond, and providing screening and seclusion for the private zones of the homes.

The Mill Valley property for the Royston and Stein homes was bounded on the uphill south side by a street and other large and irregularly shaped residential lots on all other sides. A short, fairly steep slope dropped from the street to a natural shelf below. Although incorporated as a city at the turn of the twentieth century, residential development in the area was limited prior to World War II. The handful of homes already in the vicinity were set on the natural shelf, located by the dictates of topography rather than regard for property-line setbacks, so it is somewhat ironic that the new homeowners found themselves with immediate and relatively close neighbors. After a survey, Royston also chose to locate the buildings on the shelved area, placing them closer to the center of the property to allow for distance from the neighbors and the creation of level spaces around the new homes.

Unlike his site plan for the Hudson residences, where a significant portion of the lot was used jointly by both families, the Royston and Stein households would have only the driveway and the automobile turning and parking area in common. Automobile access to the property was only possible from the road above, a physical constraint that directed the site design. In response, Royston minimized the space required for automobile access by designing a single driveway aligned perpendicular to the road. The driveway and automobile circulation areas created a center line and a functional divide of the property. Guided by a site plan that provided privacy to both residences and took advantage of the views, Royston's grading scheme expanded the natural shelf by cutting into the uphill portion of the slope and filling the down- slope areas to create level spaces for the gardens. This resulted in two roughly rectangular level areas, each approximately 50' x 75'.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

These twin house on a Marin County hillside enabled Stein to put into physical form ideas about family housing that he began to develop in the late 1930's while working in Los Angeles in Richard Neutra's office. During that time, he had begun to explore modest

This plan illustrates the garden after additions were made in the mid 1950's. This is the period when it was published the most frequently.

Significant additions were made to the house and garden in the early 1960's. The original carport became a bedroom suite and library and a new carport replaced planting. The orientation of the north garden begins to shift outward toward the distant view

The addition of an expansive deck that connects the garden visually to Mt. Tamalpais is the master stroke of the garden. Royston integrated a design studio and bathroom in the structure below the deck.

Developed from period photographs, this diagram shows the layout of the newly built garden, circa 1950. The constraints of a limited budget generated imaginative design solutions and restricted variety in the planting.

This diagram illustrates the garden after Royston undertook a process of editing and tree removal beginning in about 1990. Light is brought back into the garden and its fundamental structure is again clearly visible.

and compact structures inspired by the work of his mentor Neutra and Bay Area architect William Wurster.[3] The October 1940 issue of ***Architectural Forum***, titled 'Design Decade', included Stein's plan for a low-cost housing prototype with a series of spaces rotated 45 degrees within a square building, an idea that he continued to develop after his move to the Bay Area in 1942. His plan for a low-cost single-family house was included in the San Francisco Museum of Art's 'Houses for War and Post-War' exhibit displayed in that same year, and it bears a strong resemblance to the homes that he would build in collaboration with Royston.[4]

The basic footprint of each of the Mill Valley homes was a square with a small angled extension. A single flat roof plane covered the living space, extending over the adjacent parking area and beyond the living space perimeter to provide deep overhangs over predominantly glass walls. Within the perimeter of the homes, the floor plan was rotated 45 degrees to the walls, pivoting around a central fireplace. This unusual arrangement of interior spaces resulted in rooms with long walls adjacent to the exterior, ideal for maximizing the connection between the home's interior and the landscape. In Stein's plan, the living room, dining room, and kitchen, as well as adult and children's sleeping areas, all opened to patios and the gardens beyond.

DESIGN OF THE GARDENS

As he had done during the site planning phase of the project, Royston addressed the two gardens as a single design. While each has a distinct character and reflects the preferences and needs of their respective owners, there is a unity to the initial design that is not often seen in neighboring properties. While it differs in some ways from the built work, the concept plan that he prepared clearly shows his intention to create subtle relationships between forms not only within each garden, but between the two. The Royston garden on the left of the drawing shows a slightly more informal and asymmetrical arrangement of planting and patio spaces while in the Stein garden to the right, features adhere more closely to a geometric layout and parallel lines are more closely related to the architecture.

Although the gardens depicted in the concept plan were never fully realized as drawn, the detailed representation of outdoor spaces, the size, form, and texture of planting, and the extension of lines originating in architecture into the landscape are clear indications of the approach to garden design that Royston explored in subsequent projects throughout his career. The concept plan clearly expresses his emphasis on connection between the rooms of the home and corresponding outdoor spaces. The result of this design strategy was spaces that were highly integrated and complex with the dividing line between the two intentionally ambiguous. At both homes, the entry sequence begins with what appears to be a rather traditional-looking door that is actually a gate opening to a garden room. The visitor is then led through a walled space open to the sky before he or she moves indoors. The free-standing panel wall, a repetition of the building's structural system reinforces the hybrid nature of the space.

Although less literally, other walls of the homes were brought out into the landscape, generating outdoor spaces that were rooms without roofs. Royston was bold about pushing a line or plane that originated in architecture out into the landscape, and his patio design reinforced the strategy by extending the ground plane with only the minimum necessary drop in elevation from the interior floor.

Circulation patterns, zoning for use, and screening for privacy were fundamental issues considered by Royston when preparing a garden design, but such program-generated concerns were only the starting point for his design process. His interest in translating the forms developed in early twentieth-century painting into three-dimensional compositions is clearly illustrated in the gardens he designed for his new home and the neighboring garden for the Stein family.

PLANTING AS PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

While Royston's early concept plan for the new gardens does not indicate specific plant materials, it clearly indicates his intention for a complex planting design with considerable variety in size, form, texture, and presumably color. Royston's approach to planting design was certainly grounded in a strong knowledge of the fundamentals of botany and climate, but it went well beyond horticultural pragmatism. His background in painting and interest in sculpture informed his planting design choices and the selection of various plant varieties to a great degree.

Study of planting designs throughout his career also reveals an ongoing interest in color relationships. As with many of the innovative modern design projects of the early twentieth century and immediate postwar period, black-and-white photography tends to impart the sense that these early works were somber and reserved.[5] Fortunately the gardens received considerable attention in popular magazines and local newspapers and from those accounts with color photographs the vibrant and colorful planting compositions developed by Royston for his own garden can be understood.

A series of articles appearing in ***Sunset*** between 1950 and 1952 provide a detailed description of the color combinations found in the first iteration of the Royston garden.[6] In the entry garden the back of the freestanding concrete wall was painted dark blue to provide a contrasting background to the pale-yellow space frame. The white spring bloom of the espaliered apple set in front of the dark wall certainly provided a dramatic seasonal display of color. On the other side of the same patio room a honeysuckle vine was trained informally against the thin horizontal slats of a redwood screen stained gray. The glossy green foliage and abundant cream to yellow flowers of this scrambling vine provided another point of seasonal interest as well complex contrasts of color, form, and texture. Other dramatic plant combinations in the garden included dark and dense purple-leafed plum paired with the airy gray foliage of Bush Germander, smooth white-barked European birch trees under-planted with the dark rough texture of Carpet Bugle, and the deep green needles Muhgo or Swiss mountain pine contrasted with the flat soft leaves of Dusty Miller.

As a landscape architect, Royston understood the challenge of a medium that was constantly changing over time. The immature trees and shrubs in the initial planting in a garden or park could hardly define space effectively. In response to this situation he often employed architectural features such as walls, pergolas, and screens to give immediate form. He reinforced these architectural elements with vines and shrubs which would develop in concert with trees to eventually provide nuanced and powerful spatial definition. The sixty-plus years that unfolded during his residence in the gardens that he designed on a Marin County hillside allowed him the opportunity to experience firsthand, and in intimate detail, the process of change over time.

While conceived as a single composition, the trajectories of the Royston and Stein gardens diverged not long after they were created and each developed in response to the families that dwelled there across a shared driveway. Both places experienced the addition of features, the development, decline and removal of planting, and the eventual passing of their creators. But, while the Stein house and garden remained relatively static

over time with its composition and spatial relationships holding more or less to the original forms, the Royston home and garden experienced a process of almost continuous evolution. This can be explained by the fact that while the Royston home remained in the family for many years, Joseph Stein departed to India to serve as the Head of the Department of Architecture at Bengal Engineering College in Calcutta in 1952. [7] Although he would return from time to time, Stein never again lived for any length of time in the house he had designed. Eventually the property passed into the hands of second owners who appreciate its nature and have acted as a thoughtful stewards, affecting little change. Across the driveway however, the Royston portion of the property reflects the remarkable consequences of decades of attention and experimentation by one of the twentieth-century's most talented landscape architects.

EVOLUTION OF A GARDEN

The Royston garden has seen several distinct phases of development since its creation in 1947. These include the initial period of design and construction, embellishment of that initial design, changes made in response to the needs of a growing family, reorientation of the garden toward the view of Mt. Tamalpais, and an extended period with little change other than the growth of trees followed by an active editorial period. Through each of these episodes Royston's hand guided the changes to the garden.

INITIAL DESIGN (1947–1950)

The initial iteration of the garden shows a strong emphasis on spatial relationships and dynamic lines.[9] The constraints of a limited construction budget prompted Royston to pursue imaginative design solutions and non-standard material choices for his new garden. Low retaining walls were made from surplus precast concrete laundry sinks, the play terrace was surfaced in redwood pieces obtained from a tree trimming company, and easily propagated placeholders such as geraniums, iris, and agapanthus dominated in the planting plan. This first generation of the design included only a limited the amount of concrete paving. Rather, for the terraces adjacent to the house, Royston employed a compacted aggregate called Haydite, a lightweight expanded shale product that was used in the construction of Liberty and Victory ship decks during World War II. [10] With the end of ship building in the Bay Area it was inexpensive and readily available while other building materials were scarce.

This sort of imaginative frugality was likely part of the appeal and broad interest in the gardens, especially in California, where a post-war housing shortage confronted the ranks of returning veterans anxious to return to domestic life. Unlike the famous Miller Garden, Dan Kiley's 1955 masterpiece which was executed for the chairman of a large manufacturing corporation, Royston's garden was a decidedly middle-class affair. The photos that appeared in magazines such as ***Sunset***, showed a livable modern environment where many in the San Francisco Bay Area's burgeoning middle class could imagine themselves living and raising their baby-boom families.

Because of its prominence in the original design and its longevity in the garden, the art screen wall that separates the north garden from the laundry and service area merits special attention. Royston designed and built the screen to showcase sculptural tiles made by artist Florence Swift, whom he had met while employed in the office of Thomas Church. Royston recalled later in interviews that he admired her work from the outset and hoped to eventually have several pieces. [11] His interest in her work was strong enough that he prepared a number of study drawings at that time in which he worked out ways to incorporate the artist's sculptural panels into garden structures. This was Royston's first interaction with a professional artist, an aspect of his work that he would develop with great success. Over the course of his career he would collaborate on both private and public work with such notable artists as Claire Falkenstein, Benny Bufano, Ruth Asawa, and Henry Moore.

One of Royston's study drawings for the garden eventually appears in Garret Eckbo's *Landscape for Living*, published in 1950. It is interesting to note that the screen of Royston's imagination was considerably longer and incorporated more of Swift's tiles than the eventual built structure. In 1949, Eckbo Royston & Williams was asked to contribute to an exhibit at the San Francisco Museum of Art entitled "Design in the Patio". [12] This afforded Royston the opportunity to realize the art screen wall that he had envisioned. He built the screen as well as the furniture for the exhibit at his new home in Mill Valley with the idea in mind that all would return as an integral part of the garden.

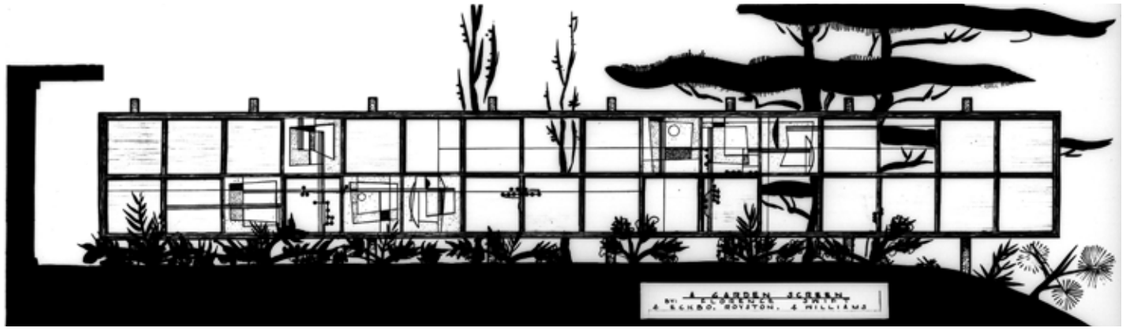
The screen project also provided Royston with another opportunity to explore the use of a new material developed during wartime for garden construction. Perspex, also known as Plexiglass was used in lieu of glass in aircraft windshields, canopies, and gun turrets by both Allied and Axis forces. Royston was interested in the material also as a glass substitute because of its lighter weight and resistance to shattering. [13]

EMBELLISHMENT OF INITIAL DESIGN (1950–1955)

Time and financial success enabled development of the Royston garden to a level along the lines originally imagined. A free-standing work shop was added to the service yard. Concrete terraces were installed adjacent to the home in areas that had been compacted by Haydite aggregate paving. Permanent planting replaced earlier place holders. With encouragement and help from their father, the Royston children colonized the down slope area as an adventure playground that included ad hoc play forts and excavated caves.

RESPONSE TO GROWING FAMILY (1955–1960)

During this period the house was expanded to accommodate the growing Royston family. The car port adjacent to the house was enclosed for a new bedroom suite for the parents, and a new parking structure was added at the bottom of the newly paved driveway. These changes created a courtyard space outside of the new master bedroom, creating a greater sense of enclosure. The orientation of the new carport and the addition of Coast Redwoods framed the northward view out from the courtyard toward Mt. Tamalpais. Larger scale plants such as perimeter hedges achieve full height at this point.



Top to bottom, left to right:
Royston was bold about extending a line or plane that originated in architecture out into the landscape. The transparency of building walls reinforces the feeling that the patio is a direct extension of the interior space, in this case a bedroom. Photograph by Ernest Braun, used with permission Ernest Braun Archive.

This early photo taken from the roof of the bedroom clearly shows the spatial composition of the entry garden. Photograph by M. Halberstadt, Robert M. Royston Collection, Environmental Design Archives (EDA), UC Berkeley.

Royston's concept sketch for an art screen wall that appeared in *Landscape for Living*.

In the first iteration of the Royston garden the terraces outside the house follow the lines envisioned in his early drawing. The framework for the art screen is visible in the background, but the decorative panels were not yet installed. Photographer unknown, collection of the author.

The garden screen with sculptural panels by Florence Alton Swift was created for *Design in the Patio*, an exhibit at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1949. Photographer unknown, collection of the author.

BRINGING MT. TAMALPAIS INTO THE GARDEN (1970)

The addition of an expansive deck with studio space below realized the cap stone of the design — the integration of the garden into the greater landscape. Changes made a decade earlier had directed the views from the house and terraces toward Mt. Tamalpais, and with the addition of the deck, the connection between the garden and the mountain was made complete.

Reached by a set of three broad shallow steps, the nearly 60' long deck created a promontory experience and allowed for a dramatic view across the valley. Royston furnished the deck with built-in benches and tables and tucked a new design and art studio beneath it. Japanese Maples and additional Redwoods appeared in the garden while the planting in general was simplified. From this point through the following two decades, the paving, structures, and arrangement of the garden remained static, but plant growth and development of the tree canopy altered the character of the garden noticeably. This period coincided with the apex of Royston's professional career. Concurrently changes to his family situation likely drew his attention away from the home and garden. Photos from the 1970's show all parts of the garden in dappled to deep shade. The strong legible lines and spatial definition of the early garden were obscured by native oaks and other plants that had developed into large specimens. Emblematic of the passage of time is the condition of the art screen, a focal point of the garden through the 1950's. By1975 it was completely enveloped in ivy with small windows trimmed to expose the sculpture panels.

AN EDITORIAL PERIOD (EARLY 1990's–PRESENT).

In the early 1990's, Royston reduced his professional activity and turned his attention back to his garden. An editing process begins to bring light back into the garden and reveal its fundamental structure. This work includes the removal of a number of large trees and shrubs. Ivy that had become rampant is also removed and the art screen is restored to prominence. The now-decrepit workroom is removed, and the slab foundation is re-purposed as a rose garden. The lowest portion of the garden is cleared, and decomposed granite is installed as a surface for games of Bocce or Petanque. One of Royston's signature disc-style garden umbrellas is installed below the studio room to provide shade for his guests.

CONCLUSION

The garden that Robert Royston designed and maintained for himself and his family holds a special place in the catalog of his professional output. While much of his work in the public realm has endured for decades, a notable achievement given the sometimes-ephemeral nature of the designed landscape, the hillside garden in Mill Valley has lasted longer than any other. While it has certainly evolved over the nearly seven decades since its inception, the original design vision seen in his earliest concept sketches is still legible and clear. Over the course of his long career, Royston designed hundreds of gardens, parks, and urban spaces and in many of these places, glimpses of ideas first explored in his own garden can be seen as features developed and expanded to suit the scale and purpose of the project-at-hand. ■

Above, left: Removal of several large trees restored panoramic views of Mt. Tamalpais.
Photograph by JC Miller, 2008.

Above, right: The original entry terrace is again sunny and bright after removal of large overhanging trees.
Photograph by JC Miller, 2008.

Opposite page, clockwise from top-left: The foundation of the demolished workroom provides a paved surface for the new rose garden.
Photograph by JC Miller, 2008.

A large canvas disc shade umbrella, a Royston design signature, provides cover at the *bocce/petanque* court. The design studio tucked beneath the deck is visible in this photo.
Photograph by JC Miller, 2008.

At this point in the garden's development, the floating table has been clad in vibrant red Heath tile.
Photograph by JC Miller, 2008.

With the ivy covering removed, the art screen returns as a prominent feature. The new rose garden can be glimpsed through the openings in the screen created where the weathered plastic panels have been removed.
Photographer JC Miller 2008

1. Stephen White, "Building in the Garden," (Oxford University Press, 1993), 28

2. See "Twin Houses: Berkeley, California", Progressive Architecture (March 1951)

3. Stephen White, "Building in the Garden," (Oxford University Press, 1993), 50

4. ibid.– page 62

5. Kodak Home Page: https://www.kodak.com/ek/US/en/Our_Company/History_of_Kodak/Milestones_-_chronology/1930-1959.htm.
While commercial color photography was generally available earlier in the twentieth-century as a result of the introduction of "Kodachrome" film in 1935, the processing of color film remained relatively expensive and rare until the late 1950's. 5 As a result most of the photographs and published images of the initial iteration of the Royston and Stein gardens are in black and white. In 1955 the Kodak Company began selling color films without the cost of processing included, this as a result of a consent decree signed in 1954. The long-term result was the creation of a new market for Kodak, providing products and services to independent photofinishers.

6. See "Design in Plant & Structure" Sunset, Magazine of Western Living (June 1950), "The Vertical Garden" Sunset, Magazine of Western Living (July 1950), "Plantings Can Extend the Walls of the Western Home" Sunset, Magazine of Western Living (February 1951), and "Surprise Companions" (February 1952).

7. Stephen White, "Building in the Garden," (Oxford University Press, 1993), 35

8. The diagrams that illustrate various stages in the evolution of the Royston garden were developed from period photographs and written descriptions of the garden during the period depicted. Robert Royston's distinctive graphic style as seen in the concept sketch for the Royston-Stein gardens was recreated for the new diagrams.

9. Buildex Corporation Home Page: Buildex.com Buildex and Haydite History

Haydite aggregate is a lightweight expanded shale product that was used extensively in the construction of ship hulls during World War II. With the end of ship building in the Bay Area it was inexpensive and readily available while other building materials were scarce in the immediate postwar period.

10. Authors' conversation with Royston July 16, 2006.

11. Ridout Plastics Web Site : Plexiglass Primer and History of Plexiglas:

http://www.eplastics.com/Plastic/plastics_library/
What-is-Plexiglass-Plexiglass-Primer-and-History-of-Plexiglas-Acrylic
In 1933 the brand name "Plexiglas" was patented and registered by another German chemist, Otto Röhm. In 1936 ICI Acrylics (now Lucite International) began the first commercially viable production of acrylic safety glass. During World War II both Allied and Axis forces used acrylic glass for submarine periscopes and aircraft windshields, canopies, and gun turrets."

12. Authors' conversation with Royston July 16, 2006.

THE MARIN ART AND GARDEN CENTER

by CAROL ROLAND NAWI

The Marin Art and Garden Center (MAGC) is an important example of the role women's garden clubs and organizations played in the early environmental movement. Located in the town of Ross in southern Marin County, just north of San Francisco, MAGC was the creation of a determined group of women activists who set out in the late 1930s to ensure the preservation of Marin County's scenic beauty and open space. In 1936 the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge physically linked San Francisco and Marin, initiating changes that would transform the rural and bucolic County into a suburban appendage to the city.

Previous spread: The entry path into today's gardens follows the original drive that led from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard to the nineteenth-century Kittle mansion.

Above: The simple lines and rustic materials allow the Center buildings to subtly recede into the larger landscape of the garden while serving a diverse set of functions that range from an antique shop to an art gallery and meeting space. Courtesy Marin Art and Garden Center.

Opposite page: Caroline Sealy Livermore was a wealthy Marin County environmental and social activist. She was the driving force behind the Kittle property acquisition and served on the Center's board from 1945 to shortly before her death in 1968. Courtesy Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.

Not everyone welcomed the real estate boom that followed bridge construction. Increases in population, the division of estates into suburban tracts, traffic, roadside commercialization, and local government enthusiasm for development schemes seemed to some to threaten the open space and natural beauty of Marin in unprecedented ways. These concerns were expressed succinctly by Kerry Allen, a member of the Marin Garden Club, when she exhorted her fellow club members that "we must maintain our standard of living—of recreation and beauty in the County."[1]

A number of new conservation groups coalesced around these concerns while existing groups placed a new emphasis on saving resources and open space. Many of these efforts were led by Marin's club-women. Among these activists was Caroline Livermore (née Sealey), a Ross resident and Marin County social leader and environmentalist who stood out for her energy and leadership.

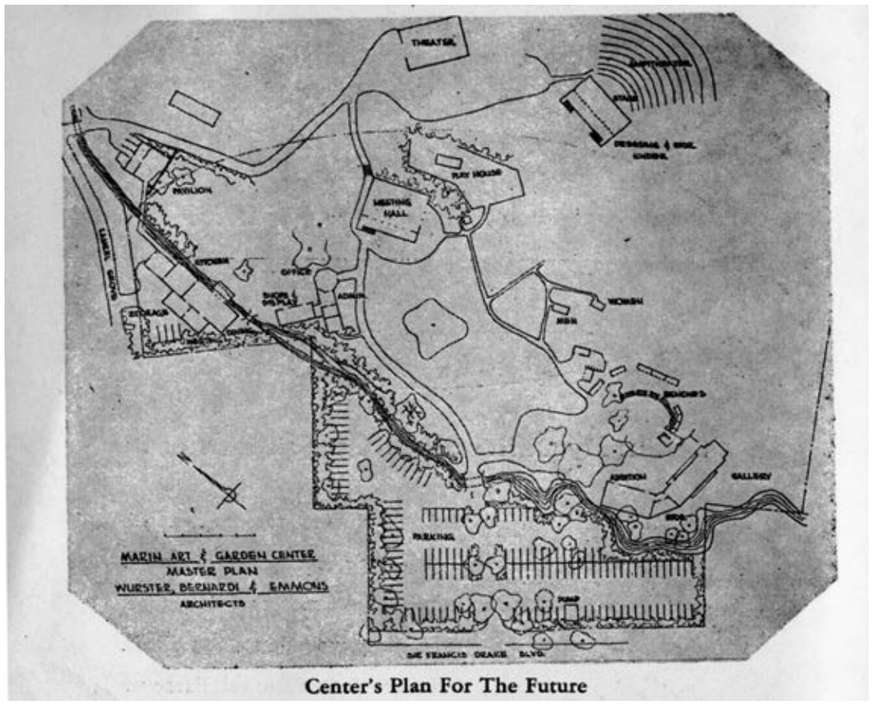
Livermore, along with a group of friends and garden club enthusiasts, was instrumental in founding the Marin Conservation League in 1934. The Conservation League was organized with the direct purpose of saving Marin open space and was instrumental in establishing Samuel P. Taylor, Tomales Bay, and Angel Island State Parks, as well as the Point Reyes National Seashore.[2]

Wealthy and influential, these women were allmembers of the Marin Garden Club (established 1931) and the Garden Society of Marin (established 1934) and later became founders and supporters of the Marin Art and Garden Center. For Livermore and her friends, conservation efforts grew directly out of the garden clubs and the personal associations that they fostered among their largely female membership. Brought together initially by a love of gardening and wildflowers, these women quickly became advocates for public lands (forests, parks, and beaches), beautification in towns and cities, and scenic highways.

By the mid-1930s the League women set to work to secure open lands from private development, sometimes putting up their own money, as well as fundraising for purchases and applying political pressure on the County Board of Supervisors to subject land use decisions to condition of approval. They also succeeded in getting a County ordinance to ban billboards and advertising along County roads. In April 1937, the Marin Garden Club sponsored a car caravan to endangered Marin beaches to raise public awareness. The League worked closely with other organizations that shared their environmental goals, such as the Tamalpais Conservation Club, the National Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, Save-the-Redwoods League, and the California State Park system. Acting as both members and leaders within some of these like-minded groups, the league founders and members maximized their social connections to build influential political alliances.

Condescendingly dubbed "the Ross housewives" by Marin County historian Jack Mason, these women were in fact knowledgeable, politically savvy, and generous in deploying their wealth to achieve the environmental goals they deemed important to the larger community.[3] The Marin "housewives" mirrored the interests and activism of women across the country who became involved in their local garden clubs and joined together in national associations to further a conservation agenda. Far from retreating to their suburban homes after World War II, women were highly effective in raising public awareness and in organizing through groups like local and regional garden clubs.

In addition to supporting the conservation work of state and local garden clubs, the national garden club organizations encouraged the development of garden centers as meeting places, forums for education, and demonstration gardens. With the end of World War II they also saw a role for garden centers as memorial spaces commemorating war veterans as well as others.[4] In Marin County at the end of WWII the availability of a virtually



Center's Plan For The Future

Above, left to right:
The Gladys Smith Memorial Fountain is a centerpiece of the formal landscape and commemorates an active member of the Marin Garden Club who contributed many hours to the planting and maintenance of the Helen Van Pelt–designed Memory Garden. Courtesy Marin Art and Garden Center.

The board of the Art and Garden Center first employed famed landscape architect, Thomas Church, and later, well-known Bay Area architects Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons to create a master plan for the Center. It was never completed, but this preliminary Wurster plan sites the Center's modernist buildings along the seasonal creek where they were later located. Courtesy Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.

Marin County Fair Director Marcelle McCoy displaying a map of the grounds for the county fair. Courtesy Jose Moya del Pino Library-Ross Historical Society.

undeveloped ten acre parcel in the heart of the town of Ross provided the opportunity to fulfill the conservation aims of the local garden clubs by establishing a center to serve multiple community purposes.

The MAGC site was originally part of the Rancho Punta de Quentin. Acquired by the Kittle family in the late 19th century, the estate consisted of a large house and outbuildings surrounded by naturalized acreage containing groves of mature trees and open hillside. By 1945 the Kittle property was one of the last large parcels of undeveloped land left in Ross and the south and central portion of Marin.

The availability of the Kittle property served as a catalyst for the women, who had already accomplished so much for conservation in Marin. It brought their energies to focus on establishing a center that would promote their horticultural and environmental goals and provide an outlet for activities and events of local cultural groups. The property's dense tree cover and potential for garden development lent itself as well to a memorial function where trees, groves, and garden furnishings could be dedicated to individuals by family, friends, and community.

Although the idea of memorial gardens was new, the idea of a garden center in Marin had been raised as early as 1934 by members of the Marin Garden Club. However, as community interest grew, the idea of a center attracted a broad local constituency that expanded the center's original focus beyond interests in horticulture and conservation to also include the local visual and performing arts.

While this pairing may have seemed to bring together a set of disparate interests, the match was not as unlikely as it might seem. At both the local and national levels garden clubs viewed many horticultural activities as art forms, such as flower arranging, decorations made from natural materials, and garden design and ornamentation. On the arts side, Marin's natural beauty served as an inspiration for artists and for many years Marin was a hub of plein air and landscape painting.

The groups that came together in 1945 to form MAGC organized programs and planned events that contributed to realizing the center's goals. Throughout the year the calendar of the Center was occupied with theatrical events, dance performances, art exhibits and sales, and horticultural shows. Many of the events became annual affairs eagerly anticipated and widely patronized by Marin residents. As a result of these efforts the Center accomplished the broad goal of becoming a place of community activity and identity in Marin.

Unquestionably the largest event and one that boosted the Center's profile throughout the County was the annual fair. In keeping with the MAGC's purpose, conservation was highlighted at booths and displays not only by the Center's own groups, but by many related organizations such as the National Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, and the Mt. Tamalpais Conservation Club. Arts demonstrations included painting, ceramics, and weaving, as well as gallery sales. Theater and dance groups provided entertainment both on stage and with performances throughout the grounds. The fair grew exponentially, from a few hundred attendees in 1947 to 40,000 in 1969. In 1970 the greatly expanded event was moved from the Marin Art and Garden Center to a dedicated space in the new Marin Civic Center.

As the MAGC began to expand its programs the board felt that an initiative should be undertaken to guide the physical development of the site to best serve the needs of its constituency. The Center was particularly fortunate in its early stage of development in attracting the attention and support of an outstanding group of young Bay Area architects and landscape architects. Among those who contributed to the planning and development of the center were Thomas Church, Gardner Dailey, Don Emmons of Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons, and Robert Royston. Although only locally known at the time, these early proponents of what has come to be known as Bay Area Regional Modernism, are now among the best known and most prestigious architects and landscape architects of the period.

Thanks to these associations, Marin Art and Garden Center possesses a unique ensemble of important and varied modernist buildings. Simple, wood-frame, and low-cost they embody the modernist's goals of informality, streamlined aesthetics, and affordability. This approach to design and building was particularly well suited to the limited means and public purposes of the center.

The relatively undeveloped condition of the property at the time of purchase allowed the center a wide range of options to consider in meeting its stated goals and the needs and desires of its founding members. The property had a heavy tree canopy that extended to the property boundaries. A central open area broke the tree cover where the Kittle mansion stood before it was destroyed by fire in 1931. The main entry drive that had been associated with the mansion now serves as the primary path into the garden.

There are two historic buildings associated with the Kittles and earlier owners; the Octagon Building (originally built as a well house) and the barn. The Octagon Building, now housing a library and historical society, and the barn which functions as a theater, tangibly connect the center with the pioneer settlement phase of Marin County as well as the critical period of the Art and Garden Center development.

In 1947 the Board engaged landscape architect Thomas Church to undertake a topographic survey of the entire property. Along with an earlier tree survey, these were the first steps toward the creation of a master plan to govern development. In late 1947 Church informally presented his ideas for the development of the grounds to the Center's Board. Although no copy of this preliminary plan survives, we know that it included the Marin Society of Artists Gallery/Studio/Frances Young Gallery (1948) designed by Gardner Dailey, improvements to the barn, and a barbeque area. Although Church did not complete a formal plan, the Board minutes clearly indicate that he exerted substantial influence as the Center began to take shape

Shortly after his presentation Church withdrew from his consulting and master planning roles at the Art and Garden Center due to pressing demands on his growing landscape practice. The board then turned to Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons of San Francisco. An undated Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons preliminary master plan drawing shows buildings strung along the west side of Kittle Creek, with an administrative center (never realized) connected to the Octagon Building.

Above: The Art and Garden Center was established in 1945 on the former Kittle estate, ten acres of naturalized landscape in the heart of Ross. The Queen Anne style Kittle Mansion (above) was destroyed by fire in 1931 and was never rebuilt. Courtesy Jose Moya del Pino Library-Ross Historical Society.

Left: A 1965 flower arranging class at MAGC. Flower shows and flower arranging were important activities of the garden clubs, both locally and at the national level. The garden club affiliates of the Marin Art and Garden Center offered a full calendar of such events including a fall chrysanthemum show, a spring fuchsia show and a winter greens sale consisting of wreaths crafted by the affiliated Decorations Guild. Courtesy Jose Moya del Pino Library-Ross Historical Society.

Opposite page, top: In its overall design and in its individual play structures the "Pixie Playground" reflected the modernist aesthetic of the Center. Designed by landscape architect Robert Royston, the playground was sponsored by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) who promoted playgrounds in parks and public places during the 1950s. Courtesy Jose Moya del Pino Library-Ross Historical Society.

Opposite page, bottom: The Marin County Fair, held annually at the Center between 1947 and 1970, provided entertainment, arts and crafts sales, informational booths and displays by local nurserymen. Courtesy Jose Moya del Pino Library-Ross Historical Society.

In 1956 the Board shifted from planning to undertake an ambitious building program on the north side of the property along the creek to supporting various auxiliary groups affiliated with the Center. The Center also installed a children's playground designed by Bay Area landscape architect, Robert Royston, who produced a space filled with modernist play structures that complemented the built environment.

The memorial function of the center and its horticultural purposes were served most conspicuously by the Memory Garden donated by the Marin Garden Club and designed by Helen Van Pelt, LSA, in 1947 and redesigned in 1953 by respected Marin County horticulturist, Herman Hein. Adjacent to the Memory Garden a large centrally located pool and fountain is dedicated to Gladys Smith, an active Marin Garden Club member, providing a serene resting point in the center of the garden at the end of the entry path. Notable memorial plantings include dawn redwoods and a giant sequoia.

By 1970 the Marin Art and Garden Center had taken on a permanent form still visible in the landscape that remains today. The Center's programs continue to reflect the horticultural, conservation, and arts centered values of the founders. For seventy-three years the Marin Art and Garden Center has remained a vital part of the Marin landscape and the local community. It remains a tribute to the wise and determined women who preserved this lovely open space in what is now a heavily urbanized environment and contributed so much to the legacy of conservation in Marin County and California.

Endnotes

1. Marin Garden Club, Minutes, Oct.2, 1945. (Private Collection)

2. http://marinconservationleague.org/about-us/history.html.

3. Jack Mason et al., *The Making of Marin*, 1975, 65.

4. Mary Leffler Cochran, *Fullfilling the Dream: The National Garden Clubs, Inc.*, 2004, 21.

5. *Battersby, The History of the Marin Art and Garden Center, Jose Moya del Pino Library, 2015, 8.*

6. Battersby et al., *Ross, California: The people, the Places, the History*, 2008, 117-125.

7. *Mason et al., 66.*

8. Marin Art and Garden Center, Minutes, Oct. 10, 1946. (MAGC)

9. Marin Art and Garden Center, Archive Box 7. (MAGC)

News

INTRODUCING STEVEN KEYLON, OUR *EDEN* EDITOR

This summer the CGLHS board began a permanent search for the Eden editor. We are excited to introduce our choice.

STEVEN KEYLON is passionate about landscape history, with expertise in designed landscapes in Southern California from 1920 – 1965. He has been the interim Eden editor for the past year, guiding the journal in a series of articles from the Arts & Crafts movement to modernism. His strong vision for the direction of Eden has strengthened the quality of the publication, while also ensuring that new stories are told, and told well.

Steven is also passionate about preservation. He has received numerous honors and awards: the California Preservation Foundation's Preservation Design Awards for his work in 2012 on the Village Green Historic Structures Report, and a 2018 award for the Cultural Landscape Report of Pasadena's Hindry House, co-authored with Lisa Gimmy. Steven joined the CGLHS board in 2013, was its treasurer in 2014, and became president in 2017 - he is committed to sustaining California garden and landscapes. In addition to board membership at CGLHS, Steven also serves on the boards of Docomomo US/SoCal, Beverly Hills Heritage, and is Vice-President of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. With commitments that reach to a national level, he serves on the Stewardship Council of the Cultural Landscape Foundation.

Steven is a talented writer and public speaker. He has published seven essays in Eden, and has written a book *The Design of Herbert W. Burns* which was published in 2018 by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. Current research includes the biographies of landscape architects Katherine Bashford and Fred Barlow, Jr., Tommy Tomson, and a monograph on architect Hugh Kaptur. He is a regular speaker at Palm Springs Modernism Week, so hopefully you'll have the opportunity to hear one of his talks soon.

A native Californian, Steven was born and raised in Sacramento, and lived for many years in Los Angeles at Baldwin Hills Village (Village Green), a National Historic Landmark garden apartment community. Steven now lives in Palm Springs with his partner, metal sculptor John De La Rosa. They have been slowly restoring their 1950 Herbert Burns-designed Late Moderne house there, bringing back details such as the original paint palette and hardware, and will next bring the landscape design back to its 1950 glory.

Steven's vision for the future of Eden is to continually improve the quality of the content, the images, and the design of the journal. He would also like to work with the editorial board to ensure the journal reflects the many interests of its readers and represents the geographic diversity of the state.

Christine O'Hara, CGLHS President

In the July 2018 issue of *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, CGLHS member and past president Kelly Comras wrote a book review "Dreams and Regrets," her impressions of *Shopping Town: Designing the City in Suburban America*, by Victor Gruen, edited and translated by Anette Baldauf; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. The article can be accessed here: http://bit.ly/dreamsandregrets

Opposite page:
Photographs of the completed landscape rehabilitation of the Hindry House by CGLHS member Millicent Harvey.

CGLHS member Lisa Gimmy, ASLA

Members in the News

CGLHS members Lisa Gimmy, ASLA and landscape historian Steven Keylon were recently recognized for their work on the rehabilitation of the landscape of the Hindry House in Pasadena. In May, the City of Pasadena awarded the project with the Historic Preservation Award, and in October, the California Preservation Foundation will present their Preservation Design Award. Besides Gimmy and Keylon, the project team was led by project lead and historic architect Kelly Sutherlin McLeod, FAIA, and the completed project photographed by CGLHS member Millicent Harvey.

Designed in 1910 by architects Alfred and Arthur Heineman, the Hindry House is in Pasadena's Prospect Park Historic District, is a contributor to the district's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and has been designated a City of Pasadena Historic Monument. Because of that, the Rehabilitation of the landscape would require a thorough process of research of site development and landscape history, along with detailed analysis of existing elements. The resulting Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) identified two distinct periods of significance: Arthur Heineman's original landscape and the 1970s design by Courtland Paul, FASLA, which was centered around an innovative and naturalistic pool. The subsequent rehabilitation plan had to retain the primary character defining features of the two periods of significance, while addressing the overall project objectives which included the correction of drainage issues that had compromised the structural integrity of the house, and the creation of a more resilient plant palette that would honor the historic plant palettes and spatial relationships. The team documented existing trees and protected and maintained healthy mature specimens, replacing important historic trees that had been removed. The addition of a dry river feature provides infiltration of roof water and corrects a major drainage issue. The restoration of the pool and boulder-lined pathways required cataloguing and documenting each stone to ensure accurate reinstallation. The rehabilitation respects the property's historic character and legacy, while providing its owners with a vision for the next one hundred years with new uses for contemporary living. ◧

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Front & Back Cover: Beyond adept planting design, Royston created furniture to compliment his outdoor rooms. This image from the late 1950's shows a pair of Royston designed wood and canvas chairs which share the patio with a concrete topped table. Many of the pieces he designed emphasized a low line. In this case the chair seat is only inches above the ground and the table top is less than a foot above the adjacent patio surface.
Photograph by Ernest Braun, used with permission Ernest Braun Archive.