The Flower Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll

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effects." Thus, he painted what he observed: objects transformed by light, color as it resulted from the play of light.

Jekyll, through a mutual friend, did meet Monet once, in the early days of Giverny. Their shared passions for gardening and painting must have made for a lively exchange. But what is significant historically is the fact that Jekyll's and Monet's concerns about light and color were similar. Monet's were recorded for posterity in his paintings and are visible in the restored garden at Giverny. Perhaps the current revival of the flower garden, together with the inspiration of Giverny, will lead to the renewal of Jekyll's Giverny—Munstead Wood—now remembered primarily through her black and white photographs. One could then experience firsthand many of the contributions to the history of garden design of this unique Englishwoman.

A number of Jekyll's attitudes about color and form in the garden have been reinterpreted by today's landscape architects. Some of these transformations of the herbaceous border are discussed here by Van Valkenburgh to demonstrate the ways in which Jekyll continues to influence garden design in the late twentieth century.

MSF

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front cover gate. "Autumn-blooming Shrub." A border at Munstead Wood, which featured the spiked flower of the American plant Aesculus parviflora.

front cover. "The September Garden" at Munstead Wood.

Editor's Notes

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On the drive from London to Gatwick airport, narrow roads pass through suburbs built since World War I in an ever expanding ring into the countryside. This past spring, I was delighted by the walled flower gardens that consistently front the houses along the way. Fist-sized roses (not an uncommon sight in England) are the June feature of these suburban gardens, which carry on the tradition of the eighteenth-century vernacular cottage garden. It was the still beloved, homely cottage garden that provided the basis for the more sophisticated herbaceous border developed in the late nineteenth century by the English landscape designer Gertrude Jekyll.

Current interest in flowers as a landscape medium has sparked a reexamination of the work of Miss Jekyll. In this article, the landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh traces the history of flower gardens, providing background for his discussion of Jekyll's contributions to that history. A cache of photographs by Jekyll in the University of California, Berkeley Library of the College of Environmental Design inspired the author to write about Jekyll's use of photography in her work. In these images, made from existing prints (the negatives are unfortunately lost) for reproduction here, one can see how photography became the means through which Jekyll, who was severely myopic, studied the landscape and developed her theories of the flower border. The architectural historian Judith B. Tankard has identified a number of Jekyll photographs reproduced here and, in addition, has graciously permitted the reproduction of recent color photographs she has made of a number of Jekyll's surviving gardens.

In examining the work of Jekyll it is instructive to note the relationships between her gardens and Claude Monet's extraordinary garden at Giverny, outside Paris, which has been completely restored. There, beginning in 1890, the painter created a garden in which color was as carefully controlled as it was in those of Gertrude Jekyll. Monet, who like Jekyll was nearly blind in his old age, directly recorded the gardens as he saw them, painting in the open air. An avid gardener, his flower borders consisted of loose rhythmic bands of color that became the subjects of his remarkable late paintings. The painter declared that he was "striving to render [his] impressions in the face of the most fugitive

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Charles Mayer, Hansen/Mayer: *figures 28–33.*
Nicholas Mertins, Cliché-Abeille Cartes, Editions Lyna, Paris: *figure 27.*
Judith B. Tankard: *figures 5, 6, 8–10, 25, 26.*

Note

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figure 1.

figure 1. The "Primrose Garden" at Munstead Wood. The original Munstead Bunch Primroses were found by Jekyll in a local cottage garden in the 1870s.

Fortunately, Gertrude Jekyll was a prolific writer, and several of her books have recently been re-published. She also photographed extensively, eventually assembling six volumes of photo-notebooks with over 2100 images, arranged chronologically from 1886 to 1914.[2] Although Jekyll used her photographs to illustrate her books, many images were never published, and the photo-notebooks that include them have been accessible to only a few scholars. The photo-notebooks and an extensive collection of Jekyll and Lutyens garden plans found their way to America after being sold to support the war relief effort in England during World War II. The American landscape architect Beatrix Farrand acquired the collection in the late 1940s for her Reef Point Gardens Library at Mount Desert Island, Maine.[3] Near the end of her life Farrand dismantled Reef Point and gave the Jekyll collection and the remainder of the Reef Point Library to the Special Documents Collection of the College of Environmental Design Library at the University of California, Berkeley, where they now reside. For Jekyll, the photo albums had a dual purpose: to replace the traditional approach of keeping sketchbooks, and to provide a record of completed works as well as ideas for later contemplation. Many of the photographs record finished projects; other images record mere fragments—segments of works to come. Jekyll's photographic studies nourished her creative life, recording what she liked and what she was interested in, what worked and what didn't work.

Jekyll's photographs clarify her place as an accomplished design innovator. But even today, Jekyll's role as a garden designer is not fully appreciated, despite her near cult status as a horticulturist. It is worth speculating about why such a prodigious writer and designer recorded little about her design process and the conceptual ideals that motivated her work. One plausible reason: English women artists of the upper middle class were expected to retain amateur status, for at the time in which Jekyll worked, the intellectual process was widely thought to be the exclusive province of men. Perhaps Jekyll was more interested in art than in its processes. She may have been unaware that attempting to share such an analysis might be of importance to others. The notations in the photo-notebooks were sparse—the photographs resolved her work process. Not to be forgotten is the fact that theoretical discourse about landscape design, though lively a hundred years earlier, had fallen off by the late nineteenth century. These factors may

1. Herbaceous perennials are those flowers that grow back from root stock each year and bloom for a period usually of not more than three weeks, whereas annual flowers must be sown from seed each spring, and bloom continuously once flowering has started.
2. Recorded dates span from 3(2) July 1886, through 14 August 1914.
3. Founded by Farrand in 1939 as an American landscape study center.

figure 2.

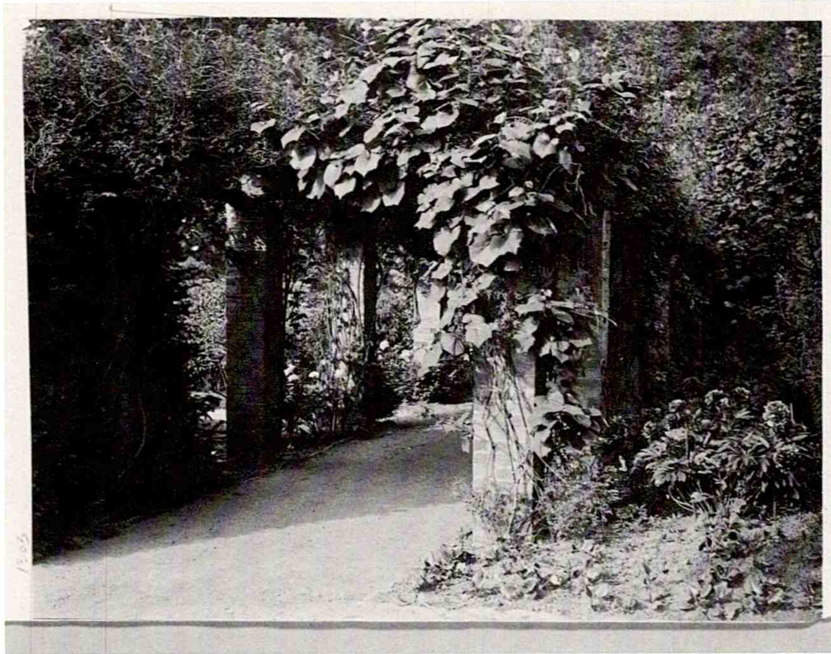

figure 3.

figures 2, 3. The use of vines played an important part in Jekyll's gardens. Clematis montana is draped on a pergola (fig. 3).

By Michael R. Van Valkenburgh

Nearly one hundred years have passed since the Victorian fascination with flowers found extraordinary expression in the early gardens of the English plantswoman Gertrude Jekyll. Since that time, the relevance of the flower as a design medium has been in abeyance for a variety of aesthetic and economic reasons that are at the core of twentieth-century Modernism. But due in part to the current reexamination of historical forms by designers, and to the ability of the flower to elicit strong feelings and powerful associations, flowers have once again achieved an elevated status in garden design.

In light of this renewal of interest in flowers, some historical perspective on their application in garden design, particularly in a planted form referred to as the herbaceous border, is useful.[1] The pioneering collaborations of Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932) and the architect Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944) established the precedents for the design of flowers in Anglo-American gardens still emulated today. Jekyll used annual and perennial flowers as well as flowering shrubs in her designs in numerous ways, but most commonly in the herbaceous border. Historically, this garden element was constructed with flowering plants, typically in a long and precisely bounded configuration that followed the course of a wall or a hedge, and was not too much wider than the distance of a gardener's reach from each side—to allow for maintenance. The herbaceous border as a garden element was Jekyll's passion. With it, she attempted to create an enduring design by choosing from countless materials, each requiring elaborate care for the whole to survive. Her design and photographic investigations resulted in two major innovations: integration of the flower border as a spatial element in a landscape, and refinement of the internal color and patterning of the border.

A couple of biographies—most notably Jane Brown's *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon*—provide excellent portraits of Jekyll's life but only begin to probe her thinking as a designer. The majority of Jekyll's design experiments occurred in the privacy of her Surrey estate in the English countryside at Munstead Wood where, from 1896 until her death, she lived in a house designed by Edwin Lutyens. Regrettably, some of the Jekyll-Lutyens gardens have been destroyed or allowed to deteriorate radically. This diminishes our understanding of the design brilliance of their projects and lessens our ability to interpret the relationship between their collective ideas and the built expressions of them.

figure 4.

figure 4. One of the flower borders at Munstead Wood demonstrates how combinations of plants were graded not only for color, but for texture and foliage interest.

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The Flower Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll and Their Twentieth-Century Transformations

figure 5.

figure 6.

figures 5, 6. "The Grey Border" at Hestercombe, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Somerset, is planted exclusively with gray-foliaged plants, such as santolina, lavender, and stachys, and accented with white flowers. An interesting Lutyens-Jekyll detail is the pavers that prevent plants from sprawling onto the grass walks. The garden, designed from 1904–1908, has recently been restored and is open to the public.

figure 7.

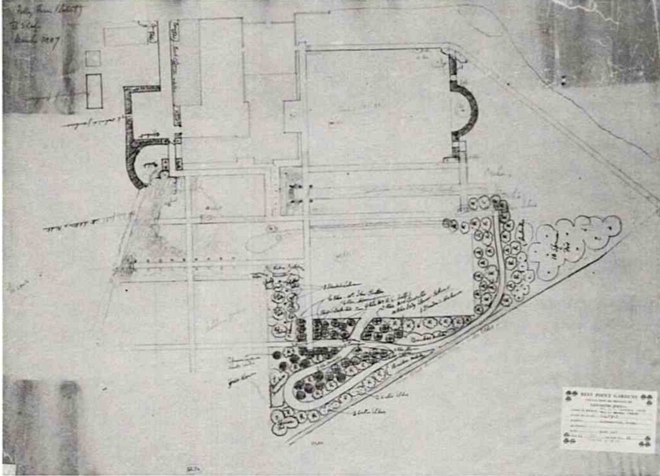


figure 8.

figure 9.

figure 10.

figure 7. A 1907 preliminary site plan for Folly Farm, Sulhamstead, Berks, with many Jekyll notations, indicates the ways in which Lutyens and Jekyll originally planned to modify the existing Georgian house and grounds.

figure 8. The Canal Garden of 1912 at Folly Farm complements Lutyens's Dutch-style 1906 addition to the farmhouse.

figures 9, 10. Elevated steps at each of four corners lead down to the sunken Rose Garden at Folly Farm, designed in 1912. This yew-enclosed Rose Garden has an octagonal pool with an elevated parterre filled with gray-foliaged plants that offset the roses in the outer beds.

help to explain why historians have frequently named Lutyens as the designer of these gardens and have only credited Jekyll with the planting schemes.

It is clear that in several gardens Lutyens and Jekyll merit recognition as collaborators.[4] If Jekyll's photographs are seen as a collection of design speculations—recorded by camera rather than pen and sparely labeled with spontaneous margin notes—we find that they are a part of her meticulous studies that join horticultural appropriateness with the visual and spatial concerns of landscape design.

The garden plans at Berkeley reveal the methodology of the Jekyll-Lutyens collaborations: vellum overlays were passed back and forth through the mail, with Lutyens and Jekyll suggesting revisions. An example of Jekyll's design role is provided by the original plans and subsequent re-design of Folly Farm, Sulhamstead, Berks. A site analysis by Jekyll records and interprets existing buildings, field lines, topography and vegetation, and other plans document her design refinements (*fig. 7*). Plans for a 1906 unrealized project in East Grinstead, show questions scripted in Jekyll's hand—seemingly made during a site visit—on a plan by Lutyens. Her notes explore the resolution of a walkway with a steep grade: "Wants stepping somewhere—here or further? Development?," later followed by "I think further," initialed by Lutyens (*fig. 11*). This exchange demonstrates that Jekyll contributed to the character and structure of their gardens, particularly in terms of a carefully wrought response to site, a response often referred to as one of the brilliant qualities of Lutyens's work.

Jekyll was a trained artist. Starting in 1861, she studied painting at the School of the South Kensington Museum and later pursued fine metal work, stencil-art, and needlecrafts. *The Handbook of Embroidery,* published by the Royal School of Art Needlework in the 1880s, contains two works by Jekyll. But due largely to the circumstances of her increasing myopia, Jekyll turned from embroidery to landscape gardening.[5] In 1885 Jekyll installed a darkroom at Munstead House, her mother's home, where she was then living. She eventually became an accomplished photographer, mastering the entire photographic process.[6] Some of her earliest photographic images were used to illustrate the books of the garden writer William Robinson, including his popular *The English Flower Garden* (1883).[7] But in this publication, as well as in her own books, the poor quality of reproduction obscured the excellence of her images.

Photography offered a way for Jekyll to continue to create despite her debilitating nearsightedness. The camera improved her ability to see, offering a way to look at the world by focusing distant landscapes onto ground glass. The resulting images permitted study of the places she was making as well as details of compositions under consideration. These photographs present an intimate glimpse of Jekyll's life; more than any other record, they reveal her design intentions and sources. By far the largest number of

4. Later in her life, even when she was too infirm to travel, she continued to make planting schemes for gardens designed by Edwin Lutyens.
5. Myopia is an extreme form of nearsightedness; the resulting blurred vision interfered less in landscape design than in needlework or painting.
6. Francis Jekyll, *Gertrude Jekyll, A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1934), pp. 115–116.
7. Ibid.

photographs concentrate on studies of plant materials, ranging from straightforward experiments with flower arrangements to stark and awesomely beautiful planted details—like clouds of baby's breath hovering above shiny, dark, prostrate bergenia leaves (*fig. 22*). The visceral quality of flowers is sharply highlighted by her photographic imagery. While most of the photographs describe design uses of flowers, they include a fascinating range of subjects: gateways and architectural ornament, household objects, rural landscapes, fabrics, site details, her needlework and her stencil art (*fig. 13*). Others are more personal. One haunting picture shows a gardener dressed in a monk's robe and hood, standing beneath a towering giant lily (*fig. 14*). Humor and death are present in some of her nostalgic images, reflecting the enduring influence of the Pre-Raphaelite English painters. In one, a cat is a blur—shaking its head madly next to a border edged with catnip; in another, a dead cat is recorded and captioned "My dear Toosey—dead." Though not intended for our scrutiny as a diary, the photographs and their notes provide a juxtaposition of her personal concerns and her design process.

Gertrude Jekyll did not invent the herbaceous border. Flowers had been cultivated in England at least as early as the Middle Ages—for medicinal use and for the church altar. In addition to their biblical symbolism, flowers emitted a pleasant fragrance in a time of poor sanitation. By the sixteenth-century Tudor era in England, flowers were cherished for their visual appearance.[8] Georgina Masson discovered that a kind of herbaceous border was introduced in the seventeenth century: Italian Renaissance parterres occasionally served as locations for exotic bulb collections such as tulips and lilies.[9] Parterres assumed a prominent and integrated position in the garden and conformed to established conventions of placement, patterning, and symbolism. As elements of a landscape they were static and two-dimensional. This early iteration of the herbaceous border moved the ephemeral herbaceous flower from the kitchen garden to a more prominent landscape position. Most importantly, the stasis of the parterre was transformed. In the 1600s the English landscape witnessed a widespread garden renaissance which emulated Italian parterre precedents brought to England by Frenchmen such as Salomon de Caus. With its ample moisture and mild seasons, England was well suited, climatically, to support other uses of herbaceous plants as design materials.

In addition, there were strong social factors motivating the use of flowers in English gardens. Most histories of the eighteenth-century English built environment focus on the naturalistic landscapes of Capability Brown and Humphry Repton that, indeed, were magnificent achievements. But vernacular cottage gardens of that era represented a populist preference for gardens with flowers, and these existed in proximity to the green landscapes of Repton and Brown. The English craft of incorporating floral compositions in small spaces near houses originated in cottage gardens, which represent one of the

8. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 224.
9. Georgina Masson, *Italian Gardens* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1961), pp. 279–288. Masson discovered this by studying garden plans and examining paintings of Italian gardens of that era.

figure 11.

EAST GRINSTEAD
GARDEN PLAN
SCALE 32 FEET TO 1 INCH.

E.L.LUTYENS ARCH^T
29 Bloomsbury Square
W.C. Nov 1906.

figure 11. In a 1906 unrealized project with Edwin Lutyens in East Grinstead, Sussex, Jekyll made important contributions to the site plan that are noted on this drawing.

figure 12.

figure 13.

figure 12. The publication in 1907 of another successful book, Flower Decoration for the Home, *was the result of Jekyll's interest in still-life compositions combining the best of flowers and containers.*

figure 13. This drawing room was an early interior design commission undertaken by Jekyll around 1886. The quilted curtain, crafted by Jekyll, and the inlaid door reflect her involvement in the English Aesthetic Movement (1870–1895).

foundations of the herbaceous border as a planted form. Photographs of nineteenth-century cottage gardens, originating in the traditions of the preceding century, are in the Jekyll photo-notebooks. Concurrent in England with the aesthetic appreciation of cultivated flowers, came an immense expansion of pleasure gardening. Between 1500 and the 1850s, the number of cultivated plants in Britain expanded from a few hundred to eighteen thousand.[10] This enthusiasm for gardening found diverse cultural expressions in nineteenth-century England in the work of Gertrude Jekyll and her contemporaries.

Jekyll's formal concerns in her designs for herbaceous borders originated in the aesthetic theories of the nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts Movement, particularly in the designs of William Morris. Decorative handcrafts of all kinds achieved new importance as a result of the Arts and Crafts emphasis on pattern making, which coincided with the emergence of the Queen Anne style and Jekyll's early gardens. In addition to Morris's works, the significance to Gertrude Jekyll of William Robinson's writings and of her work with him have been widely discussed. But as Mark Girouard notes in *Sweetness and Light: The 'Queen Anne' Movement 1860–1900*: it simplifies history to say that Robinson and Jekyll saved England from "bedding out," the popular mid-Victorian practice of isolating geometric patterns of annual flowers on expanses of lawn.[11] Another influence on the garden art of the 1800s was Kate Greenaway's 1870s children's books illustrated with fanciful interpretations of manicured small gardens. These drawings affected a widespread preference for old-fashioned flowers and hedged private spaces as part of a revival of the formal garden.[12]

Jekyll was also influenced by the Impressionist painters of the era, such as her friend Hercules Brabazon, with whom she occasionally shared painting sessions.[13] The Impressionists were devoted to interpreting the color theories of Michel Chevreul's *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors and Their Application to the Arts,* published in English in London in 1854.[14] Chevreul, a French chemist, was the first person to explain how contrast and proximity can produce afterimages of color. His work provided the basis for the color theories of several painting movements of the twentieth century.[15] As Michael Brill has observed, Seurat's painted frames are as close to Jekyll's work as can be achieved in another medium. "Seurat took the normal wooden frames of his time and stippled them, so they were Pointaliste borders on Pointaliste paintings. . . . But the difference is that the dots on the frames do not organize themselves into larger images. . . but hold their shimmer without resolution into something else."[16]

A painter thwarted by deteriorating eyesight, Jekyll made sophisticated landscape translations of Chevreul's theories, culminating in her book on the subject, *Colour in the Flower Garden* (1908).[17] Jekyll's introduction to this work defined the garden as a painterly visual art, not simply a plant collection: ". . . it seems to me that the duty we

10. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World, p.* 226.
11. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 152.
12. Ibid., p. 156.
13. Jane Brown, correspondence with the author, 22 June 1987.
14. Jane Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), pp. 41–42.
15. Faber Birren, *Color and Human Response* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978), pp. 58–61.
16. Michael Brill, correspondence with the author, 28 June 1987.
17. The book was reprinted shortly thereafter under the title *Colour Schemes for Flower Gardens.*

owe to our gardens . . . is so to use the plants that they shall form beautiful pictures; and that, while delighting our eyes, they should be always training those eyes to a more exalted criticism."[18] In her 1908 book, Jekyll proposed a model for a 200-foot long, 14-foot wide herbaceous flower border in which color was distributed linearly in minute gradations of chromatic separation. Cool colors, starting with violet, were placed at each end, and warm colors were grouped at the center: "At the two ends there is a groundwork of grey and glaucous foliage. . . . With this, at the near or western end, there are flowers of pure blue, grey-blue, white, palest yellow and palest pink; each color partly in distinct masses and partly intergrouped. The colouring then passes through stronger yellows to orange and red. By the time the middle space of the border is reached the colour is strong and gorgeous, but, as it is in all good harmonies, it is never garish."[19] Jekyll had to surmount two major obstacles to convert this diagram into a successful landscape: the large variety of plants required to express the full color spectrum, and the difficulty of uniting their disparate forms and textures. Her photographs reveal assorted solutions: a continuous band of similar plants with dark or gray foliage could provide a unifying ribbon edge, while the internal texture of the border remains diverse. The photographs record borders with surprising textural diversity, with graphic specimens such as red hot poker dotted among finer foliage plants. Alternatively, she blended flowers of similar size to establish harmony, as is shown in a photograph of a long border of autumn asters edged with the shorter woodland North American aster.

18. Gertrude Jekyll, *Colour in the Flower Garden* (London: George Newnes/*Country Life*, 1908), p. vi.
19. Ibid., p. 51.
20. Ibid., pp. 54–55.
21. Ibid., p. 101.

Jekyll emphasized the importance of color in ordering the observer's movement through a typical floral allée in her 1908 book: "Looked at from a little way forward . . . the whole border can be seen as one picture, the cool colouring at the ends enhancing the brilliant warmth of the middle. Then, passing along the wide path next to the border, the value of the colour arrangements is still more strongly felt."[20] Here, the herbaceous border is visually consuming: each juxtaposition of color and every detail of the surrounding view is calculated scenographically and as part of a sequence of movement through the landscape. Consider Jekyll's intentions in her description upon reaching the gray garden after passing through the orange borders: "This filling with the strong, rich colouring has the natural effect of making the eye eagerly desirous for the complementary colour, so that, standing by the inner Yew arch and suddenly turning to look into the Grey Garden, the effect is surprisingly—quite astonishingly—luminous and refreshing."[21]

Jekyll's Arts and Crafts pattern-making sensibilities appear in a quilt included in her photo-notebooks, which is remarkably like a herbaceous border in another photograph (*figs. 15, 16*). The quilt is composed of long patterned strips at each side, with a broad neutral band at the center, and is nearly a plan representation of the double flower borders frequently represented in her photographs. Recalling enframement

figure 14.

figure 14. "The Giant Lily," Cardiocrinum giganteum, sometimes towered 11-feet high and was the pride of Munstead Wood; for the photo session one of Jekyll's gardeners has been coaxed into monk's garb.

figure 15.

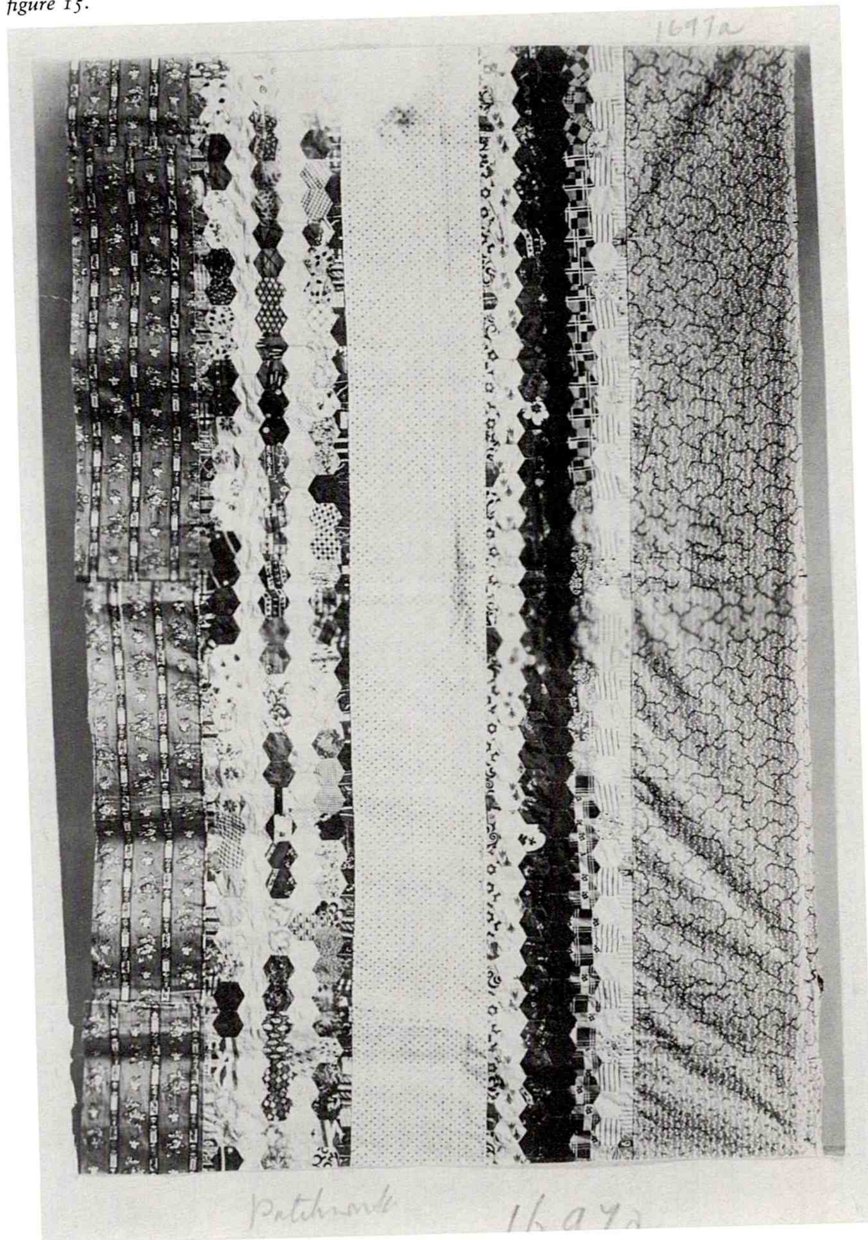


figure 15. The linear forms of Jekyll's flower borders echo an early nineteenth-century patchwork quilt from her personal collection, later donated to the Guildford Museum, Surrey.

figure 16.

figure 17.

figures 16, 17. Two views of "The September Garden" at Munstead Wood, the same garden shown on the cover. The top image of the Grey Garden looks back through the archway into the garden, the other is a close view of the border near the house.

techniques used in quilt design, the outside perimeter of a Jekyll flower border was backed with large masses of evergreen hedges, unclipped shrub borders, or masonry walls. In terms of horticulture, this enclosure modified the microclimate to protect the fragile perennials from ground level winds, yet was designed to be low enough not to obstruct sunlight. The surrounding plant masses suspended the flower border and its refined colors in a field of green. The centered grass path worked compositionally to cut through the floral quilt, but at the same time it visually completed the enframement in green, this green frame thereby uniting the colorful border with the landscape context.

Some of the herbaceous borders in the Jekyll photographs are elongated by camera angles that reinforce their working as floral allées. Her photographs of borders rarely include elevations and more often were taken from an oblique vantage point, emphasizing the longer dimension. Even a wide flower border is quite transparent when seen across its width; but seen from one end, a border will appear full due to the layering and overlapping of plants caused by the foreshortening of perspective. This long view offers the advantage of obscuring gaps in the plantings caused by factors such as insect damage. But most importantly, the density it establishes was critical to the construction of Jekyll's color gradients with flowers.

Jekyll controlled both view and movement by her positioning of the flower border in space so that it would be passed along in the long dimension. The linear presentation of borders implies that she did not want the borders studied—by stopping and turning toward them—but wanted them experienced in a continuous walk. The herbaceous border was not simply pictorial—her borders were three-dimensional paintings with flowers that required movement through them to be appreciated. An example is provided by photographs of a Laburnum arch framing symmetrical borders of September perennials (*cover*). The arch, perpendicular to the borders at the entry, signals passage from one space to another. Visually, it obscures portions of the outermost sides of the flanking borders, but also frames the visible portions. A bench in a clipped hedge niche located beyond the far end provides the best static vantage point (*fig. 17*).

The photographs reveal other explorations of sequencing landscape space to assist with pathfinding, including path and stair alignments and the relationship of these to informal clumps of herbaceous plants known as "incidents." A series of photographs examines the placement of plants to offer directional clues. The first image shows a stone stairway; on the cap of the stair's right wall a small pot with vertical, light-colored plants draws attention to a drift of white lilies in the distance, on the right, which echoes the closer plants and signals entry to a woodland path (*figs. 18–20*). This study reveals a subtle, yet deliberate use of flowers to sequence movement through a landscape.

figure 18.

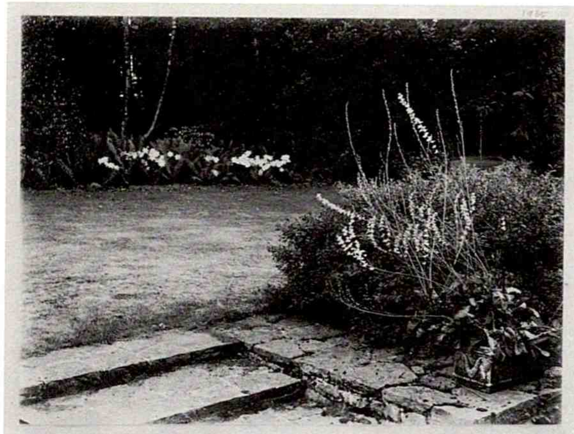
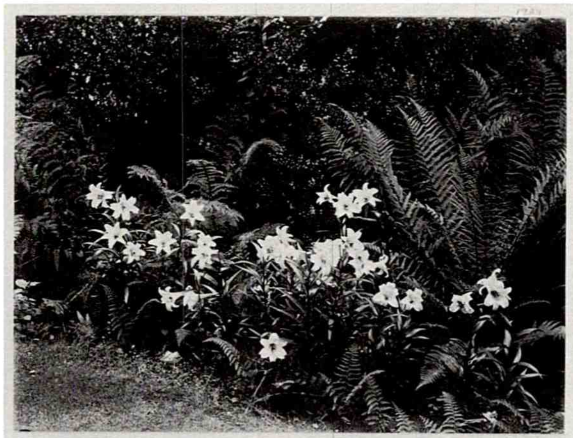


figure 19.

figure 20.



figures 18–20. *One of Jekyll's strengths was her woodland planting, and another her use of plants to indicate movement and direction through a garden. In these images we see clusters of ferns and lilies that designate a path's turning and an entrance to a woodland area.*

figure 21.

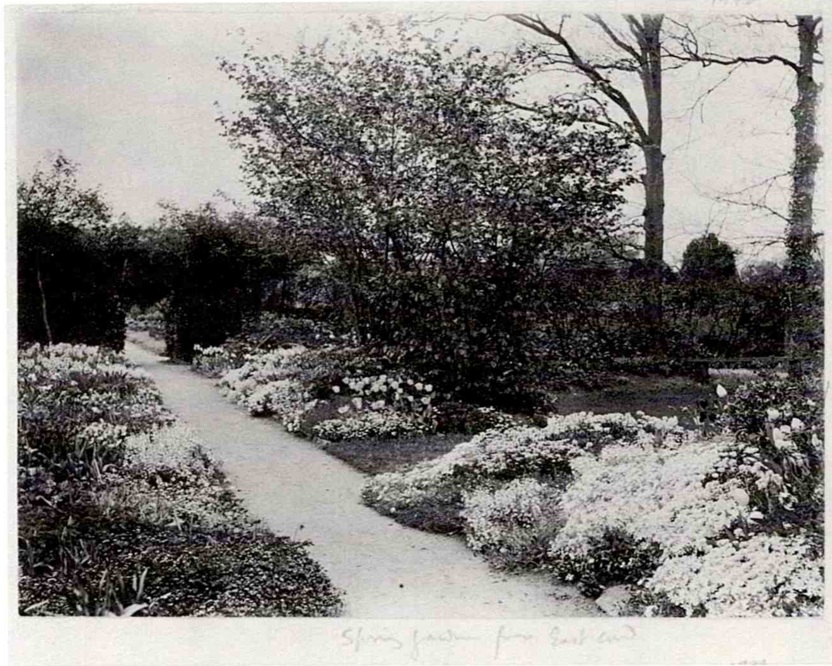


figure 22.

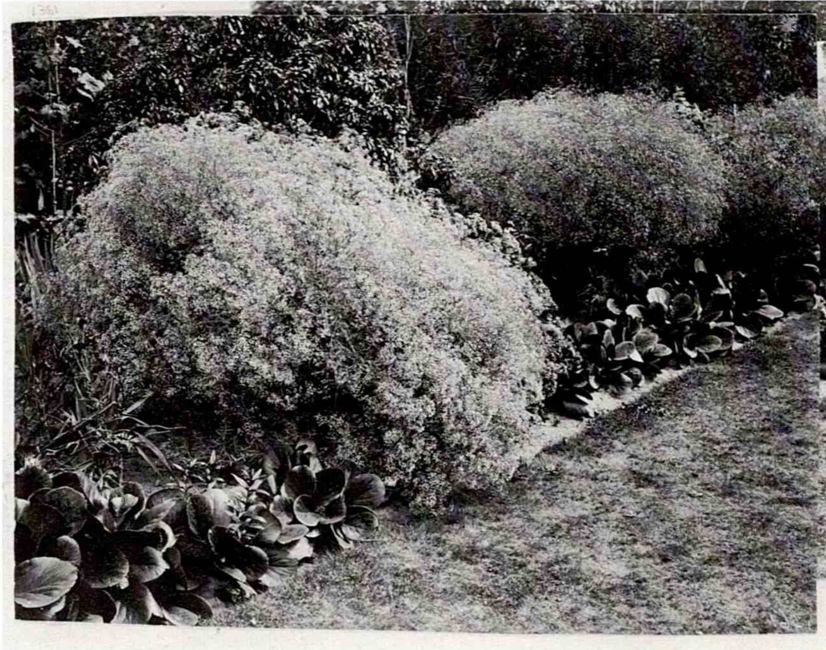


figure 21. "The Spring Garden" at Munstead Wood was another garden of seasonal interest only. Bulbs were left to die back quietly as attention focused on another part of the garden.

figure 22. "Gypsophila and Megasea at Shrubbery Edge." Jekyll's love of textural variation is evident in the contrasts between the satiny bergenia leaves and the minutely flowered clumps of baby's breath in this garden detail at Munstead Wood.

The cycles of the seasons found diverse celebration in Jekyll's borders and in her gardens. Jekyll's writings caution against attempts to represent evenly all of the seasons in a single space.[22] A typical Jekyll garden was large and divided into rooms, each containing herbaceous borders or other flower configurations planned to bloom for a period of time as short as four to six weeks. Photographs of a spring garden at Munstead Wood, planted largely with flowering bulbs, illustrate how extensively areas were devoted to a condensed period of bloom (*fig. 21*). Jekyll respected seasonality not only as a way to create moments of harmonious crescendo, but as a means to underscore the cyclical nature of the year. Other plant materials were used similarly to notate seasonality. The tattered and bleached leaves of beech in March were compositionally joined with the acid greens of new grass. In the woodland garden, primroses were positioned so that their colors were tinted by the distinct light of spring filtered through the opening leaves of trees overhead.

22. Gertrude Jekyll, *Colour in the Flower Garden*, p. v.

Jekyll's desire to produce sublime seasonal moments in a garden was coupled with a need to create temporary places of perfection. But, Jekyll worked with equal conviction to obscure the signs of foliage decline in each garden as plants passed their prime. She took great care to obscure plant losses in the herbaceous border—having pots of "fillers" such as snapdragons or hydrangeas waiting in reserve if needed. In other situations, plants prone to foliar decline, such as lilies, were combined with tall ferns to camouflage the withering foliage after flowering. It appears in her writings that Jekyll most comfortably embraced the value of season in the garden only at the height of its expression. But one wonders about Jekyll's private thoughts about seasonality in a moment in the spring garden a few weeks after the last flower petals had fallen and the ripening foliage had begun to yellow, or later, in early winter, when the last dry daffodil leaves had shriveled and flattened to the ground. A garden's greatest value can be the solace conjured by its place in our memory. The recurrence of special landscape events: the fragrance of the first mown grass, the blackened leaves of tender annuals after an autumn frost, or the spectacle of nearly spent peonies, bending under the weight of their giant heads—these images are as important in memory as they are in marking another year's passage (*figs. 23, 24*).

By 1900 Jekyll had become widely acclaimed as a talented plantswoman, and was a leading figure in an expanding and egalitarian cult of landscape designers. This group shared the belief still held by many today that gardens are artistic, symbolic artifacts that demand an enduring commitment to maintenance. Our contemporary perspective on the design uses of flowers relies on Jekyll's work and her collaborative designs with Edwin Lutyens for its foundation.

figure 23.

figure 23. "The Wide Wood Path."

figure 24.

figure 24. Pollarded trees in winter.

The last date in Jekyll's photo-notebooks is 14 August 1914, which not only marks the end of Jekyll's photography but coincided with declining wealth in Britain and the devastation of World War I, followed by a global depression in the 1930s. The same era saw the disappearance of the servant class that had maintained the larger Jekyll and Lutyens gardens. The re-emergence of gardening as a recognized service profession has occurred slowly in the twentieth century, and it is arguably one of the reasons the art of the garden has made such limited advances. Twentieth-century Modernists were uncomfortable dealing with the symbolic aspects of the landscape—one of the goals of Modernism was to uncouple place from history, and avoiding symbolic references was easier than embracing them. Used in the kitchen and the cemetery, on the altar and the funeral crypt, the flower offers paradoxical associations of domesticity and death. As a designer initially trained in the Modernist tradition, this author has found Jekyll's enduring legacy useful in clarifying landscapes by other twentieth-century designers and in assessing the prospects for works yet to emerge.

Numerous English designers worked to extend Jekyll's garden design theories. Lawrence Johnston's use of flowers at Hidcote in Gloucestershire (from 1905) were derived from many Jekyll theories, as was the writer Vita Sackville-West's design of Sissinghurst in Kent in the 1930s (*figs. 27, 28*). Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson placed separate hues or palettes of harmonious colors into distinct garden rooms connected with walls of masonry and long corridors, such as the double eight-foot yew hedge. Though influenced by Jekyll, their flower configurations were not organized in the same manner as Jekyll's herbaceous borders, but instead appear to float more freely in space.

In the United States, Jekyll's theories also found adaptation, as can be seen in Beatrix Farrand's 1920s attempt to create a literal color spectrum in her initial design of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden in Maine. Farrand did not obtain the Jekyll photographs until the 1940s, gleaning her inspiration instead from conversations with Jekyll in the 1890s, and from Jekyll's writings.[23] Today the A.A. Rockefeller Garden represents a much simplified—and perhaps improved—version of the original design, which included at one point a huge bed of annuals at the center instead of its contemporary greensward. Fletcher Steele, the prominent Boston landscape architect, used herbaceous plants with great simplicity, often featuring tints and shades of flowers of a single species, such as the sweeping iris borders in the gardens of the Angelica Gerry Estate (circa 1940, now destroyed) in Lake Delhi, New York.

Several early twentieth-century gardens incorporating the flower reflected a movement toward landscape Modernism. The iris garden in the Parc de bagatelle in Paris by Jean Forestier (1905), introduced a flower border as part of his re-design of this public

23. Eleanor McPeck in Diane McGuire and Lois Fern, editors, *Beatrix Jones Farrand* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), p. 26.

open space (*fig.* 27). A single room hedged in yew and organized around a long central water rill, the garden is devoted to one flower genus—iris. The bloom period of the several iris species used is less than two months, but the remainder of the year is marked by the seasonal changes in the iris foliage. The public acceptance of the annual cycle of herbaceous plant growth and decline is highlighted by the position of the iris garden near a major entry to the park. The gradation of leaf and flower color from spring through winter—accepted as variations of a plant's visual qualities—embraces seasonality in a way that moves beyond Jekyll's conventions. On warm winter days, when the fallen, brown iris leaves are barely discernible, Parisians of all walks of life can be seen strolling in the garden, rummaging memories of the iris while mulling whatever may have prompted their need for solitude. This design use of herbaceous plants represents an ongoing transference of the sensibilities of the private garden to the realm of the public landscape. After World War I, landscape architects began to involve themselves in the European avant-garde. Temporary gardens at the *Exposition des arts décoratifs* in Paris (1925) attempted abstract, Cubist compositions using flowers. Gabriel Guevrekian's garden for the Comte de Noailles at Hyères, France (1925) used stepped parterres planted with herbaceous flowers to create a modern sculptural landscape around a villa designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens.

The fact that most American and European landscape architects cast off the flower in preference for the austerity of Modernism is due in part to the loss of the gardener and the consequent economic issue of maintenance costs. But there were other influences: one was the American effort to assert landscape architecture as a design profession; ambiguous domestic and even funereal associations prompted by flowers in the landscape lacked consonance with the image of the emerging profession of landscape architecture, which defined itself broadly to include regional planning. But such references were even less tenable to the Modernists of art and design who believed they were molding permanent, unchanging space. With its emphasis on the machine as an aesthetic model and the concurrent loss of gardening as a craft, landscape Modernism gradually moved away from the use of flowers. As Keith Thomas's research shows, flowers were a conspicuous part of the rituals of marriage and burial prior to the eighteenth century in England, and they are still clearly visible in this century. A more recent design use of flowers is represented by the Memorial for Deportation in Paris—a ceremonial row of everblooming roses parallels a row of tree stumps at the entry—the thorns and blooms of the roses and the severed trees establish a bittersweet threshold.

Flowers organized as part of a spatial sequence transmit special physical and symbolic qualities to a place, charging it with emotion. Their presence characterizes a landscape as belonging to a typological group with a set of meanings and experiences.

figure 28: June.

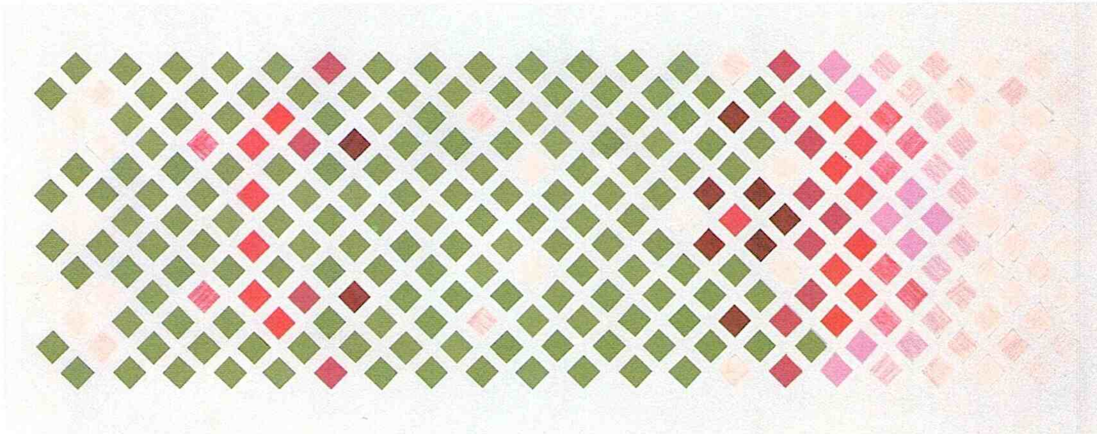


figure 29: July.

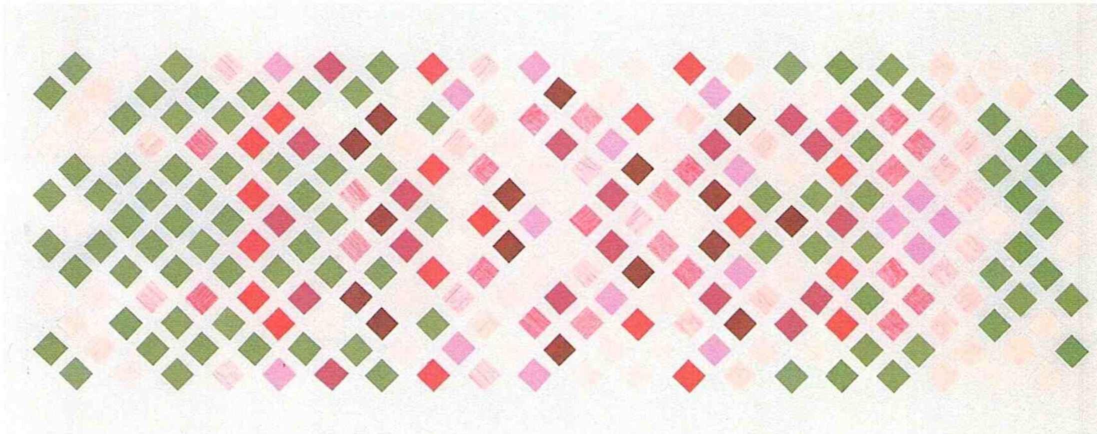
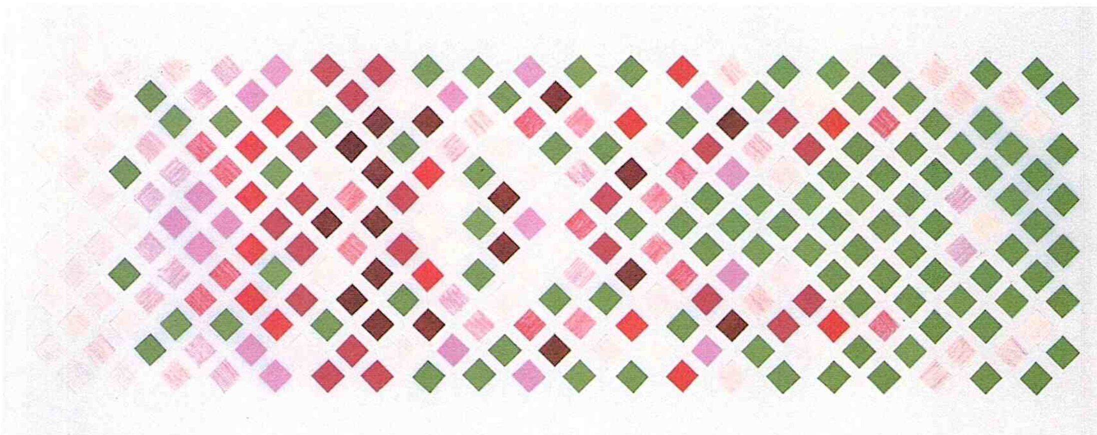


figure 30: August.



figures 28–30. A 1986 proposal by the author for a 90 x 300-foot gridded area of raised flower beds, this enormous field would ensure a diversity of blooms throughout the growing season.

Flowers tease our senses with color, fragrance, and striking, sensuous form: their sensory reverberations can transport us to a reassuring landscape, a place which is at the same time partially unknown. Flowers in memory can become a significant touchstone—as the seasons and years come and go, our repeated experiences of these flowers mark time, and their fleeting presence underscores our mortality. The combinations of sense, memory, and references to history offer possibilities for design explorations that are not post-modern, but expressionistic landscapes that are appropriate to a post-industrial society.

Garden flowers remind us that built landscapes are tenuous artifacts. Wildflower meadows speak differently than crisply edged beds of flowers, with their overt signs of cultivation. The forms in which flowers are used in landscape design are still undergoing transformation: traditional elements such as kitchen gardens, parterres, carpet beds, herbaceous borders and wildflower meadows are being reinterpreted as devices such as geometrically patterned borders, meadow fragments repeated in parterrelike patterns and meadows reinforced with cultivated herbaceous perennials. Today, new contexts and settings have provided challenging opportunities for the design of flower gardens.

A 1986 proposal by the author for a hypothetical 90 x 300-foot flower field as part of a corporate headquarters combined the use of tints of red with an attempt to express the particular seasons of the summer.[24] Herbaceous perennials and shrub roses were placed in a rotated grid of eight-foot square planting beds, raised sixteen inches, with four-foot wide grass paths on all sides to establish a green enframement and to make walkways. The coloration was planned to begin at the far west end of the long dimension of the garden, farthest from the facing building, where primary viewing throughout the day would occur. As summer progressed, the color field would advance, in a wave, culminating with the September colors nearest to the building. Each square in the composition was filled by only one plant species to isolate and express the particular qualities of each plant, before, during and after bloom. The size of the garden ensures that areas in peak bloom could be found each day of summer. In addition, a walk from one end to the other on any summer day would provide a record of seasonal transition. In winter, when the plant stalks were removed from each bed, the shadows of the raised planter edges would play against frosted grass and snow—a grid waiting for the warmth of spring to reactivate dormant foliage and another summer's bloom (*figs. 28–30*).

Designed collaboratively by Barbara Stauffacher Solomon and the author, the March 1988 flower show of Dayton's Department Store, a temporary garden with only a two week duration, is devoted to the fragrance and color of tulips, and is proposed for a windowless, climate-controlled space approximately 150 x 90 feet in the Minneapolis store. For many Minnesotans, this traditional event marks the first sign of spring. The design includes a processional corridor of columnar poplars at the perimeter, ending with

24. Richard Johnson, a student at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, completed the actual plant species collection and placement in this plan.

figure 27.

figure 27. A brilliant example of the flower border in France is in the Parc de bagatelle in Paris (1905) where an entire roofless room is planted in several species of iris. After they bloom, the foliage marks the changing seasons until the next spring's blossoms appear.

figure 26.

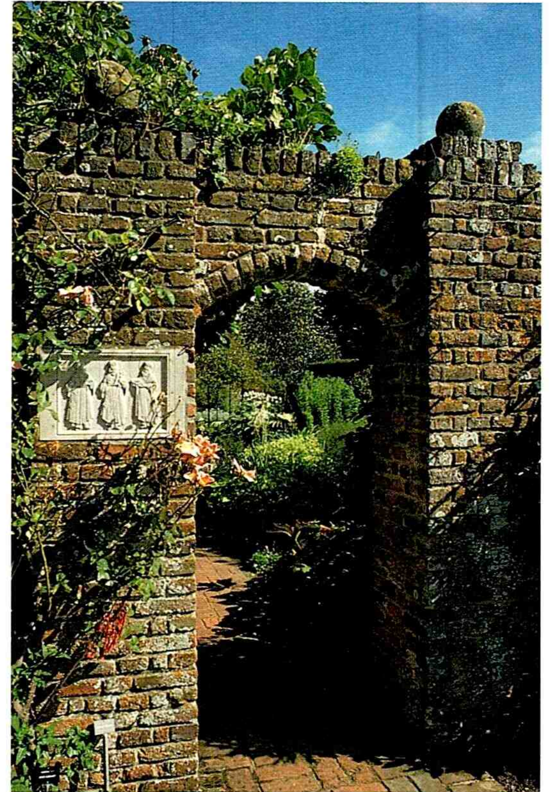


figure 25.

figure 25. The design of the Red Borders at Hidcote in Gloucestershire, by Lawrence Johnston, was in part inspired by Gertrude Jekyll's teachings.

figure 26. The spirit of Jekyll can be seen through the Bishop's Gate in the White Garden at Sissinghurst Castle Gardens, Kent, a series of garden rooms designed from the 1930s on by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson.

figure 31.

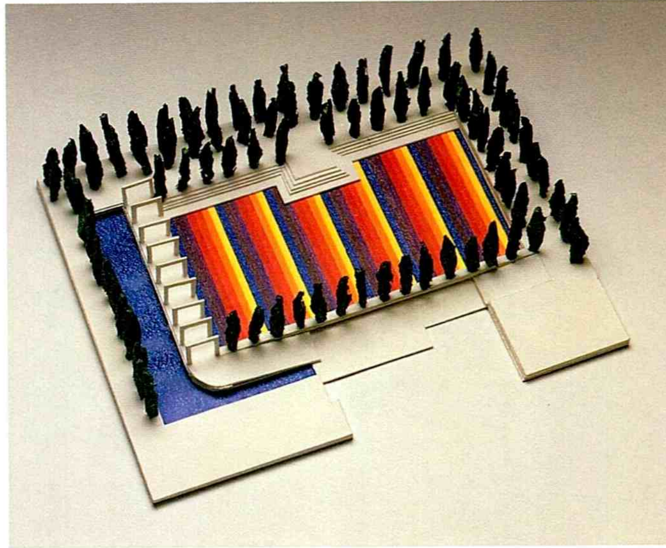


figure 32.

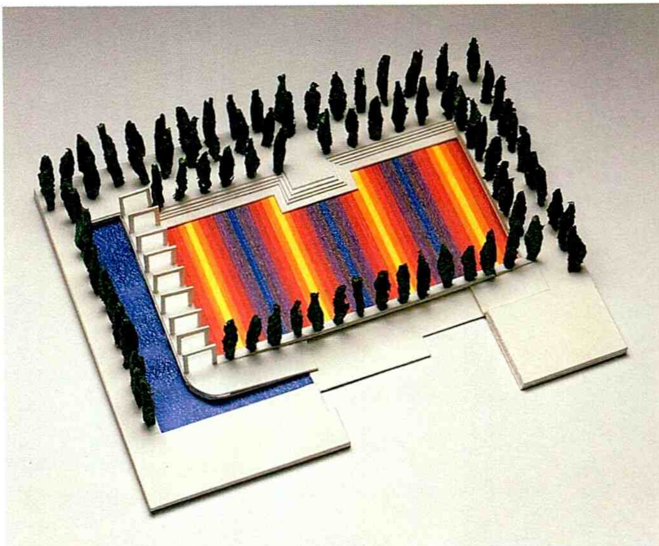
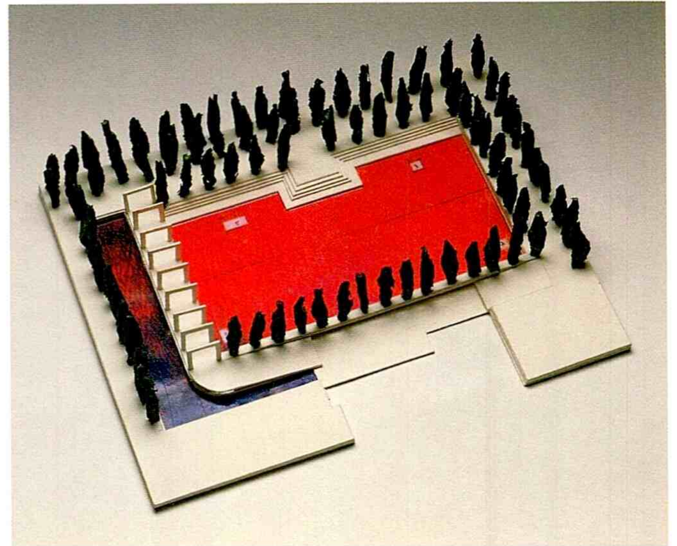


figure 33.



figures 31–33. In these models by the author and Barbara Stauffacher Solomon for the 1988 Dayton's flower show, the designers experimented with the color distribution of flowers in patterns reminiscent of those developed by Jekyll. The final design for the tulip bed (bottom, right) is entirely in various shades of red, bordered on one side by dark blue hyacinths.

a long pergola covered with fragrant southern jasmine. The walkway is elevated, for better viewing, two feet above a continuous field of tulips, forced into bloom. The movable chairs on a broad terrace at the edge of the field provide places for rest and contemplation.

Alternatives for color distribution in the field were considered, including experimentation with Jekyll's chromatic separation theories. In one proposal for Dayton's flower show, a gradient of the full color spectrum, from violet to yellow, was repeated in series at ten-foot intervals over the entire length of the space (*fig. 31*). Each floral color was represented as a two-foot band. In place of Jekyll's careful color blending with tints and shades, this garden attempts to engage the tension of somewhat abrupt color transitions, the result intended to create a pulsating field. A second proposal allowed the spectrum to end abruptly and repeat; at the end of each spectrum, yellow and purple were juxtaposed, establishing a stronger and more staccato rhythm than the previous example (*fig. 32*). A third composition, accepted for implementation, transforms another Jekyll theory, completing an entire garden with graduated shades of red from one side to the other (*fig. 33*). The distribution of one color over the entire field is intended to establish a condition of color immersion, with darker colors at the far side, first seen upon entry to the space, to heighten the sense of perspective and thereby enlarge the sense of distance.

Other contemporary American landscape designers and environmental artists are reinvigorating the design use of flowers. George Hargreaves used red geraniums and pampas grass as the enigmatic center of his design for the surreal Harlequin Plaza in an otherwise sterile office park in Denver. Martha Schwartz spelled words in series such as IGNORANCE, EVIL, MONEY and BLISS with pots of flowers in her 1986 Soho roof garden in New York City. Barbara Stauffacher Solomon has explored transforming agrarian flower fields in proposals such as her 1986 rows of flowers on raised earthen mounds as part of the flower field at the west side of the Cowles Conservatory in The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden.

Rampant lushness, saturated and luminous color, consuming fragrance, and ripening foliage are again being drawn into landscape architecture. Two diverse groups of people have emerged to make the cultivation of garden flowers a possibility once again: men and women whose cultural traditions have a positive affinity to gardens and their care, and young middle-class people, many with no background in gardening, who have chosen to practice the virtuous craft of gardening. These two groups of artisans are providing the hands-on nurturing essential to the reinvigoration of the flower garden in America. We are indebted to Gertrude Jekyll for recording her speculations about the design uses of flowers, and for reminding another generation of the fecundity of this potent, living medium.

For a complete bibliography of Gertrude Jekyll's publications, see *Gertrude Jekyll*, by Michael Tooley, 1984, printed by Michaelmas Books, the Old Vicarage, Witton Le Wear, Co., Durham, England.

For a complete listing of Gertrude Jekyll's garden designs done in collaboration with Edwin Lutyens and independently, see Jane Brown's *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon*.

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back cover gate. *"A proper place for shoes and stockings," from Jekyll's popular book* Children and Gardens *published in 1908.*

back cover. *In this photograph, Jekyll records the process of coppicing wooded areas.*