

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden

Seal Harbor, Maine

Photographs by Alan Ward 1983

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

I photographed the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden in 1984 for the exhibition “Built Landscapes: Gardens of the Northeast”, organized by Michael Van Valkenburgh. We were assisted by Patrick Chassé, who was researching the summer garden designed by landscape architect Beatrix Farrand.

A trip to Asia by the Rockefellers in 1921 profoundly influenced their vision for the garden before Farrand started the design in 1926. The site is a secluded location in northern Maine, where the visitor follows a sinuous path through a forest glimpsing a rose-colored wall through the pines (1,24). Arriving at the south entry, the view into the garden is framed through a Chinese gate to the Spirit Path, a linear walk of crushed stone lined with Korean funerary figures (2,25). The path is terminated by a Chinese stele in a small clearing with a view north to a pond (9,30). These antiquities were purchased from a Japanese antiques dealer and installed on the south to north axis, matching their original orientation. A curving path about midway along the funerary procession leads to the ledge pool, a small Japanese garden with a stone bench and lantern (10,31). The route through the forest and walled garden immerses the visitor in a palette of subtly-varied greens of the forest understory, that are the setting for the gray-stone pieces of Asian art. That is followed by passage through a second inner wall with a Chinese Moon Gate to the sunken garden, an open

sun-filled space with a central, rectangular lawn (12,32). The lawn is framed by brilliantly-colored herbaceous borders – resembling the patterns and textures of an English perennial garden (13-16,33-39)*. It is a surprising and stunning juxtaposition and contrast of Eastern and Western landscape design traditions.

My approach to photographing a site like the Rockefeller Garden is to depict the experience of walking through the landscape with views at eye level. Each photograph is done with a wide-angle lens, making an expansive image, exceeding the central and focused thirty-degree field of human vision.** The wide-angle lens emphasizes a sense of space, with a visible foreground, as well as distant elements leading the eye deeper into the space. I set up each image with a 4” X 5” view camera and photographed the exact scene in both black and white, as well as color, by exposing film holders with each type of film. I have elected to include both in this portfolio to contrast the obvious, as well as subjective differences, between viewing black and white - compared to color photographs. The images are arranged in the sequence of experiencing the garden. The cumulative effect gives a more intense depiction of the place than a single picture, conveying the artful integration of these two distinct cultural expressions of landscape architecture in one exceptional garden.

List of Photographs

1. Path from Eyrie, the summer house
2. South gate entrance
3. View back to south gate
4. View back through south gate
5. Beginning of Spirit Path at south end
6. Spirit Path with Korean funerary figures
7. North end of Spirit Path
8. Approach to the terminus of Spirit Path
9. Chinese memorial stele and overlook
10. Approach to ledge pool
11. View east from ledge pool
12. Moon Gate, entrance to sunken garden
13. View of north border, Moon Gate and spruce
14. Northwest corner of border looking south
15. View south in west ornamental border
16. View from west border to Moon Gate
17. View north of lawn and north wall
18. View north of pool and lawn
19. View south of pool and pagoda
20. Wall and bottle gate
21. View through bottle gate
22. View west after passing through east gate
23. Enclosing wall with Chinese coping tiles
24. Path from Eyrie, the summer house (Color)
25. South gate entrance (Color)
26. View back to south gate (Color)
27. View back through south gate (Color)
28. Beginning of Spirit Path at south end (Color)
29. Spirit Path with Korean funerary figures (Color)
30. North end of Spirit Path (Color)
31. Approach to ledge pool (Color)
32. Moon Gate, entrance to sunken garden (Color)
33. View of north border, Moon Gate and spruce (Color)
34. North wall and north border (Color)
35. Northwest corner of border looking south (Color)
36. Borders at northwest corner (Color)
37. View south in west ornamental border (Color)
38. View north of west border and lawn (Color)
39. View from west border to Moon Gate (Color)
40. View north of lawn and north wall (Color)
41. View north of pool and lawn (Color)
42. View south of pool and pagoda (Color)
43. Wall and bottle gate (Color)
44. View through bottle gate (Color)
45. View west after passing through east gate (Color)
46. Enclosing wall with Chinese coping tiles (Color)





























































































Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Exhibition Catalogue for "Built Landscapes: Gardens in the Northeast," 1984
"Built Landscapes/Gardens in the Northeast Exhibition and Catalogue," Awards Issue of *Landscape Architecture*, September/October 1984
Dietz, Paula, "The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden," *House and Garden*, February 1985
Dietz, Paula, "Design: Notebook: Retrospective of Gardens by Beatrix Farrand," *New York Times*, May 2, 1985
Dietz, Paula, "Quand Les Rockefeller Se Font Jardiniers," *Maison & Jardin*, November 1985
Balmori, Diana, et al., *Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses*, 1985
Strong, Donna, "Beatrix Farrand: Landscape Gardener," *Inland Architect*, January/February 1986
Chassé, Patrick, *The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden: a Visitor's Guide*, 1990
Ward, Alan, *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation*, 1998

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"Built Landscapes: Gardens of the Northeast" Harvard Graduate School of Design and circulated nationally, 1984-85
"Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes," Wave Hill, 1985
"Luminous Landscapes: Photographs by Alan Ward" The National Building Museum, 2016
"American Designed Landscapes: Space and Light" Sarasota Center for Architecture, 2018

* David Rockefeller, writing in the *The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden: a Visitor's Guide* in 1990, believes that his parents made numerous trips to England, where they visited English gardens that influenced the direction they gave to Beatrix Farrand.

** Thirty degrees is the focused field of view at the center of attention. The peripheral field of vision is much wider, in the range of 120 degrees.