

# Bloedel Reserve

Bainbridge Island, Washington

Photographs by Alan Ward 1996

# Notes on the Making of the Photographs

I photographed Bloedel Reserve to add to the collection of images for the book *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation* published by Spacemaker Press in 1998. Bloedel Reserve is the work, principally of Richard Haag, but also Thomas Church, Koichi Kawana, Fujitaro Kubota, and others. As a result, it has layers of design implemented at various times over a thirty-year period beginning in 1951. My intention was to reveal in photographs the experience of moving through a sequence of gardens, each with its own distinctive character and built at various times, to comprise a poetic story about nature and design.

The 120-acre former logging site is on Bainbridge Island, accessed by ferry from Seattle across Puget Sound. Paths through the Moss Garden beautifully reveal natural processes with remnants of felled trees, large stumps, along with sizable emergent trees, all in a simplified carpet of vivid green moss that wraps over these forest fragments (6-7). Wooded landscapes like the Moss Garden can be challenging to render photographically because of the extreme contrast range between light filtering through to the forest floor and large areas of deep shade. The human eye has significant latitude to see detail in both the brightest and deeply shaded areas that exceeds the range of photographic materials. I set up views and waited

patiently for this contrast range to be reduced by occasional clouds coupled with exposure and development times to further flatten the contrast. This was in the film era. The process is now simplified in digital photography by making multiple exposures for dark and light areas and merging in HDR (high dynamic range).

The winding path through the Moss Garden leads to the Reflection Garden, where a sudden design shift occurs. You step from immersion in the natural process of forest succession with mosses, ferns and rivulets to a rectangular pool framed by a mown lawn and clipped hedges (12-14). It has the geometry of a French Garden open to the sky, but within a Pacific Northwest forest. It is such a powerful idea that it seemed best interpreted in a wide-angle view centered on the pool, showing just enough lawn in the foreground to reveal the scale, and elevated enough to reveal the tall trees and sky. Since the design was governed by a geometric order, it was like photographing architecture with perspective correction used to keep the hedges and trees in the background vertical (12). A straight-on symmetrical view seems less self-conscious and lets the design begun by Thomas Church with the pool, and completed by Richard Haag with the frame of lawn and hedges, come forward and echo the timeless appeal of a clearing in the woods.

# List of Photographs

1. Middle Pond and house
2. View to Puget Sound from terrace
3. House on east bluff
4. View from Japanese guest house to Japanese Garden
5. Japanese Garden
6. Path entering Moss Garden
7. Evening in Moss Garden
8. Watercourse in Moss Garden
9. Ferns and watercourse
10. Stepping stones at watercourse
11. Path from Moss Garden to Reflection Garden
12. View north in Reflection Garden
13. Oblique view of Reflection Garden
14. Bench in the Reflection Garden
15. Boardwalk through forest bog
16. Bird marsh
17. Ducks in bird marsh
18. Path at edge of meadow
19. West meadow path in midsummer
20. View to Puget Sound from meadow













































# Notes

## **Selected Publication of the Photographs:**

Ward, Alan, "Trees in the Frame," *Arnoldia*, Summer 1997

Ward, Alan, *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation*, 1998

Saunders, William S., editor, *Richard Haag: Bloedel Reserve and Gas Works Park*, 1998

Simo, Melanie, *A History of Landscape Architecture at Harvard: 1900-1999*, 2000

Ward, Alan, "Time After Time," *Garden Design Journal*, June/July 2002

## **Exhibitions of the Photographs:**

"Luminous Landscapes: Photographs by Alan Ward" The National Building Museum, 2016

"American Designed Landscapes: Space and Light" Sarasota Center for Architecture, 2018