

Dumbarton Oaks

Washington, DC

Photographs by Alan Ward 1984, 2022

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

I photographed Dumbarton Oaks for the exhibition, "Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes," that was organized by Leslie Close, Director of the American Garden History Program at Wave Hill in New York. I worked with landscape architect Diana Balmori, who put together the section on Farrand's campus work and public landscapes. The exhibition opened at Wave Hill and included a catalogue of historic plans and images, as well as my contemporary photographs.

Diana Balmori was a talented designer, who researched Beatrix Farrand's work with owners Mildred Bliss and Robert Bliss at Dumbarton Oaks, done over a twenty-five year period concluding in 1947. Farrand began with symmetrical ordering and axial relationships at the core of her plan, that transitioned to less rigid and more natural patterns moving away from the center of the composition. Balmori wanted images of Dumbarton Oaks that depicted this evolution of design expression from the more architectonic elements associated with the house, terraces and walls on a hilltop in Georgetown, transitioning to Rock Creek at the lower elevations.

The photograph from inside the orangery is centered on a pair of doors opening out to a path leading to steps that start the descent

down the hill toward the creek (9). I used a 4" X 5" view camera with a wide-angle lens and the front raised to correct the perspective. It shows the axial relationship from inside to outside and illustrates the beginning of a series of adjustments in the design as paths and terraces step down the hill to fit with the topography. There is an intriguing ambiguity in this image because sunlight strikes the doors from within the space; and it is a view from inside an architectural space, however the vegetated orangery merges with the planted landscape beyond.

The image which further interprets Farrand's design intent is set farther down the hill and includes a sloping and sinuous path through a lawn leading to an arbor (28). The path beyond the arbor connects to the wooded riparian corridor of Rock Creek visible beyond. In this view, the framing is used to separate out extraneous elements in order to emphasize the path connecting to the arbor. It reinforces the idea that the frame is a powerful tool in photography to combine and juxtapose elements in a scene. I think about an imaginary frame as the ultimate editing tool that defines the content of what is included in the composition. Photography is a subtractive process to simplify and exclude the unessential to make a compelling image illustrating a design.

List of Photographs

1. Entrance drive and south lawn, 1984
2. Entry to the house and orangery, 2002
3. North vista and series of narrowing terraces, 1984
4. House and north terrace, 1984
5. Beech terrace, 1984
6. Green garden, 1984
7. View of pebble garden and Dumbarton Oaks Park beyond, 2002
8. Pebble garden, loggia and house, 2002
9. View east within orangery, 1984
10. View east to beech terrace and urn terrace, 1984
11. View west to the house from the rose terrace, 1984
12. Fountain terrace, 1984
13. View west to fountain terrace, 2002
14. View from arbor terrace to fountain terrace, 2002
15. Arbor terrace, 2002
16. Wisteria at arbor terrace, 2002
17. Path to lower garden and overlook from fountain terrace, 2002
18. View north on Prunus walk, 2002
19. Cutting garden, 2002
20. View south of box walk, 1984
21. View north to ellipse, 1984
22. Brick path and Terrior Column, 1984
23. Path to amphitheater and Lovers' Lane pool, 1984
24. Trellis at south end of amphitheater, 2002
25. Upper entrance to amphitheater, 2002
26. View north to Lovers' Lane pool, 1984
27. View south of Lovers' Lane pool and amphitheater, 1984
28. Path to arbor and kitchen garden, 1984
29. Arbor and kitchen garden, 1984
30. Bench in lower garden, 1984
31. Path to arbor and kitchen garden, 2002































































Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Balmori, Diana, et al., *Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses*, 1985

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

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

"View from the Orangery, Dumbarton Oaks," *Photo District News*, February 17, 2016

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses," Wave Hill and Harvard University, 1985

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

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