

Naumkeag

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Photographs by Alan Ward 1983, 1996

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

I photographed Naumkeag in 1983 for the exhibition “Built Landscapes: Gardens of the Northeast,” curated by Michael Van Valkenburgh, who was then an Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at Harvard. The focus on built gardens exemplified the relevance of design on the land at a time when there was an increased emphasis on landscape planning. It showed that the scale of a residential garden can be an important expression of the relationship of our culture to the land, as well as an ideal setting to test nascent design ideas.

I went to the site in early October. It was a perfect fall day with the warm vibrant colors of New England appearing in the background of each view, along with fallen leaves on the ground. What made it ideal and so productive, was the flat even light which reduced the contrast. It allowed views under trees with the detail and luminosity remaining in the foreground, as well as in the brighter open areas, including views outward to the Berkshires (9). The camera, whether using film or digital, has less light to dark latitude than the human eye, so the reduced contrast range on overcast days allows for the depiction of the subtle tones of the landscape in a photograph.

The exhibition opened in 1984 at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and circulated nationally for several years. The poster and cover of the catalogue for the exhibition featured the black and white image of the Blue Steps at Naumkeag (15). This photograph is representative of one of the fundamental characteristics of photography – its abstracting tendencies. I visualized the potential impact of this picture and employed a range of tactics inherent to the medium to amplify certain aspects of the scene and to diminish others to create an image emblematic of the design, not necessarily a depiction of reality. Control of the medium and its craft are essential to expression. Selecting the tones of black and white, which emphasize form, space and light over color, is an abstraction from everyday vision. I used an extreme wide-angle lens that showed an area beyond the normal human field of vision. The perspective was corrected in the 4” X 5” view camera by raising the front, so that the verticality of the trees and walls remain vertical, even though the view is elevated looking up a steep hill. A red filter was used to darken the foliage and emphasize the white trunks of the birch trees and curved railings against the dark background of vegetation. The image is thus manipulated to be quite an abstraction, not necessarily the truth.*

List of Photographs

1. Allée at entry drive, 1983
2. House by Stanford White and west entrance drive, 1983
3. Entrance to the house from the east, 1983
4. Panorama of afternoon garden, 1996
5. Afternoon garden, 1983
6. Steps to afternoon garden, 1983
7. View east to sloping lawn, 1983
8. Runnel and afternoon garden, 1983
9. Perugino view, early morning from west terrace, 1983
10. View to house from south lawn, 1983
11. Brick runnel leading to Blue Steps, 1983
12. End of brick runnel at Blue Steps, 1983
13. Steps and brick runnel detail, 1983
14. View from about midway on Blue Steps, 1983
15. Blue Steps and birch grove, 1983
16. View west from terraced lawn to Blue Steps, 1983
17. View south from runnel to terraced lawn, 1996
18. Apple orchard, 1996
19. Sloping lawn and sculpture, 1983
20. Bench along Linden allée, 1996
21. Column at entrance to Linden allée, 1983
22. Linden allée, 1983
23. Chinese garden wall and moon gate, 1996
24. Planting in Chinese garden, 1996
25. View west in Chinese garden, 1996
26. View north in evergreen garden, 1983
27. Arborvitae allée, 1983
28. Pool in the evergreen garden, 1983
29. View south of the pool and arborvitae allée, 1983
30. View from the overlook, 1983
31. Floribunda rose garden, 1983































































Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Poster and 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

Reeve, Margaret B., "Three New England Private Gardens," *Art New England*, July/August 1984

Campbell, Robert, "American Garden-Making as a Work of Art," Boston Globe, March 20, 1984

Yang, Linda, "Northeast Gardens in Photo Exhibition," New York Times, August 9, 1985

Tishler, William, *American Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places*, 1989

Treib, Marc, "Fletcher Steele, Landscape Architect: an Account of the Gardener's Life 1885-1971," Review Essay, *Journal of Garden History*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1991

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

Kay, Jane Holtz, "A Modernist Whose Landscape Artistry Redefined Gardens," *New York Times*, August 24, 1998

Karson, Robin, *Fletcher Steele, Landscape Architect: An Account of a Gardener's Life*, 1989

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

"American Icons," *Landscape Architecture*, Awards Issue, 1999

Simo, Melanie, *100 Years of Landscape Architecture*, 1999

Brown, Jane, *The Modern Garden*, 2000

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"Built Landscapes: Gardens in the Northeast" Harvard Graduate School of Design and circulated nationally, 1984-85

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

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

* See *American Photography: A Critical History, 1945 to the Present* by Jonathan Green for an excellent analysis of American photography and the characteristics of the medium

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