

Sissinghurst

Cranbrook, Kent, UK

Photographs by Alan Ward 1999, 2003

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Sissinghurst is a twentieth-century landscape design overlaid on a site with remnants of earlier phases of building. Originally a Saxon farm, a medieval manor house was built 800 years ago, and was subsequently replaced in the sixteenth century with a Tudor residence. The abandoned and deteriorated four-hundred-acre property was purchased in 1930 by Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicholson. They added another overlay by ingeniously reusing and incorporating the remains of existing structures to make a residence and garden. The entrance range, probably originally the stables, was renovated to become the living quarters (1,2,7), while the twin-peaked tower became Vita Sackville-West's room for writing (1,20,27,28). The remnants of walls were preserved - giving structure to a series of gardens that were added, modified and adjusted over the next three decades (14,15,19). As landscapes like Sissinghurst were reused or altered they still have visible traces of an earlier form. Landscapes with layers of design can be read like a palimpsest, where most of an earlier scheme was scraped away and new designs constructed, yet still show significant evidence of the past.

Sissinghurst is a sequence of spaces, each with well-defined thresholds from one garden room to the next with sculptural landmarks in each space (11-13,15-18). The view north from the tower extends beyond the current site to the fields and woodlands of the original Sissinghurst farm (8). The remaining walls of the Tudor house give geometric order to the garden that

was supplemented by planting yew hedges (8-10). The Priest's house was built in 1639, and the adjacent small garden was added in the 1930s and incorporated into the design of the White Garden in 1939 (8,13).

The vista south from the tower shows the path to the rose garden with its circular yew hedges on the site of an earlier kitchen garden (9,16,17), while the lime walk with pleached trees on cables, was begun in the 1930s and completed after the War as the southern boundary of the garden (18). The remains of a moat were integrated into the garden with a parallel mown grass path along a surviving wall - and terminated at an elevated seating area (23,24). A statue of Dionysus is framed in the view from the moat walk (30). The gardens transition along a mown path to an orchard and lake, that were on the site before the purchase of the property (27-28). The last few images are emblematic of the countryside beyond the gardens, that was once an integral part of the property (31,32).*

Sissinghurst is an interwoven collage of eras. The views in the photographs were chosen to illustrate this interaction and juxtaposition between the tastes and needs of the past and the designs by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicholson in the twentieth century. These photographs of Sissinghurst represent moments in time; in these moments there is accumulated evidence of the layers of design in the landscape.

List of Photographs

1. Lombardy poplars leading to entrance court, 1999
2. Entrance Range or Long Library, entrance court on right, 1999
3. Oasthouses north of the entry, 1999
4. Approach to the tower from courtyard, 2003
5. View east from tower to the yew walk, 1999
6. View back to entrance and Long Library, 1999
7. View from tower to entrance and Long Library, 1999
8. View to white garden and Priest's house, 1999
9. View from tower south to rose garden, 1999
10. View east to yew hedge, orchard and moat, 1999
11. Entrance to yew walk, 2003
12. Yew walk, 1999
13. White garden, 1999
14. Exiting white garden, tower lawn and steps, 1999
15. Entrance to rose garden, 1999
16. Entering the rondel, south cottage on the left, 1999
17. Leaving rose garden, entering lime walk, 1999
18. View west on lime walk, 1999
19. Medjez-el-Bab gate from rose garden to courtyard, 1999
20. South cottage garden and tower, 1999
21. South cottage garden, 1999
22. Entrance to south cottage, 2003
23. View east on moat walk to statue of Dionysus, 1999
24. Lutyens bench at west end of moat walk, 1999
25. Herb garden and nuttery beyond, 1999
26. Herb garden, bowl on plinth of tiles set on edge, 1999
27. Yew hedge and tower from the orchard, 1999
28. Orchard with lawn path, 2003
29. Gazebo at northeast corner of moat, 2003
30. Moat and statue of Dionysus, 1999
31. Lombardy poplars along the path to the lake, 2003
32. View west from the lake to the tower, 2003



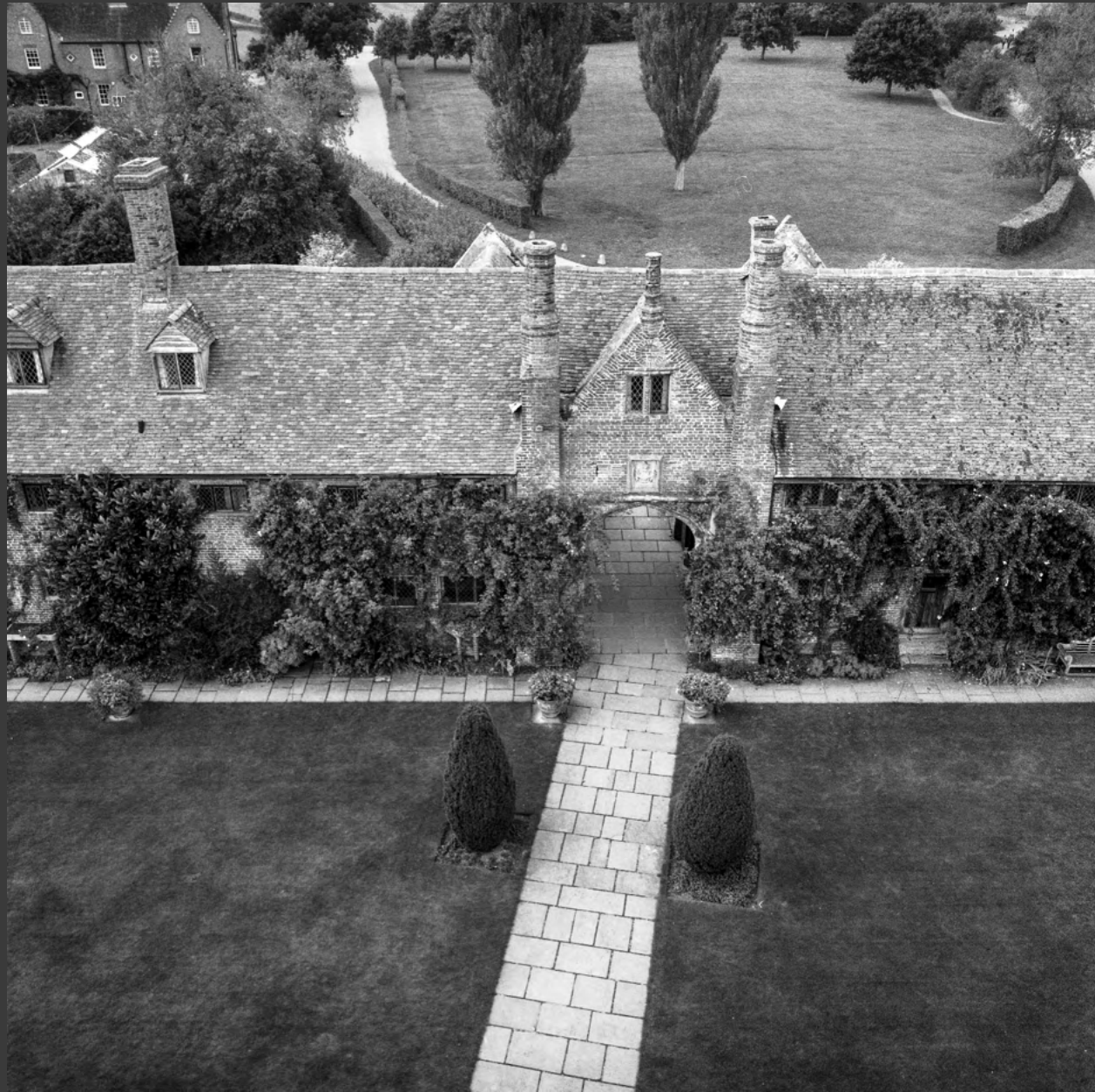






























































Notes

* See Adam Nicholson's *Sissinghurst: An Unfinished History* for a fascinating account and personal history of Sissinghurst, including the land beyond the gardens.