

Afterword to *Wrestling with Angels and Singing with Dragons: The Making of a Garden Across 45 Years*, by William H. Frederick, Jr.

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The introduction to Susan and Geoffrey Jellicoe's *Modern Private Gardens* (1968), a much-referenced garden survey that sits dog-eared in Bill Frederick's library, concludes, "If we visit a gallery of modern painting anywhere in the world—London, Tokyo, New York, or Rio de Janeiro—we find that behind the visual and literary associations belonging to that particular part of the world, there lies an abstract art that is universal in its appeal. So it is with gardens. Just as the mind is responding, in abstract art, to shapes which it appears to seek and often crave, so it responds to shapes in landscapes ... Like a painter, a designer of a garden may be unable to explain how he has groped his way to the result..."

In a recent conversation, Bill told me that the Jellicoes' book had influenced his own design enormously. I recalled an earlier visit with Bill and his wife, Nancy, in the spring of 2006, when Ashland Hollow's azaleas and wisteria were at their explosive peak of color. The tour began inside the Fredericks' living room, where a wonderful painting by Roberto Burle Marx demands attention with its bold use of color and flowing curvilinear forms. Little did I realize then that the painting offered more than a preview of the landscape outdoors. Now, thanks to the publication of *Wrestling with Angels and Singing with Dragons*, along with other authors' reappraisals of Burle Marx, we can unlock and critique the motivations, inspirations, experiences, and creative encounters—both conscious and subconscious—that have collectively shaped Bill's approach and philosophy as a designer. In his garden we can revel in a richly articulated and illustrative personal narrative spanning an unrivaled 50-year continuum of creativity and exploration.

My 2006 visit was part of a two-day excursion in Wilmington, Delaware, and other parts of the Brandywine Valley, an area where celebrated garden owners wear multiple hats, often serving as patrons, designers, master planners, horticulturists, and stewards. This tradition began with the du Ponts' significant garden and estate designs, mostly in the Beaux Arts and/or Picturesque style at Gibraltar, Nemours, Hagley, Winterthur, and Longwood Gardens—and continues today with Elise du Pont's *Patterns*, a garden that includes the last private residential design by Dan Kiley.

Like Henry Francis du Pont and his creative collaborators at Winterthur, Bill and Nancy Frederick share a quest for "strong bones, innovative design, and horticulturally rich" solutions. It is worth noting, in terms of regional garden heritage, that du Pont opened his house to the public in 1951, the same year the Fredericks were married and entered Cornell University. If H.F. du Pont had epitomized American decorative arts in the home and its grounds during the first half of the 20th century, Bill Frederick would subsequently import the emerging Modernist garden design movement from Europe, Scandinavia, and California to the Brandywine Valley, where he naturalized it with a sure hand. The international group that Bill refers to as Modernism's "bubbling cauldron" of talent included Conrad Hamerman and Peter Shephard, who both contributed to the design of Ashland Hollow, as well as Thomas Church, Geoffrey Jellicoe, Roberto Burle Marx, and Mien Ruys. All but Ruys visited the Fredericks in Delaware, though Bill and Nancy visited her at home in the Netherlands, as they did Burle Marx at his country place in Brazil.

It is no accident that all of these designers are represented in Shephard's book *Modern Gardens* (1953) or that Bill Frederick took up the author's cause. Just as Dan Kiley, Lawrence Halprin, and Garrett Eckbo promoted of Christopher Tunnard's *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* (1938), Bill became an advocate

for this new wave of thinking. Shepherd wrote, "In the last few years the gardens of the painter-gardener Burle Marx ... have made a revolution in Brazil. What there was of a landscape tradition in Brazil, in spite of its tropical climate, was European, and has produced little other than sterile symmetrical layouts, making little or no use of the country's flora and taking no account of the need for shade-giving trees. Burle Marx's gardens ... show a fierce reaction against all symmetry and rectangularity; they are full of sinuous curves, bold and aggressive on plan " He goes on, "But Burle Marx's most important lesson for Brazil has been the one William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll preached in England-the paramount value of plants native to the country."

While Ashland Hollow displays the clear influence of Shepherd and the Jellicoes, it also embodies a very personal sensibility. It exemplifies an artist at work in the garden, and it manifests Bill Frederick's study of the connection between painting and horticulture. A landscape architect and a preeminent horticulturist, Bill is also a painter who explores the expressionistic use of color in representations of the figure and landscapes on canvas, in many ways similar to artwork by Burle Marx. Bill has been influenced by his long fascination with Fauvist painting in the early 20th century; Ashland Hollow is testimony to decades of experimentation with color in the garden. This shows a courageous spirit and exacting discrimination, and it also achieves Bill's personal quest for "something of interest going on in the garden every month of the year."

Wrestling with Angels comfortably places Bill's work in the bubbling cauldron of modern garden design, as is clearly evidenced by his sweeping, biomorphic water features and planting beds, bold hardscape geometry drawn from Bauhaus principles, and strikingly expansive applications of color. Even so, the garden's ever-changing horticultural features and events lie lightly on the land. The sophistication, richness, and complexity of Bill's planting goes beyond the comparatively simple planting plans laid out in Modernist primers such as Thomas Church's *Your Private World: A Study of Intimate Gardens* (1968), whose chapter headings include "Plant It Away," "Plant to Screen Your Window," and "Don't Spare That Tree."

Bill recounts that a lecture his fellow Cornell landscape architecture student Conrad Hamerman devoted to his mentor, Burle Marx, back in 1951, was "a real eye-opener to me [and] in many ways the beginning of my search for an appropriate approach to contemporary garden design in our part of the world." *Wrestling with Angels* not only documents how time and again, over five decades, this challenge has been met successfully. It also serves as a permanent record of a garden that has no equal.

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