

Vizcaya

Miami, Florida

Photographs by Alan Ward 1980-81, 2000

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Vizcaya is an early twentieth-century landscape in Miami, Florida that immerses the visitor in a site that feels like an Italian Renaissance Garden. I made a number of trips to Miami for my planning and design work, and on each visit to Vizcaya, it seemed to echo the villas outside of Florence and Rome. That was the intent - as the owner Charles Deering, his advisor Paul Chafin, and designer Diego Suarez, all brought their experience of European classical gardens to this forty-three acre site in a subtropical climate on Biscayne Bay.

The design is organized around axial lines from the house; one axis leads east to the Bay. Three radiating lines extend south from the house to the garden and large natural area beyond, that was once part of the estate. While the garden is symmetrically organized, the experience is more complex as the path of the visitor is not as linear as it might appear in plan. Paths wind through a series of outdoor rooms framed by walls, trees and hedges (6,7,11,12). The flat Florida landscape is varied by building a table-top mound, ten to twelve feet high, aligned on the south axis with a casino terminating the view (17-18). Deering and Chafin had acquired sculptural pieces from Europe that Suarez skillfully incorporated into the site. The views of these pieces in light colored stone are striking when set against the dark green Florida vegetation (5-7). The sequence of images shows the varied experience that unfolds as you move through these spaces.

Water is a consistent and captivating feature of Vizcaya. There are elevated basins along paths, where at certain vantage points, the key elements of the composition including the residence, sculptural figures, and planting are reflected in the pools (14). The stone-barge breakwater (28) just offshore gains extra dimension and presence reflected in the Bay, while the path along the water's edge terminates at the tea house with framed views to the water (24-26).

The photographs show the effects of the challenging subtropical climate that has darkened, weakened, and chipped away at the coral stone walls, stairs, paving and other sculptural features, so that the site has an aged and weathered look (10). The brilliant sun of Miami presents its own challenge in photography because of the significant contrast range between the stone and the shadowed surfaces. I photographed the site back in the film era. Negatives were overexposed and underdeveloped to reduce the contrast, however this form of processing still left some images unprintable in the darkroom, however these negatives were later salvageable by scanning to reduce contrast and then processing in Lightroom to bring out a full tonal range. The photographs are thus a product of a hybrid process of using film and negatives, scanning the negatives, and then processing to enhance the tonal range with contemporary digital programs.

List of Photographs

1. Entrance to the garden, 1981
2. Center island and south façade, 2000
3. Live oaks flanking a basin and an island with topiary, 2000
4. Approach to cross-axial stair, 2000
5. Sculptural figures, 1981
6. Entrance to semi-circular basin, 2000
7. Semi-circular basin with antique columns and busts, 2000
8. Radiating axis and parterre garden with south façade, 2000
9. Radiating axis with basin and walls of the mound, 2000
10. View south of island in basin and live oaks, 2000
11. Central basin, cascade and grotto, 2000
12. Stairs and grotto, 1981
13. Fig-covered gazebo and south façade, 2000
14. Steps at cascade, basin with island and south facade, 2000
15. Stairs to central mound, 2000
16. Cross-axial stairs to the mound, 1981
17. Casino on the mound, 2000
18. Casino on south axis from the house, 2000
19. Steps south of casino to lawn and boat landing, 2000
20. Lawn at south side of casino mound, 1981
21. Steps to casino mound on south side, 1981
22. East terrace, barge breakwater and Biscayne Bay, 2000
23. Northern sea arm and boat landing, 2000
24. Barge breakwater and tea house from north arm, 2000
25. Southern sea arm and tea house, 2000
26. View through tea house to Biscayne Bay, 2000
27. View to house from south sea arm, 2000
28. Aerial view of house and stone barge breakwater, 1980

























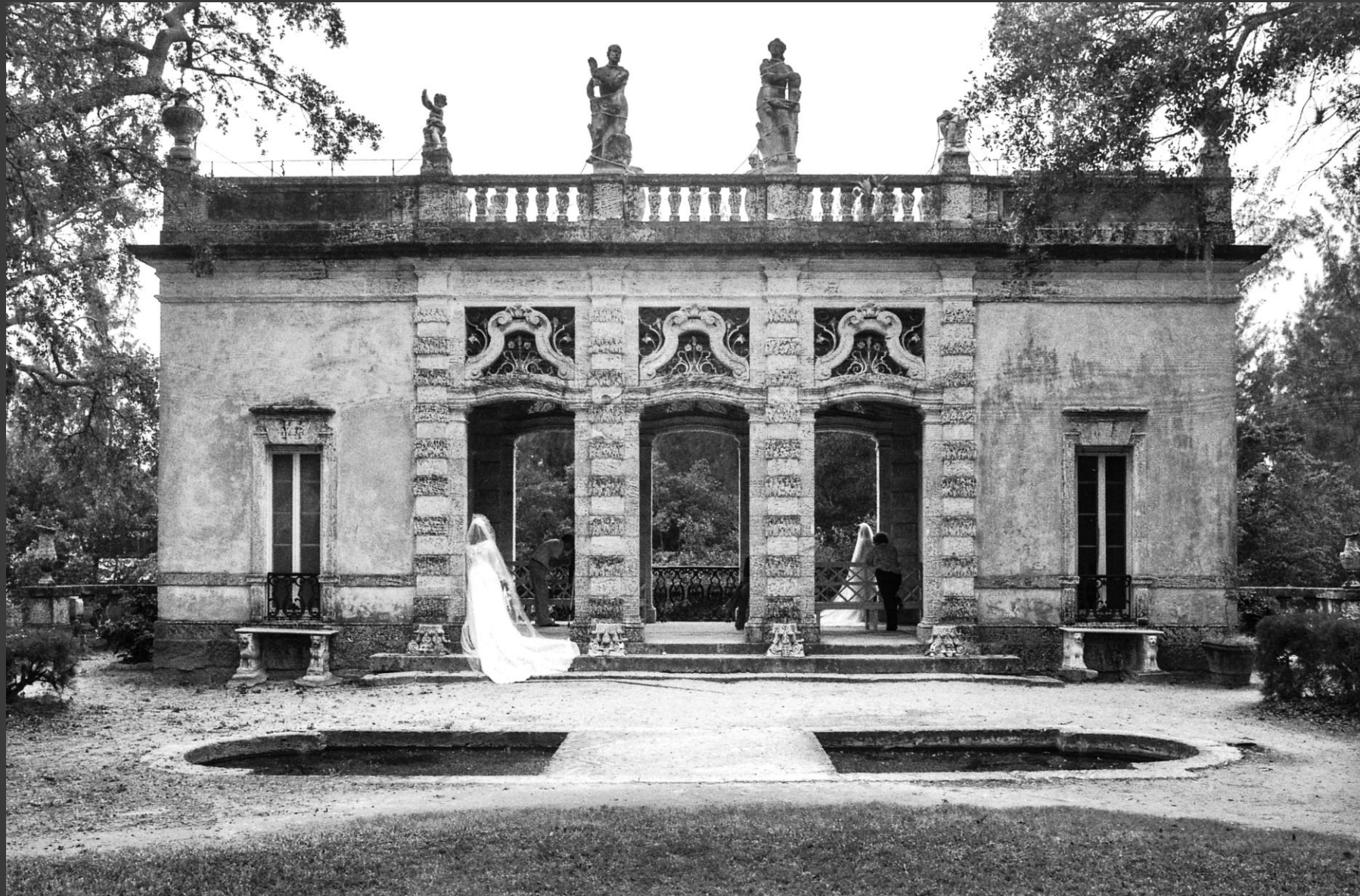
































Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Littlefield, Susan, *Seaside Gardening*, 1986

McGuire, Diane Kostial, *Gardens of America: Three Centuries of Design*, 1989

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