



BRITISH GARDENS
HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY AND DESIGN

Tom Turner



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Garden design began in West Asia and spread through Europe. This book tells how, in the British Isles, it flourished to an extraordinary degree. Following the historical method in Tom Turner's books on Asian gardens (2010) and European gardens (2011), it uses almost 1000 colour photographs, plans and style diagrams to provide a word and image history of garden design. Individual chapters cover the Celtic, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical, Romantic, Arts and Crafts, Modern and Postmodern periods. Additional information about the gardens in the book is available on the Gardenvisit.com website, which the author edits ?http://www.gardenvisit.com/history_theory/br...

British Gardens: History, Philosophy and Design Details

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Author : Tom Turner

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From Reader Review British Gardens: History, Philosophy and Design for online ebook

Kasia James says

Tom Turner teaches at the University of Greenwich, London, and his publication history is as extensive and ambitious as the scope of his latest book 'British Gardens: History, Philosophy and Design.' This book takes on the substantial task of documenting the progression of garden design all the way from the Prehistoric Period (3500BCE), through the Roman settlement of Britain, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Romantic and Classical Gardens, through to those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, discussing Arts and Crafts Gardens, Abstract and Modern gardens, and Post-Abstract and sustainable gardens.

An Australian Landscape Architect might ask what relevance British Gardens have to their everyday practice. Apart from rounding out general knowledge on the subject, I think it is safe to say that our historic gardens do owe a great deal to the development of ideas in the United Kingdom and Europe more broadly. Arguably, the correct management of those spaces should take into account the development of ideas which contributed to their design. Understanding the foundations which underlie current design practice also provides us with a deeper and more interesting pool of thoughts in which to fish.

'British Gardens' offers an insight into that progression of ideas, in a style and language that does not require a higher degree to understand. That said, this is not simply a coffee-table book, although it is generously scattered with illustrations, photographs and diagrams.

Each chapter systematically discusses the political, social and demographic changes of the era, and then goes on to describe in some detail the garden features which developed from those ideas. The thoughts and original writings (often in poetry) of particular gardeners, designers and landscape architects of note contribute greatly to the understanding of the zeitgeist of the times.

Having some prior knowledge of British history is a definite bonus when reading this book, and as particular sites are nominated throughout as retaining valuable aspects of each type of landscape, I can see that it would a valuable asset on a study tour of Britain. For those of us not as intimately acquainted with the historic estates, there are photographs, plans and diagrams to help appreciate these features.

Of particular note are the series of Style Diagrams developed by Turner. These attempt to distil into an idealised form the garden features of a particular approach, and it is interesting to see the effect of the ideas of each historic period on this plan. I would like to have seen more emphasis on these diagrams, especially as sometimes they appear quite small, and take a little deciphering, as they are an excellent key for Landscape Architects seeking to understand the implications of philosophy on the physical practice of garden design.

Perhaps in the aim of extending our general knowledge of the area, 'British Gardens' does sometimes stray a little off topic, I felt. For example, the philological basis for particular terms is sometimes discussed with a level of detail which could perhaps have been contained within a discrete section for those interested in this field. Structurally, I also found the references to a few of the most influential gardeners and designers a little confusing at times. For example, when they were involved in the design of spaces over a succession of styles, or when they had a lasting influence on later styles, the reader is left with the impression that these men lived for several centuries! Specifically, I'm thinking here of people like John Loudon, whose writings are scattered through references in chapters on Neoclassical, Romantic, and Arts and Crafts Gardens, which spans a period from 1730-1970.

Understandably, the books does cut to where the action is in the planning and design of landscape. For example, the Prehistoric chapter maintains a focus largely on the domestic landscape, while chapters from

the Medieval to the Romantic period concentrate more on the estates of the landed gentry. Later sections on Arts and Craft Gardens and Abstract Gardens return to the domestic scale, and then Postmodern municipal spaces. This is perhaps a good indicator of the social changes happening in each period, but also of the way that different layers of society have contributed to the progression of ideas throughout history.

Overall, 'British Gardens: History, Philosophy and Design' is a substantial work of scholarship, written in a highly accessible and engaging way. It contains a wealth of information to help decode and understand garden and more broadly landscape design, and is a valuable resource to all Landscape Architects, British or otherwise.

John Andrews says

The author traces the history of gardens in England, Scotland and Wales from the present day back to the stone age (including Stonehenge) and back to France, Germany, Italy etc and back to the origins of garden design in Asia (which I also read about in Tom's book on garden history in Asia. Next thing I am going for is his book on European gardens. The book has an amazing number of illustrations. I love the plans and diagrams but could have done with more large photos.
