

THE RESTORATION OF GARDENS OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

GENERAL BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

In 1967, the International Federation of Landscape Architects (I.F.L.A.) set up a historical section, the aims of which are as follows :

1. The establishment of a list of gardens of historical interest throughout the world ;
2. The making of an attempt to find the necessary means for protecting, conserving and restoring those recognized as worthy of attention, and arranging for their upkeep ;
3. The examination and recording in writing of the rules to be observed by those in charge of these gardens, with regard both to architectural design and to the plants to be grown and their settings and immediate surroundings ;
4. The adoption of energetic measures to prevent the destruction of gardens thus qualifying for protection.

These aims are akin to those of ICOMOS in the field of monuments (and in a way historic gardens are themselves monuments).

Following an agreement between the two organizations, ICOMOS is organizing a symposium - the first of its kind - the agenda for which is given below :

1. General report : definition of terms and the problem of inventorying
2. Dangers threatening gardens of historical interest and factors which could cause their destruction.
3. The problem of big private gardens.
4. Laws which might be invoked for the protection of gardens.

5. The conservation of gardens of historical interest.
6. Ornamental features.
7. Documentation.

Doubtless because they embody a synthesis, as it were, of the different arts, gardens have always been the product of what is most refined in artistic creation. Here the artist's material itself is of an exceptional quality, for it is no more nor less than nature. He is not seeking to subdue his medium as in the other arts, he is wrestling with nature which is constantly developing and changing. He must overcome it, or allow it to speak, to just the right degree, and while he must treat nature with reverence, his reverence must not be excessive, otherwise his work would be neither a human creation nor a work of art.

Thus the art of making a garden consists in the instilling of order by a human agency into a living material of which man is a part and without which he cannot live. The garden will offer him both that beauty which will elevate his spirit and the oxygen without which he could not breathe.

Historic gardens, in the way they are laid out, embody a system of rules of design which are, as it were, the grammatical rules of the profession.

The present-day gardens they are what the works of the great writers of the past - Homer, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Goethe - are to the languages even of to-day. But for the age of leisure on whose threshold we stand, they are something whose influence on society may be very important; they may help to give the masses a sense of the value of the individual. They are the best possible gateway to those inalienable treasures which lie in nature and in all the arts.

A garden may be considered as of historical interest if it belongs

to the past, even if that past is in some cases recent.

To be considered, a garden must be of undeniable value and will generally be recognized as being part of our cultural heritage.

Such gardens may be regular or irregular in shape, classical, baroque, romantic or of the artificial landscape type ; however they must be original works of art.

Gardens of historical interest are living monuments.

Where they are not intact they must be restored. Even if they are intact they will have undergone alteration, for their plants, which are living things, will with time affect the appearance of the whole and finally transform it altogether. Hence gardens rarely resemble their original selves ; they are not static like architectural monuments but are living things.

A historic garden is not merely an unquestionable cultural treasure, it will enhance a town and often be the cause of its celebrity. The funds invested in such a garden are invested at a profit.

For all the above reasons it will be clear that principles should be laid down governing the conservation and restoration of historic gardens as their past traditions deserve. These principles may be summarized as follows :

1. While a garden is unquestionably the joint work of a designer and a gardener, it is preferable, where a study is to be made with a view to restoration, to start by examining its architectural structure and the idea and general atmosphere which give the work its originality.

Such a study will be much more a question of scale than a question of detail. However, care must always be taken to see that the plants or trees serve to stress the general idea and do not disturb the general harmony of the whole.

2. The principles of design, in the case of ancient gardens, are to be found embodied in examples and are also to be laid down in writing, as well as being a matter of tradition.

Each country, it is true, has its traditions. However, each age has its basic rules and a given style to which all must conform. Such rules may be interpreted with a degree of flexibility, but if they are to be interpreted at all they must first be known, and they cannot be forgotten unless they have first been learned.

3. In restoration work too much attention must not be paid to restoring parts which have disappeared down to the last detail ; it is better to replace them with something in keeping with the spirit of the appropriate period.
4. Historic gardens may contain imperfections of a minor nature. The fact that a garden is ancient does not make of it something absolutely perfect.

If one of such imperfect detail has been destroyed, it must obviously not be reinstated when restoration work is done. Care must merely be taken to restore that part of the garden in the general style of the period.

5. If historic gardens are to fulfil their purpose they must once again become places of enjoyment and entertainment and not mere pieces of decoration.

Entertainments must be a means and not an end and must not therefore be given more importance than their surroundings, or spoil the atmosphère ; they must remain minor activities.

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