

## *American Book Notes*

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Piet Oudolf's name seems to be on the tip of every gardener's tongue these days, especially since the publication of *Hummelo: A Journey Through a Plantsman's Life* (reviewed in HORTUS 118). Now he has a new feather (or, rather, carex blade) in his editorial cap, *Gardens of the High Line: Evaluating the Nature of Modern Landscapes* with co-author and photographer Rick Darke (Timber Press, \$40/£25). This lush, oversize paperback brings to life one of America's most sought-after destinations, New York City's famed High Line. Before it was restored, this abandoned elevated railway track on Manhattan's West Side was an overgrown wilderness and something of an eyesore. But thanks to visionaries Robert Hammond and Joshua David, founders of the Friends of the High Line, a design team was assembled to give it new life. Today it serves as a sumptuous walkway filled with Oudolf's signature plant palette – drought-tolerant perennials, wildflowers and native grasses. The book provides a walking (or jogging) tour of the High Line from the Gansevoort stairs at West 13th Street, through Chelsea, to the rail yards loop ending on West 33rd Street. Hammond, in his introductory comments in the book, sees the High Line as 'an art museum on an industrial structure . . . a community space running a mile and a half through several neighborhoods [and] a botanical garden suspended over city streets'. It takes us through four seasons along the old tracks, where plants spill out and bring joy to thousands of visitors each year. It is worth noting that since the High Line, Oudolf has been much in demand for new commissions, including a new meadow garden currently being installed at the Delaware Botanic Garden, which may rival the Lurie Garden in Chicago.

*The Art of Gardening: Design Inspiration and Innovative Planting Techniques from Chanticleer* by R. William Thomas, with photographs by Rob Cardillo (Timber Press, \$34.95/£25) chronicles a romantic and imaginative public garden near Philadelphia. It's a plantsman's

dream garden, the equivalent of Great Dixter in Sussex, yet on a scale that definitely appeals to home gardeners. While Cardillo's colour photographs provide visual appeal, the text is filled with practical advice for plant selection based on the size and scale of the garden. Even if you don't have a garden, the book is a source of pictorial and practical inspiration and a wonderful read.

*The Bold Dry Garden: Lessons from the Ruth Bancroft Garden* by Johanna Silver, with photographs by Marion Brenner (Timber Press, \$34.95/£25) documents one of America's most famous private gardens. Located in Walnut Creek, California, the Ruth Bancroft Garden is justly renowned for its collection of outsize cacti and succulents. It is also renowned for the extraordinary woman who created the garden literally from scratch. More than twenty-five years ago, Frank Cabot's visit to this garden inspired him to found the Garden Conservancy to help preserve such treasures. The Conservancy now has a dozen or more gardens in its portfolio and hosts an active open-days programme across the country. The book provides a history of the garden and its founder as well as practical information about design principles and plant palettes, all beautifully photographed by Brenner.

In addition to the many titles on practical gardening published by Timber Press, they also publish books on garden history and design inspiration. Susan Cohen's *The Inspired Landscape: Twenty-One Leading Landscape Architects Explore the Creative Process* (Timber Press, \$50/£35) takes readers on a personal journey through the realm of landscape architecture. The book draws from the work of internationally-known designers such as Tom Stuart-Smith and Kim Wilkie, to lesser-known Americans, such as Gary Hilderbrand, Thomas Woltz, and Sheila Brady. Thrown into the mix is Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, doyenne of Canadian ecological landscapes, Charles Jencks (Garden of Cosmic Speculation) and several Japanese designers. With the aid of sketches, plans, and photographs, Cohen (a landscape architect based in New York and Connecticut) fleshes out the creative design process that makes for extraordinary landscapes. It is certainly a book worth savouring.

Marta McDowell, a seasoned author whose previous books, *Emily*

*Dickinson's Gardens* and *Beatrix Potter's Gardening Life*, focused on creative women, has changed tack a bit with her newest book, *All the Presidents' Gardens: Madison's Cabbages to Kennedy's Roses – How the White House Grounds Have Grown with America* (Timber Press, \$29.95/£20). Previewed in HORTUS 120, it explores how the garden's design has been influenced over the years by White House links with British royalty. (Her forthcoming book, *The World of Laura Ingalls Wilder: The Frontier Landscapes that Inspired the Little House Books*, returns to the female theme.) McDowell's innovative history of the White House and the horticultural activities of several presidents offers a refreshing change from the onslaught of political memoirs. Who knew about Madison's cabbages or Jackie Kennedy's roses? Her book begins with 'plant-obsessed' George Washington and ends with Michelle Obama's widely praised kitchen garden. More than two hundred black-and-white and colour illustrations, ranging from seed packets and sepia-toned photographs to Queen Elizabeth planting a tree (with George H. W. Bush digging the hole) in 1991, greatly enrich her pages. Through the lens of the White House gardens, one can get a sense of America's rich horticultural and garden history.

Beatrix Farrand (then Miss Jones), who designed the East Garden at the White House in 1913 under President Wilson, reappears in *The Rockefeller Family Gardens: An American Legacy* by Cynthia Bronson Altman, Todd Forrest, and Cassie Banning (Monacelli Press, \$50). This lavishly illustrated book, with photographs by Larry Lederman, documents the gardens of one of America's most famous families. Kykuit and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden are both nationally significant gardens. Located in Pocantico Hills, near Tarrytown, New York, Kykuit (the Dutch word for 'lookout') was the country retreat of John D. Rockefeller. Later improvements were made by his son, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and, finally, Nelson Rockefeller, who saved it from extinction. The bucolic grounds were originally laid out by the Olmsted Brothers, but the later work of architect William Welles Bosworth brought much-needed Beaux-Arts formality to the estate. Kykuit is now a site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and open to the public.



Hydrangeas bloomed at the White House after the Civil War.  
(From *All the Presidents' Gardens.*)

The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden in Seal Harbor, Maine, is a much more personal garden. Designed in the 1920s by Beatrix Farrand for John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his wife Abby, it is still a summer retreat for the family. In this exquisite garden, Farrand deftly balanced naturalism and formality with dazzling plantings and superb architectural detailing. This beautiful book will surely inspire everyone to visit both gardens, different as they are.

In the United States, the profession of landscape architecture continues to be documented with many excellent books about individual designers and their work. One of the heaviest is *Warren H. Manning: Landscape Architect and Environmental Planner*, edited by Robin Karson, Jane Roy Brown and Sarah Allaback (University of Georgia Press, \$39.95), and nearly four hundred pages in length.

One might well ask, who was Warren H. Manning? Manning (1860–1918) worked for the Olmsted firm before establishing one of the nation's largest landscape firms, designing more than sixteen hundred projects, from small home grounds and estates to campuses and parks. Like many American practitioners, he fell into obscurity after his death a hundred years ago. For the specialist, this detailed book commemorates his life and work.

Somewhat better known is modernist landscape architect James Rose (1913–91), who is the subject of an attractive book, *James Rose* by Dean Cardasis (University of Georgia Press, \$26.95), part of a series honouring modern masters. Rose, rebellious by nature, was sometimes referred to as the 'James Dean of landscape architecture'. He attended (and was expelled from) Harvard's Graduate School of Design that also turned out Daniel Urban Kiley, Garrett Eckbo and other significant figures who rebelled against the prevailing Beaux Arts approach to design. Most of Rose's landscapes have vanished, but his former home (now the James Rose Center for Landscape Architectural Research and Design) in New Jersey, is an exceptional example of his work. Rose was known for his creativity (he worked directly on-site) and frugality (he often used discarded railway sleepers in his designs). His gardens continue to be inspirational and this book gives a rarefied glimpse of his career, as do his own books, *Gardens Make Me Laugh* (1965) and *Creative Gardens* (1958).