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english rose

In her new book, *Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden*, Judith B. Tankard walks us through some of the legendary designer's most elegant environments

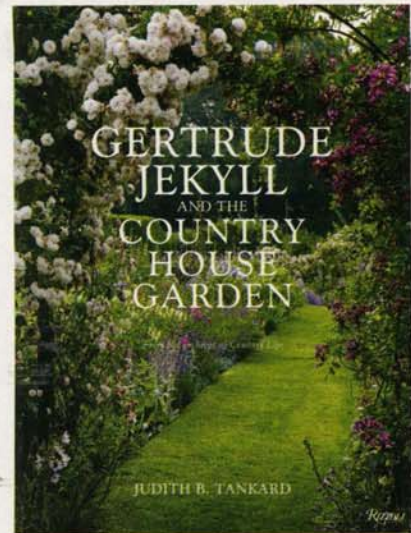
BY SUSAN S. ELLIOTT

hERBACEOUS BORDERS were an innovation of the late 19th century, and no one was more influential in this beautiful gardening style than Gertrude Jekyll. Born in London in 1843, Jekyll trained as a painter and craftswoman as a young woman. She studied art in Italy and France and traveled abroad to Greece and Turkey. After her father's death, she resided with her mother at Munstead House in Surrey. She remained in Surrey for the rest of her life, and from this base she collaborated on some 50 gardens with acclaimed architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. In all, Jekyll designed nearly 400 gardens in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States.

Jekyll wrote a multitude of magazine articles with practical advice and aesthetic recommendations for gardens in *Country Life* and *The Garden*. She wrote more than 10 books, including

Roses for English Gardens, *Colour in the Flower Garden*, and *Gardens for Small Country Houses*. Judith B. Tankard's newly released *Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden* pursues an in-depth look at Jekyll's accomplishments and her significant contribution to gardening in the 20th century. Divided into five sections and with 200 color and black-and-white photographs—many from the *Country Life* Picture Archive—this book is invaluable for readers with a desire to learn more about Jekyll and her life.

Jekyll was a fascinating and extremely talented woman, and Tankard's graceful prose brings her to life. Jekyll excelled at gardening in her native Surrey and knew what plants would thrive in that particular soil and climate. When she hired Sir Edwin Lutyens to design her own home in



TOP: In 1917, Jekyll designed this lily pool in the old stable yard and recommended dahlias, phlox, and other warm-toned plants. Today Barrington Court in Ilminster, Somerset, belongs to the National Trust and is open to the public.
ABOVE: The new book from Rizzoli



the mid 1890s, she established her gardens first and left a void in the middle for him to create her manor. Both Jekyll and Lutyens stressed the importance of vernacular building traditions, and Jekyll often relied upon local building materials for her stone terraces and walls. When unable to visit a garden that she was designing, she always inquired as to the color of the stone employed and requested soil samples.

One of Jekyll's legacies to modern gardeners was her dependence on gray foliage plants. Her early artistic training provided her with an astute sense of color and attention to detail in her plant compositions. Jekyll theorized that gray and gray-toned leaves gave the eye a place to rest, allowing the viewer's gaze to peacefully drift across a colorful border.

Amazingly, Jekyll was at her busiest designing gardens when in her late 70s. Even when her eyesight failed she was able to continue with planting schemes because she understood what plants made harmonious combinations. At 85, she still offered planting suggestions to Lutyens. Because of her ingenious use of hardy plants, some of Jekyll's gardens still exist today, and several are open to the public. ❖

ABOVE: Jekyll's palette for this herbaceous border at Hestercombe in Somerset was inspired by the local soft-gray stone. Nearly all of the original plants at Hestercombe came from Jekyll's nursery at Munstead Wood.

LEFT: Framed by viburnum, Jekyll's beloved spring garden at Munstead Wood in Surrey, England, features rambling paths.