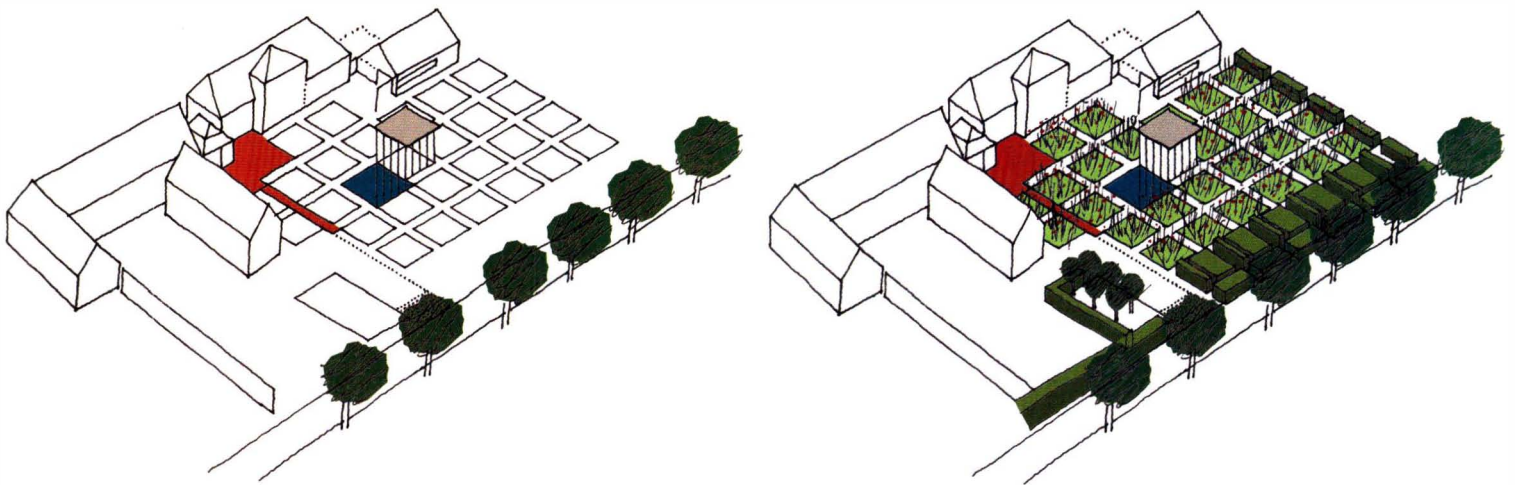


CHRISTOPHER BRADLEY-HOLE

MAKING THE MODERN GARDEN



with MARK GRIFFITHS

MITCHELL BEAZLEY

and cultures. For example, the temple of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto contains an enclosed landscape just 250sq m (2,700sq ft). It consists of a bed of raked pale gravel and 15 stones. The only plant is the moss that fringes the stones. Utterly simple yet conceived with consummate artistry, this landscape is an abstraction of Nature that evokes complex feelings and associations by a process of radical reduction. In this respect it is a modern garden, albeit 500 years old.

What Modernism offers us, then, is the distillation and synthesis of certain fundamentals of garden design. Couple these with new materials and technologies and a new spirit of exploration, and it becomes impossible to name any other period of horticultural history that has promised more diversity and innovation than the present. For the garden, the 21st century is the modern age. I, for one, feel excited and privileged to have arrived there at last.

When it first appeared in 1936, George Taylor's book *The Modern Garden* predicted big changes in horticultural fashion. In fact, those changes have become widely apparent only in recent years. Even now the modern garden remains *terra incognita* for some and liable to prompt misgivings. For example, to mark its bicentenary in 2004, the Royal Horticultural Society staged a debate in London. Underlying the motion of the debate, *This house believes that horticultural craft will determine the culture of the gardens of the future at the expense of artistic expression*, was a concern that "traditional" horticulture and ultra-modern design were incompatible and heading for a nasty divorce.

For me this spins on a false dichotomy. One can certainly be both a plant and a design person. Indeed, great modern design and great planting are not only compatible but sometimes inseparable. So the pages that follow amount to a plea, really, that we should overcome these anti-modern prejudices and allow the garden the same developmental sophistication that we are prepared to accept in other art forms. At the same time, I want to offer guidance on what to look for in modern gardens, where to find them, and how to make them.

From all of this a message emerges to solace those who worry that Modernism drives a barrier between design and horticulture. A garden does not need plants like a library needs books, but the influences of landscape and vegetation are a different matter. All gardens are informed by these. This relationship between Nature, culture, and cultivation is something I explore in this book. It is the big idea behind many contemporary designs, as it is now in the world beyond them. Little wonder that the modern garden, powerful and poetic, has become such a vital means of self-expression.

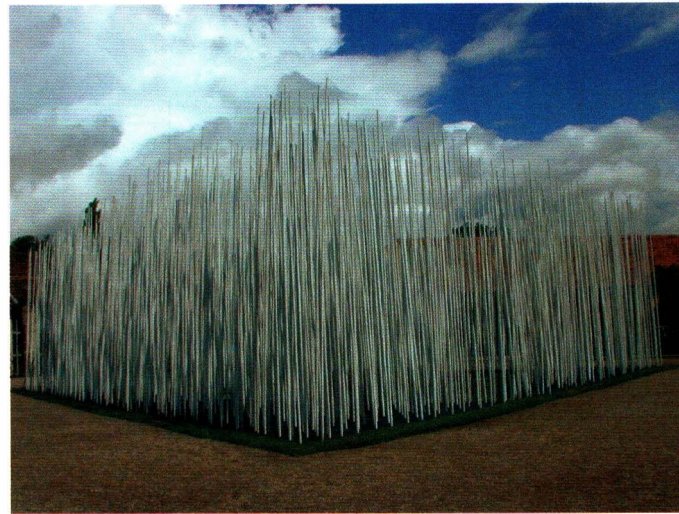


For the Chelsea Flower Show in 1997, I designed a Modernist garden inspired by the Roman poet Virgil. I believe that gardens can convey complex narratives, and my intention here was to engage the viewer in an exploration of the relationship between Nature, culture, and cultivation.

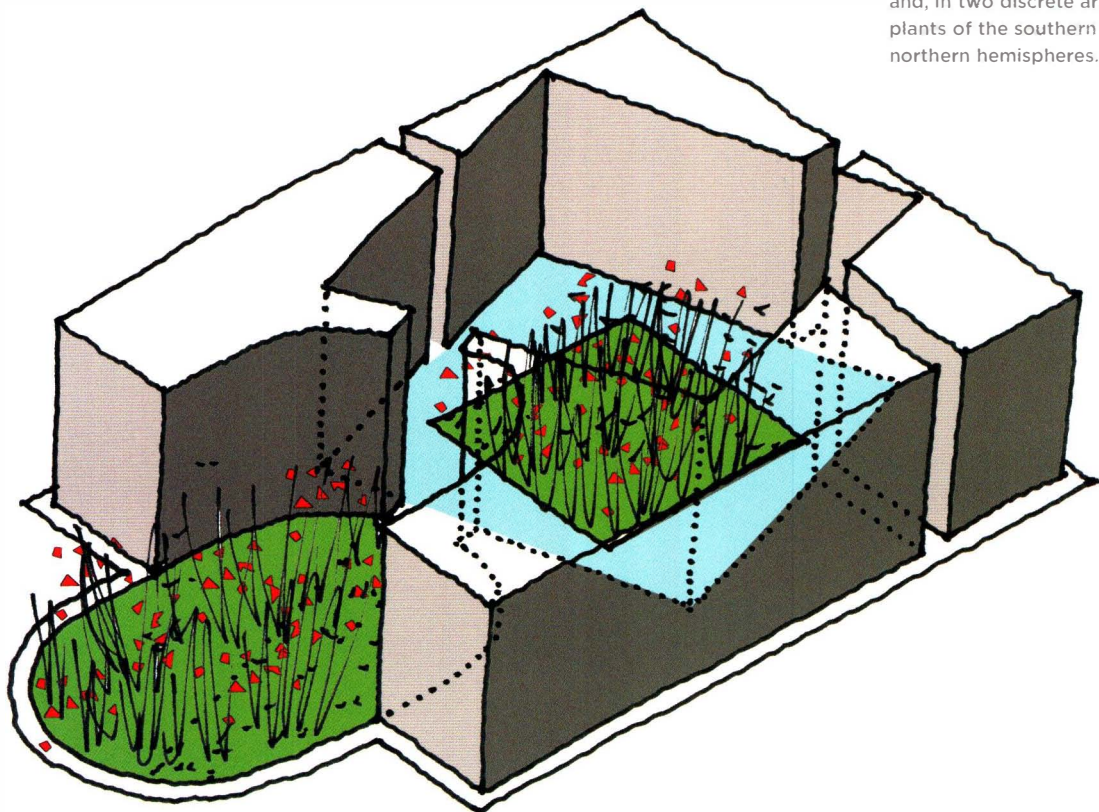
signed in 1215, an acre of English ground was given to the American people for a memorial landscape. Steeped in Jungian thinking, landscape architect Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe used the metaphor of the pilgrimage through life to design a unique garden of remembrance. This physical interpretation of a celebrated life in the form of a modern landscape is a powerfully moving experience.

Recently, I was asked to design a garden in Weimar, Germany, inspired by plant hunting in the South Seas. This three-dimensional event is also an expression of imagination about travel, sea, vastness, wildness, dryness, and unknown terrain. The garden is divided into two areas: one, surrounded by water, contains plants of the southern hemisphere, and the other, plants of the northern hemisphere. The garden celebrates Linnaean taxonomy and plant collection, and the poet Goethe's work in developmental biology. It is also a contemporary interpretation of the impact of historical events that continue to shape our world.

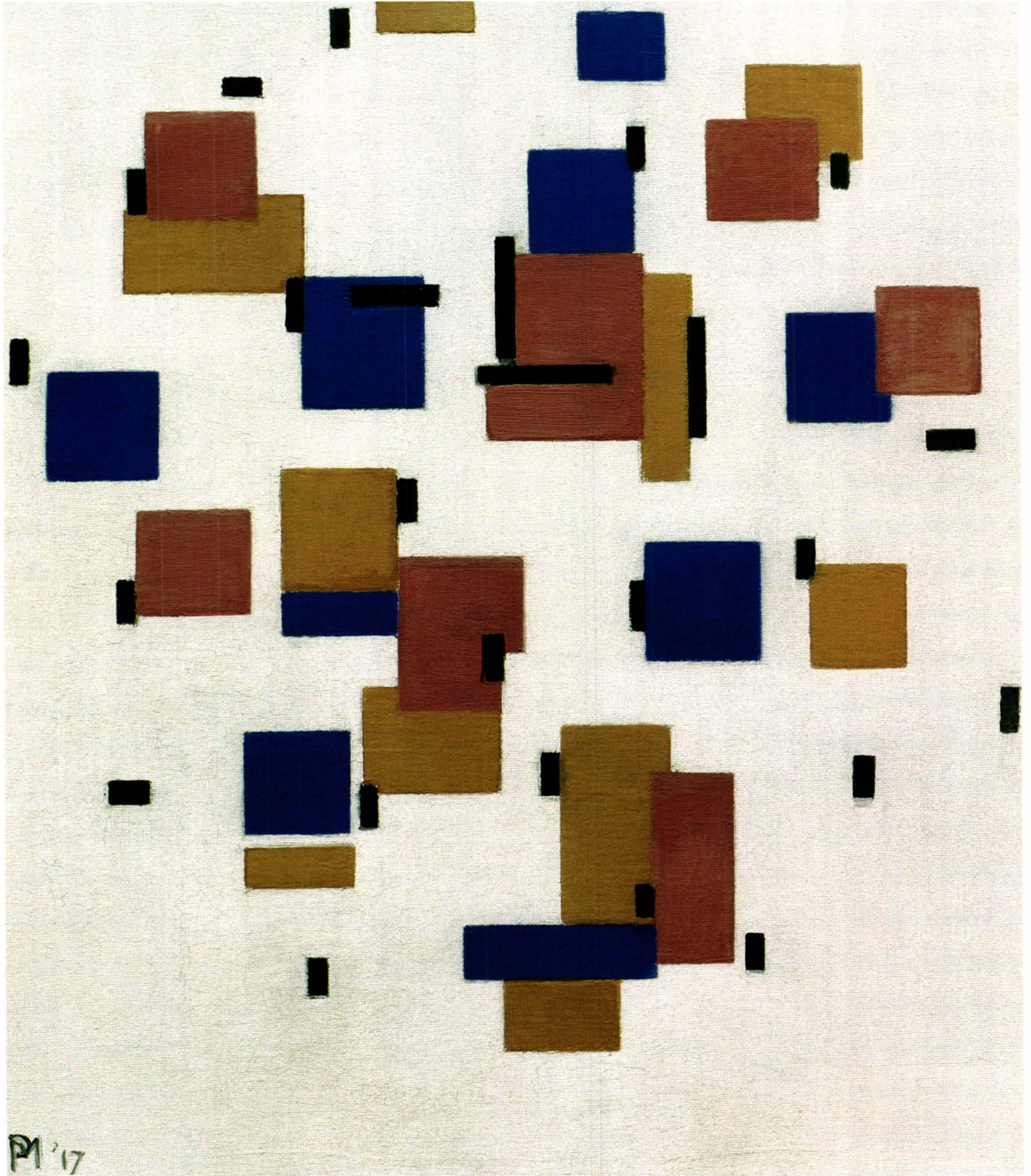
Gardens, then, can be so much more than merely pleasing assemblages of form and colour. Like any other artwork, they can contain a multiplicity of meanings. In the 18th century it was customary to imbue them with meaning at every turn and, as in a great novel or symphony, this needed time and teasing out. Today, however, when gardens and other sources of gratification are expected to be easy and instant, we stand in danger of forgetting the narrative in our garden making. A thing of immense potency and plurality, the garden has fascinated writers, philosophers, artists, and patrons. But only by resonating with meaning, with ideas old and new, can it continue to be the greatest art form.

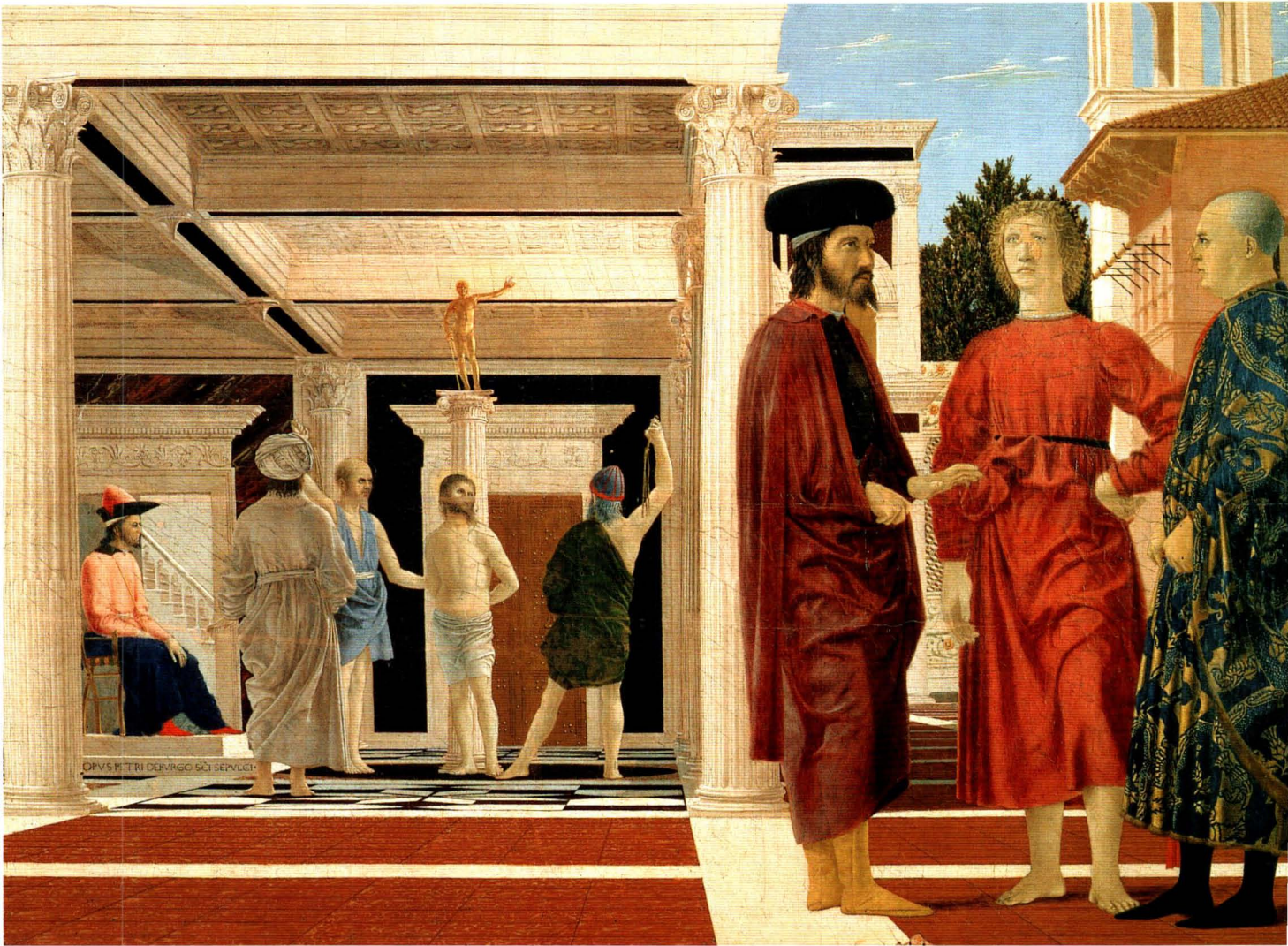


Above and below:
With the artist Insa Winkler I designed this garden in Weimar (above), inspired by the theme of plant hunting in the South Seas. Bamboo encloses a plot that is a three-dimensional meditation on travel, vastness, and unknown terrain. The design illustrates how a garden can relate a complex narrative: here, a celebration of Linnaean taxonomy, the poet Goethe's work in developmental biology, and, in two discrete areas, the plants of the southern and northern hemispheres.



Below:
Modern art is a rich source of
inspiration for garden-makers.
The blocks, lines, and spaces of
Piet Mondrian's 1917 painting,
Composition in Colour B, would
easily translate into walls,
hedges, borders, and pools.





composition, where the designer is looking for movement and flowing spaces, vistas would be set to one side, encouraging the eye to look farther and to a wider view.

For garden designers, fine art goes beyond supplying inspiration and provoking thought. Paintings can also yield practical clues as to the construction of a garden composition. When we analyse some artworks, we discover a preoccupation on the artist's part with proportion and space. In Mondrian's abstract painting (left), which could be mistaken for a series of arbitrary lines painted on canvas, this sense of space is produced by a strong, underlying geometry that would be a good starting point for planning an external, or garden, space. It is not difficult to imagine some of those painted squares or rectangles as hedges, terraces, or walls, and the spaces in between them as lawn or water.

In a similar way, when one looks at the painting by Piero della Francesca (above), it is immediately apparent that the ground plan is precisely structured. The spaces are interlocking, yet they have contrasting moods. There is the rather formal composition of a piazza, but, offset to the left, there is a sense of one space

Above:

In Piero della Francesca's *The Flagellation of Christ* (c.1460), we find a sense of space which, although strictly Classical, anticipates the geometry of Modernism and offers inspiration for modern garden "rooms". Within a highly structured ground plane, interlocking spaces each have different atmospheres. Offset to the left of the formal piazza, there is one space that runs through and connects with other spaces farther on. We tend to think of spaces as being defined by the buildings that enclose them. Here, however, the ground plane, the grid of paving, alone defines and structures a space that is open to the sky.

running through and connecting with other spaces farther on. We are used to spaces being defined by the buildings that enclose them, but here we cannot fail to be aware of the importance of the ground plane and of the way it is used to structure a space that is open to the sky. Strongly architectural, Piero della Francesca's paintings demonstrate the way that a structured ground plane can be made to inform a designed landscape.

One of the greatest qualities a garden can imbue is a sense of calm. In a modern garden, this can be achieved not only by the way that spaces are formed but also by the choice of materials and the way that they are designed to meet one another. Whether the design is based on a strong, rectilinear geometry or an organic composition, there will be a feeling of calm if the design details are resolved successfully. To achieve this success, it is vital to understand and to work with the materials at your disposal. This

Below:

In this London garden that I designed, the plan is based on the Golden Section with the ground plane of a lawn as the pivot of the space. It illustrates the importance of working in proportion to the module. All the construction materials relate proportionately to its basic building block, the brick. The result is a rectilinear composition that also has a sense of great harmony.





means taking account of the size of the component materials and working to a grid that suits their modules – their basic design units. For this garden in London (left), I based the design on the Golden Section, with the ground plane of a lawn as the pivot of the space. This was a space within a space, enclosed by low brick walls with steps on one side and a wall beyond. I wanted to ensure that all the details were well considered and resolved. A brick is a standard module, so the size of the joints, steps, and wall all had to relate to the brick's dimensions, to ensure that no cutting was required. In other words, all the construction materials of the garden related proportionately to its building block, the brick. The result was a rectilinear composition that also had a great feeling of tranquility.

The garden at the Centre for Global Dialogue, at Rüschtikon in Switzerland, designed by the office of the late Swiss landscape architect Dieter Kienast, combines geometrical hard landscaping with organic planting. It reads like a delta, in which the river, that had been strongly flowing, becomes less directional as it slows down, easing itself out into the surrounding land. Despite appearances, this garden has been rigorously worked out and the planting, too,

Above: Despite appearances, the garden at the Centre for Global Dialogue, at Rüschtikon in Switzerland, designed by the Swiss landscape architect Dieter Kienast (1945-1998), has a strong underlying geometry. Without the rectilinear rigour and empty spaces of the hard surfaces, the sinuous asymmetry of the planting would lose all definition. "We do not have to produce chaos," Kienast once remarked, "because it emerges on its own. The exterior space, however, must be a sensual place." To achieve that sensuality, he combined a variety of materials, looks, and disciplines in a highly individual and catholic approach.



Above:
At the Necco Garden in Cambridge, Massachusetts, American landscape architects Peter Walker and Martha Schwartz show how the introduction of grids to a design can energize it rather than render it static. Here, one grid overlays another in an offset, slightly rotated, pattern that engenders great dynamism. This central court, composed of two very literal and visible grids, is itself an intervention in a wider grid of tree and parkland.

has an underlying geometry. In the best artistic and design compositions, this type of deep organizing structure or pattern is invariably present even when the works themselves appear, at first, to be arbitrary.

Although it is often said that working with a grid can stultify a design, making it rather stiff and unmoving, I believe that the more rigorous the grid, the more opportunities it offers for design ideas. For example, in the context of soft landscape, a grove of trees will establish a new scale and relationship with the human form and adjacent buildings. There is great value in the regular repetition of these trees – their grid – in creating a rhythm for the design and in bringing reassurance to those who use it. Meanwhile, a grid of hard landscape will immediately define an area, putting a frame around an unstructured space.

The architecture that surrounds a site may offer a clue to the grid it requires. The proportions of windows or buildings may be reflected in the composition of the garden to create a subliminal but powerful link. Of course, there may be a variety of prevailing dimensions suggesting a confusion of grids, but this brings with



Below:

In this garden that I created in Sweden, there are three types of lighting. Eerie natural light combines with ambient artificial illumination to imbue the space with a cool and mysterious quality. Meanwhile, submerged spotlights paint the pool and the rocks amber.



LIGHTING

In this pictorial essay, we see three garden spaces, all Modernist, as they undergo a nocturnal transformation. Within the precise geometry of these gardens, lighting is used, as if in the theatre, to engender cold or warmth, mystery or sensuality, high drama or mellow contemplation. Modern garden-makers should think of lighting as an element that is every bit as vital and defining as solid construction materials or plants.

Right:

At the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, Topher Delaney has created a minimalist sculpture garden of dark and light grey stone. Diffuse but bright lighting gives its sober surfaces a pearly quality by night. An arch-colourist, Delaney has contrived a haunting contrast between the stonework's frosty nocturnal luminescence, the brooding buildings, and the lavender sky.

Following pages:

Created by Vladimir Djurovic for the chalet of fashion designer Elie Saab, this supremely elegant minimalist garden makes optimum - but not maximum - use of three types of lighting. Spotlights paint walls and tree trunks. A pebble hearth creates a night-time focus and summons memories of earlier denizens of this Lebanese landscape. A mirror pool reflects the twilight sky. In a brilliantly planned *coup de théâtre*, all three light sources share the same glowing tonal qualities.







Above:

Designed by Topher Delaney and Andrea Cochran, this landscape at the Portland Art Museum in Oregon is entirely constructed as a flowing sequence of terraces, steps, and courtyards characterized by sharp geometry, dynamic lines, and materials that bespeak precision and elegant austerity.

to be two contiguous rectangles of different tones and depths. But can this building be called a landscape garden? Well, many periods and traditions of landscape design have relied on built structures. Ruins and temples, pagodas and gazebos have all played their part in the story of landscape gardens. You might see my *Lyceum* as standing among them, albeit in sharply modern dress. But I am trying to achieve something deeper than that with this building. It is not just an ornament to the landscape but a way of reflecting, structuring, and focusing the landscape. In the senses of both being condign with it and of metamorphosing into it, the building becomes the garden.

At the Portland Art Museum in Oregon (see above and opposite), Topher Delaney and Andrea Cochran have extended this principle to create one of the most magnificent modern urban landscapes. Featuring no planting other than the surrounding

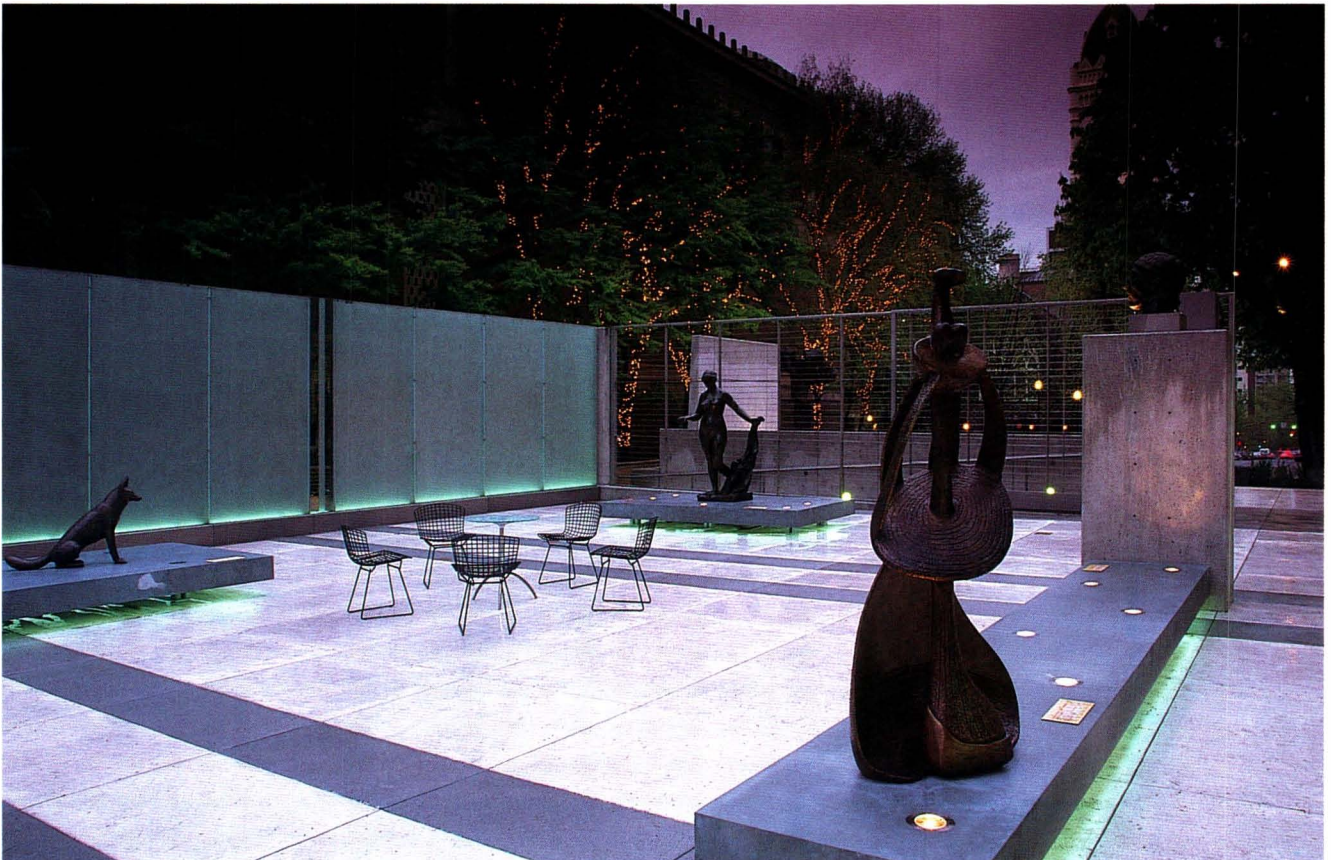
trees, this landscape is entirely built, wholly constructed, a flowing sequence of terraces, steps, and courtyards characterized by sharp geometry, dynamic lines, and materials that bespeak precision and elegant austerity. If there is a sense of “planting”, it is in the artful positioning of sculpture, screens, tables, and chairs. If there is a sense of “terrain” it is in the use of contrasting bands of surface texture. These give direction and dynamism to the landscape much as contours do. The Portland Art Museum is the ultimate city landscape – chic, minimalist, and serenely powerful. But I suspect that one of the reasons for its success is that this design strikes a deep chord – the same chord that Janis Hall strikes with her snowy Connecticut slopes.

So we have seen gardens that work with Nature and formal gardens that make no reference to Nature. We have also seen wholly built gardens that exclude vegetation yet still resonate with the spirit of wilderness. Each of these examples stands at a compass point, representing one of many directions that the modern landscape garden can take. I would like to end, however, with a design of my own that takes a more conciliatory approach. It is a new landscape garden at Portland Castle in Dorset.

I conceived the garden as a ringed enclosure, a low wall of Portland stone that echoes the circular outline of the castle. A gravel path within the wall picks up the tan and tawny colouring of the stone and the planting. To my mind, one of the most important but underexploited aspects of the landscape

Below:

If there is a sense of “planting” in the landscape at the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, it is in the artful positioning of tables, chairs, screens, and sculpture. If there is a sense of “terrain” it is in the use of contrasting bands of surface texture that dictate the garden’s grain, its visual direction.





Market in Essex, the great plantswoman Beth Chatto copes with some of the lowest rainfall in the United Kingdom. In 1992, she decided to make an opportunity of adversity by creating a gravel garden. A symphonic sequence of informal beds where sun-lovers spill seamlessly into the shingle surrounds, it bears all the characteristics of the best modern planting. Plants are chosen for their compatibility with each other and with their given environment. They are planted chiefly in drifts that build beautifully modulated chromatic harmonies. The garden appears naturalistic, free in form, and open to some degree of autonomous change. In the choice and balance of its materials, however, and in the purity of its conception, it is the product of great planning and painstaking design.

A garden such as Pensthorpe or Elmstead Market proves that plantsmanship and ground-breaking design can go hand in hand. Moving from the east of England to California and an even more challenging climate, we find the same marriage, where the small-scale, slate and succulent schemes of Isabelle Greene resemble a landscape viewed from the air, and where the Desert Garden at the Huntington Library in San Marino assumes the appearance of a living sculpture park.

These gardens demonstrate that the new approach to planting can be applied no matter where the site is. In each case it is the tones and textures of plants that give the garden its unique character and structure. But then Nature is the best designer – even when it contains no plants, if a modern garden is to succeed, her influence must not be far away.



Above and left:
In a process of abstraction that is reminiscent of some traditional Japanese gardens, American designer Isabelle Greene looks to the natural landscape for inspiration. In this Californian garden, the textures and colours of the arid American southwest are translated into patterns of slate, shingle and succulents.

Opposite page:
Started in 1925, the Desert Garden at the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, California, is the largest collection of cacti and succulents in the world. It succeeds brilliantly as a modern design. First, the plants are ideal for the site and require minimal watering and maintenance. Second, they are displayed in such a way that it is chiefly their forms that give this garden its unique character and structure.