

## REVIEW / Books

## Fruits of the Gardening Boom

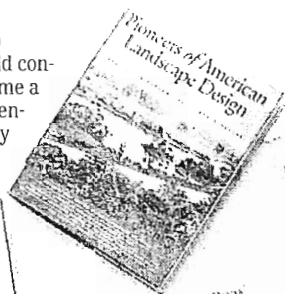
By MAC GRISWOLD

IT'S TIME the garden world congratulated itself. It has come a long way since the gardening boom began in the early 1970s, when Americans warily stepped out of the concrete wilderness of the postwar "low-maintenance garden." We used to read books with generic titles like "The Garden" or "10,000 Garden Questions"—but no more. Each of the four books below embodies experience gathered over many years on a specific, even narrow, aspect of how we view the land and what we do with it, or grow on it. At the same time, each one also carries the reader out of the garden to touch on other subjects: history, biography, art, aesthetics, sociology or science.

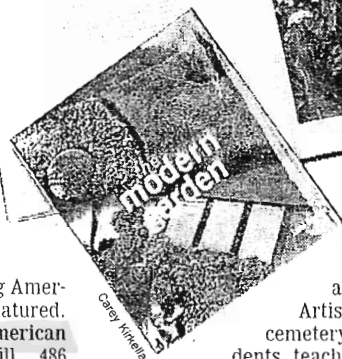
Over the past 10 years, the preservation movement that is slowly documenting and preserving American designed landscapes has matured. One of the results is "Pioneers of American Landscape Design" (McGraw-Hill, 486 pages, \$59.95), a handsome encyclopedia offering 160 short biographies of American landscape movers and shapers. Edited by Charles A. Birnbaum and Robin Karson, the book stretches the conventional idea of "landscape" past the residential garden to include designs for urban centers, freeways, cemeteries, suburban developments and wilderness preserves.

## Designs in the Wilderness

The record runs for more than two centuries. Here is Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806), the African-American surveyor and astronomer who probably redrew the L'Enfant plan of Washington from memory when L'Enfant was fired and departed with his drawings. We also read about Daniel Fay Hull (1890-1964), who designed the rustic hotels, lodges, roads and scenic overlooks in Yosemite, Sequoia, Grand



CAROLINE MANNING



CAREY KILEY



Canyon and Yellowstone National Parks, among others.

Artists, botanists, cemetery superintendents, teachers and conservationists—all are here.

No art except architecture affects more people than landscape design; no account is more moving or interesting than that of these (usually obscure) people who wanted to design a beautiful and harmonious America. More than 450 photographs, drawings and plans—many previously unpublished and 100 of them in color—flesh out the descriptions. While a subject index should have been added for the general reader, there is at least a welcome list of existing sites open to the public.

"An Artist's Garden" by Raymond Booth (Callaway, 132 pages, \$65) is a flamboyantly scaled book about the size of an atlas, and indeed it is just that. Mr. Booth's paintings of his untidy garden are much more than botanical renderings; they are maps of a particular pre-European Union England, the 19th-century natural world

beloved by writers such as Gilbert White of Selbourne and Lewis Carroll. He sets his English plants in the woodlands and open hedgerows where they flourish and also depicts the deer, rodents, insects and birds who live there. And like many 19th-century explorers of the tropics, Mr. Booth is mad about orchids, which are among his most beautiful studies.

But this is not postcard art. Peyton Skipwith, director of the Fine Arts Society in London and a friend of Mr. Booth's for more than 40 years, points out in an accompanying essay that the artist is an admirer of Lucien Freud and a reader of Thoreau,

and it shows. As beautiful as his depictions of English roses and Maytime are, Mr. Booth's best paintings are his dark ones. His barn owls and badgers are not cute; they are the real denizens of the night.

## Modernism Outdoors

It may sometimes seem that Dan Kiley is The Only One. The only modernist garden designer, that is. In "The Modern Garden" (Princeton Architectural Press, 223 pages, \$45) the English cultural historian Jane Brown sets the record straight by tracing the forgotten story of modernism in the garden as it traveled from its birth in Europe in the 1920s to America in the 1930s and back again. She deals lucidly with the politics, wars, literature and ecological struggles that shaped the movement, as well as with a plant palette that includes *Eryngium giganteum*, "Miss Willmott's Ghost," a spiky gray shadow that is surely the emblematic designer plant.

Ms. Brown compiles a list of "Masterworks" by well-known designers such as Roberto Burle Marx, Luis Barragan and, yes, Mr. Kiley. There are also less familiar luminaries such as Ludwig Gerns, a contemporary designer in Hanover, Germany,

and Mien Ruys (1904-98) of Holland. Each garden is illustrated with a suite of images by one of two stellar photographers, Sofia Brignone and Alan Ward. Ms. Brignone's series on Ruys's gardens in Dedemsvaart, the Netherlands, is enough to make you rush out to flood the lawn and install recycled plastic pallets as steppingstones among wetland grasses. Ruys's design offers what Ms. Brown calls the "ecological empathy, flexibility in maintenance, [and] lack of expensive pretence" that are what "gardeners, architects and designers have been clamorously demanding, largely in vain, for the last forty years."

Perhaps the best measure of the gardening boom is the increase in the numbers of really good gardeners with prodigious appetites for spending time in the garden. Ken Druse is one such person. In "Making More Plants: The Science, Art, and Joy of Propagation" (Clarkson Potter/Crown, 256 pages, \$45), his sixth book, Mr. Druse gracefully shares what he's

Low-maintenance is out. Today people are fascinated by the specifics of the land and what we do with it.

learned about such arcana as conditioning (making sure a seed is wet enough, or cold enough, to sprout), layering, grafting and the differences among genera that make one method more successful than another.

This is probably the best, the best-looking and the most accessible book about propagation in print. Mr. Druse took all the photographs: while many are beautiful in the conventional sense, the best are technical shots that also manage to be beautiful, such as a series on graft after-care that finishes with a shot of the new scion poking its little green nose out of the graft cut. There is also an indispensable "Generic Guide to Propagating Ornamental Plants"—shorthand descriptions of what each species likes best. My favorite section of all is "The Scoop on Bulbs," which tells me what those little black things are that sprout in the angle between leaf and stem on many lilies. I never knew. Bulbils. Just plant and watch, says Mr. Druse.