end, Klaus focuses her considerable research skills on the documentary record left by Olmsted, his firm, and the records of the Sage Foundation Homes Company. The book’s greatest strength is that Klaus highlights the extraordinary career and talents of the younger Olmsted. There is no question that he was greatly influenced by the work of his father and the years spent as his apprentice, but he forged a new path in the nascent field of city planning unimagined by his father.

Olmsted Jr. was committed to professionalizing the field of city planning and landscape architecture.

Klaus shows that in the design of Forest Hills Gardens, Olmsted developed a comprehensive and unified plan within a hierarchy of streets, parks, and curvilinear roads, surrounding planting schemes, and open spaces. These features were inspired, in part, from the suburban work of his father at Riverside and Roland Park, but they were also a product of twentieth-century concerns for rational planning, infrastructure, and the City Beautiful movement. Olmsted was also influenced by events abroad, as well as architects and planners at that time. English sources such as Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City and the design of Hampstead Garden Suburb, and German sources such as the work of Camillo Sitte, were certainly in Olmsted’s mind. Grosvenor Atterbury most visibly expressed the evidence of those sources in the architectural designs. My main criticism of the book is that Klaus relegates the discussion of architectural design to the background because of her focus on Olmsted. The effect is to minimize the role of architecture in the overall success of the suburban principles she wishes to elucidate. The real success of Forest Hills Gardens is the way in which buildings and landscape were carefully orchestrated; therefore, the two subjects deserve equal time. There is also a lack of discussion about house plans and interior designs.

Olmsted believed that the comprehensive plan was the most important characteristic contributing to the success of Forest Hills Gardens, and as Klaus points out, was employed for good effect by Olmsted at Palos Verdes Estates in California, and Mountain Lake in Florida. Klaus finds the same principle underlying the modern communities of Seaside and Celebration, Florida, and suggests that planners and architects revisit Forest Hills Gardens for guiding principles. This raises the question of whether it is realistic to seek design principles in a model suburb with roots in the nineteenth century and a wealthy benefactor who paid for such talented designers. Is it possible to establish principles for suburban planning when the context is ever changing and the needs of American families—the primary constituency—are also ever changing? Would present-day families be content with the relatively small houses on compact lots that characterized Forest Hills Gardens? Probably not. Today we are dismayed at the proliferation of large houses on small lots yet how do we change the inherent attitudes that fuel the desire for mega-houses? It seems that the issues are more complex than aesthetics alone and that architects and planners need to consider the underlying cultural and social values. The assumption of Modern Arcadia is that if we establish good design principles and raise the bar on our aesthetic standards, people will respond in a positive way. Klaus herself points out that there are criticisms of the “new urbanism” who dislike the artificiality and storybook character of these planned communities (p. 159). She acknowledges that there are “challenging social, economic, and environmental issues facing us today,” most of which were never considered by Olmsted and Atterbury (p. 161). Architects and planners should look at suburban models such as Forest Hills Gardens for basic principles, but critical issues such as declining resources and population density are central concerns and need to be considered in neighborhood planning and design. The principles outlined by Klaus in A Modern Arcadia are in important first step, but they will only go so far in addressing the inadequacies of modern-day suburban planning.

Sue Pettose
Monsicello, Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc.