Ruth Shellhorn, a twelve-minute documentary film in the LALH North America by Design series.

Over the course of her nearly sixty-year career, modernist landscape architect Ruth Shellhorn (1909–2006) created close to four hundred landscape designs and collaborated with some of the most celebrated architects in Southern California. Inspired to enter the profession by her Pasadena neighbor Florence Yoch, Shellhorn received formal training at Oregon State and Cornell before opening her own practice in Los Angeles.

Today she is best remembered for her Bullock’s department store designs—lush gardens and fountain-filled courtyards that lured shoppers with the promise of the “Southern California experience.” But Shellhorn she also worked to preserve the region’s coastline and native landscape. In 1955 she helped lay out Disneyland, conferring with Disney on circulation and plantings for the various “lands.” A year later, she became supervising landscape architect for the University of California at Riverside. Shellhorn’s many private gardens in Los Angeles and Pasadena were elegant, exotic, and among the most horticulturally distinctive of their day.
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Clockwise from top left: Kelly Comras, author of Ruth Shellhorn; Ruth Shellhorn and Walt Disney at Western Railway station, Disneyland, two weeks before opening day, 1955; Hixon garden, 1978. Photograph by Ruth Shellhorn. Courtesy Ruth Patricia Shellhorn Papers, UC Berkeley.

P. O. Box 1323
Amherst, MA 01004
(413) 549-4860
www.lalh.org

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