

3.3. Plan of first floor. From *Monograph of the Work of Charles A. Platt*.

Platt seems never to have considered any other location for the house but the edge of the bluff, where the impact of the lake was sharp and spare. In his design, the lake would first be revealed from inside the house, through French doors in a large central hall, and then from a large portico on the north facade, in the Italian tradition. The curving form, which replaced a square version he had proposed initially, resembles the portico on the south façade of the White House, which in turn recalls the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli—classical examples all. Herbert Croly later wrote that Platt's design "comes, as it were, to a head in this portico, which is both the one ornamental

member of the house itself, and the member which will be of most use and pleasure to the inhabitants thereof."¹⁷ (Fig. 3.3) Curving stairways from the portico lead to a terrace below, and there, a broad view of the lake. Another set of curving stairs leads to a lower terrace, and from there a flight of steps descends to the narrow beach and the water itself. Two curving walks take visitors to the end of the seawall. Each of these elements takes its proportions from the house. (Fig. 3.4)

From this vantage point, lake views are austere, in the manner of Whistler. Water and sky appear almost as changing planes of color and light, abstract compositions in keeping with Platt's preference for clarity and balance. At the same time, a vivid sense of the lake's expanse and force is heightened by this enframement, which delivers the water view into the heart of the design. Platt's scheme provided both an architecturally elegant space and transcendent views, the hallmark of his best work. (Fig. 3.5)



3.4. Construction of fountain terrace, 1907. Gwinn.

trace the natural contour of the cove and thereby frame the lake panorama. Within this embrace, Lake Erie would seem almost to belong to the garden. Samuel Howe, one of many critics to write about Gwinn, later described the force of the appropriation: "Think of having a lake of your own a hundred miles long, the boundaries of which no eye can determine, and to know that it is yours for ever, and that it cannot be taken from you."¹⁵ Few of Platt's houses would have the advantage of such dramatic, scenic splendor.¹⁶

3.5. *Boy with Dolphin from East Staircase*, 1995. Photograph by Carol Betsch.



gate new plants, coax them to grow in the varied terrain, and, in some cases, to keep them in scale. Manning wrote to Seiberling that he was purposely using shallow soil in some areas to stunt growth so trees would not block views. As at Gwinn, some existing plants were retained, and new ones were raised from seed or cuttings, purchased from nurseries, and dug from the wild. Native and imported species were mixed throughout. As work progressed and the lagoons were filled, bridges were constructed to join small islands with the irregular banks. (Figs. 4.18, 4.19) The resulting compositions recalled Olmsted's approach road at



4.18. Bridge in wild garden lagoon, c. 1920. SHH.



4.20. Outlook. SHH.

Biltmore, where he had achieved “a natural and comparatively wild and secluded character . . . with incidents growing out of the vicinity of springs and streams and pools, steep banks and rocks.”³⁹

As Seiberling's support for Manning's “pond plan” grew, confrontations between architect and landscape architect recalled similar disputes at Gwinn. On Stan Hywet's home grounds, however, the authority was reversed: Seiberling's growing appreciation for an American style supported Manning's perspectives. In 1916 the outlook, a circular extension at the center of the house terrace, became the subject of an argument between Schneider and Seiberling. “I don't want a sub-plaza of stone put out in front of the terrace,” Seiberling wrote Schneider. “So don't send down any sketches that mean a large structure in front, as I will have none of it.”⁴⁰ But Schneider persisted. “I am positive I am right about it. [The outlook] should not be made very small and out of keeping and harmony with the general magnitude of the house and the upper terrace. It is on the main axis line carrying through the Great Hall and should be a final focal point. I had hoped that in the center of it you would someday put a beautiful piece of marble or bronze sculpture.”⁴¹

Yet, precisely because the outlook was to be aligned with the Great Hall and also, by virtue of Manning's siting of the house, exactly on axis with the summer sunset, neither Manning nor Seiberling wanted a large piece of sculpture to block the view—one of the most important in the estate's landscape design.⁴² Manning clearly envisioned that his clients would walk out and sit in this space. As he wrote to one workman, “Both Mr. and Mrs. Seiberling feel that it ought to be out as far as possible, so one would have the feeling of the great height possible under them, . . . and also feel they were out in the middle of the landscape rather [than] detached from the top of the bluff.”⁴³ Manning prevailed in the argument and developed the outlook as an elegantly bounded viewing platform. From this vantage point, tall stands of trees frame a long vista that brings an experience of reach, quiet expanse, and sky into the designed landscape. (Fig. 4.20)

4.19. *Bridge in Wild Garden Lagoon*, 1997. Photograph by Carol Betsch.





below but rather in a delightfull confusion, then with any plaine distinction of the pieces. From this the *Beholder* descending many steps, was afterwards conveyed againe, by several *mountings* and *valings*, to various entertainements of his *sent*, and *sight*: which I shall not neede to describe (for that were poteticall) let me only note this, that every one of these diversities, was as if hee had beene *Magically* transported into a new Garden.¹⁸

Even before Farrand was engaged for the landscape, Frederick H. Brooke had been commissioned to remodel the house. He focused first on removing Victorian accretions to the Federal structure and stripping off layers of paint to reveal the original warm tones of the brick. Soon, the role of consulting architect was turned over to Lawrence White, son of the late Stanford White, who maintained an office in New York not far from Farrand's. It was the Blisses' decision to bring White into the landscape design process too, a move that circumvented a role for Farrand's own consulting architect and that also kept the clients at the center of the design process and firmly in control of it.¹⁹ While still working on the revision to the house, he set to work almost immediately designing a tennis court and swimming pool. Still, it was clear that in matters relating to landscape White was to answer to Farrand. Her authority had grown since her clash with Ralph Cram at Princeton, and it is evident in the many letters chronicling White's proposals at Dumbarton Oaks.

One of the first areas to occupy Farrand was the Rose Garden, a large (123' x 88') terrace reached by a long flight of steps descending from the orangery. By virtue of its position and scale, it was the most important of the new outdoor rooms. Nowhere else is space so forcibly wrought or its impact so sublime as here. The exquisitely proportioned room seems to hover—suspended, almost—over the landscape below. It is defined on the west by a looming stone wall planted with climbing roses, jasmine, and “a wispy veil of *Forsythia suspensa*.”²⁰ (Fig. 7.9) The

7.8. *Path to Grape Arbor*, 1999. Photograph by Carol Betsch.



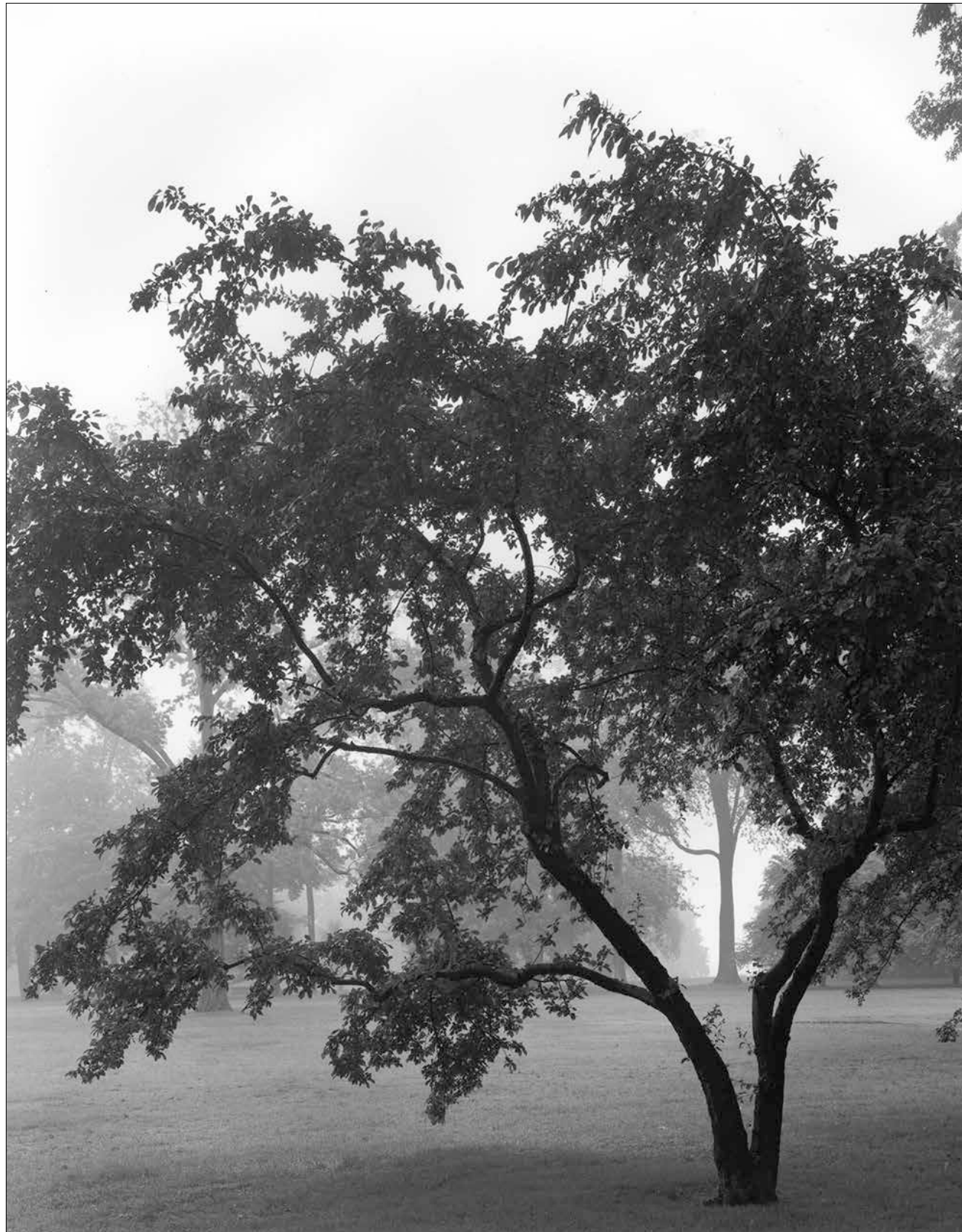
7.9. West wall of Rose Garden, view toward orangery and Beech Terrace, 1999. Photograph by Carol Betsch.



7.10. Rose Garden, c. 1930. Dumbarton Oaks.

north and east sides open to views across the orchards, the trim fields of the kitchen garden, and below, the treetops of Dumbarton Oaks Park. (Fig. 7.10) The geometric layout of the beds is enlivened by large boxwood specimens that provide an evergreen foil for the roses. The architec-

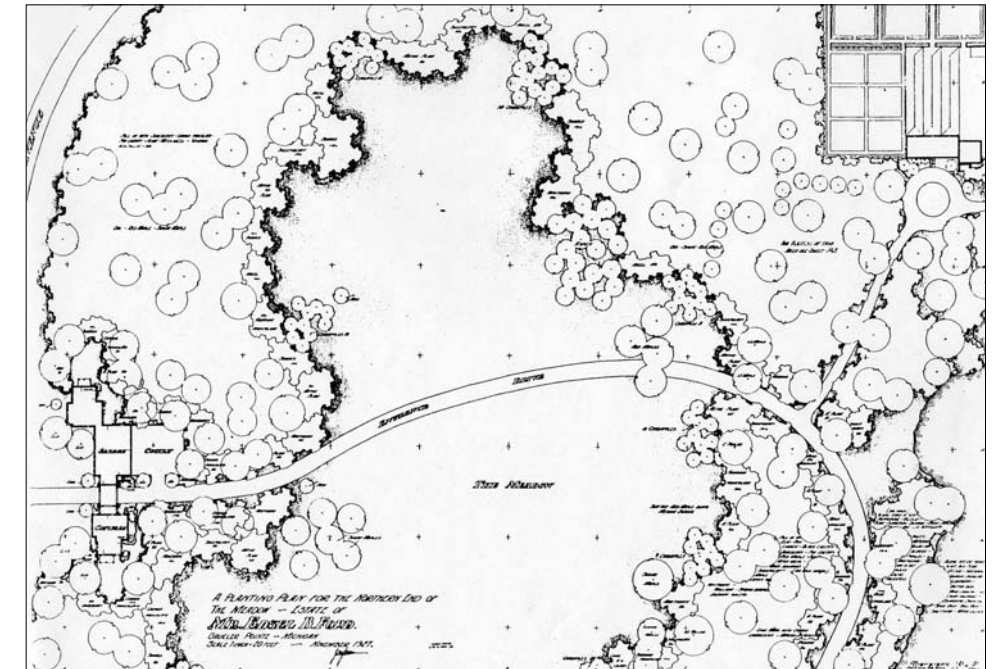




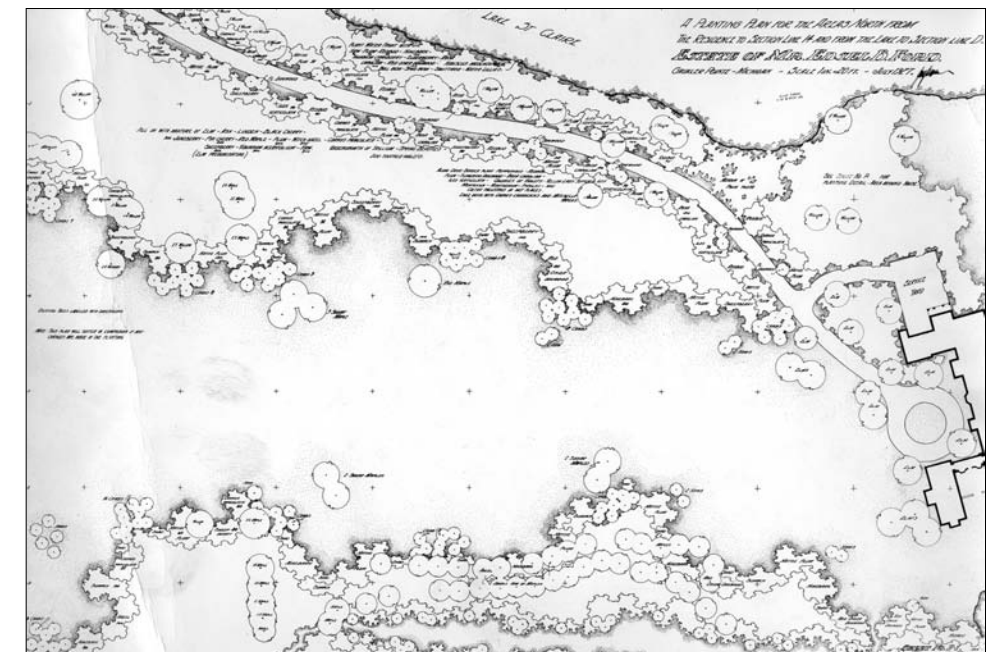
from shadow. (Figs. 11.17, 11.18, 11.19) In his 1906 article “Landscape Art,” he described this event in almost religious terms: “Nothing is so fascinating as the light behind the immediate shade; the lining to the cloud; to some, the hope beyond, which may be the greatest part of life itself; with its allurements of mystery, its enticement for reaching the goal beyond, yet withal, the futility of the effort, the inborn, onward striving of the soul toward the unattainable.”³⁶ To achieve this end, most of Jensen’s landscapes included small “sun openings,” clearings that were visible from the shadows.

Grese, in fact, suggests that “the spatial framework for many of Jensen’s designs had as much to do with sunlight and shadow as with the physical expression of space.”³⁷ (Figs. 11.20, 11.21, 11.22) Others have argued that Jensen’s preoccupation with patterns of light and shadow and with the brilliant colors of the midwestern landscape stemmed from the deprivation of his childhood in Denmark, where skies were often overcast and winters long.³⁸ Jensen’s favorite painter was George Inness, who included “a ray of light in every picture he painted”—he once remarked that he felt “refreshed” after visiting the Inness paintings at the Chicago Art Institute.³⁹

Traditional flowers were also given a place in the Fords’ landscape, primarily in the wide, grass path that adjoins the meadow. At Eleanor’s request, the inner edges of the passage were designed to provide planting pockets for spring, early summer, and late fall color. (The Fords spent July and August at Skylands.) *Anchusa*, delphinium, veronica, daylilies, peonies, hollyhocks, lupines, shasta daisies, and others are listed on Jensen’s plan. The Flower Lane also incorporated old fruit trees from the



11.15. “A Planting Plan for the Northern End of the Meadow,” November 1927. Ford House.



11.16. “A Planting Plan for the Areas North from the Residence,” July 1927. Ford House.

French strip farms, to which Jensen added dogwood, haws, and other small trees. Several ornamental shrubs Eleanor Ford requested were integrated into this area as well. (Fig. 11.23)

The creamy white, yellow, and blue color scheme of the Flower Lane is reiterated in the Rose Garden, located

11.14. *Crabapple at Edge of Meadow*, 1996. Photograph by Carol Betsch.



13.27. Maze with Dioscurus. Photograph courtesy Kellam de Forest.



3.28. View to large reflecting pool. Photograph courtesy Kellam de Forest.

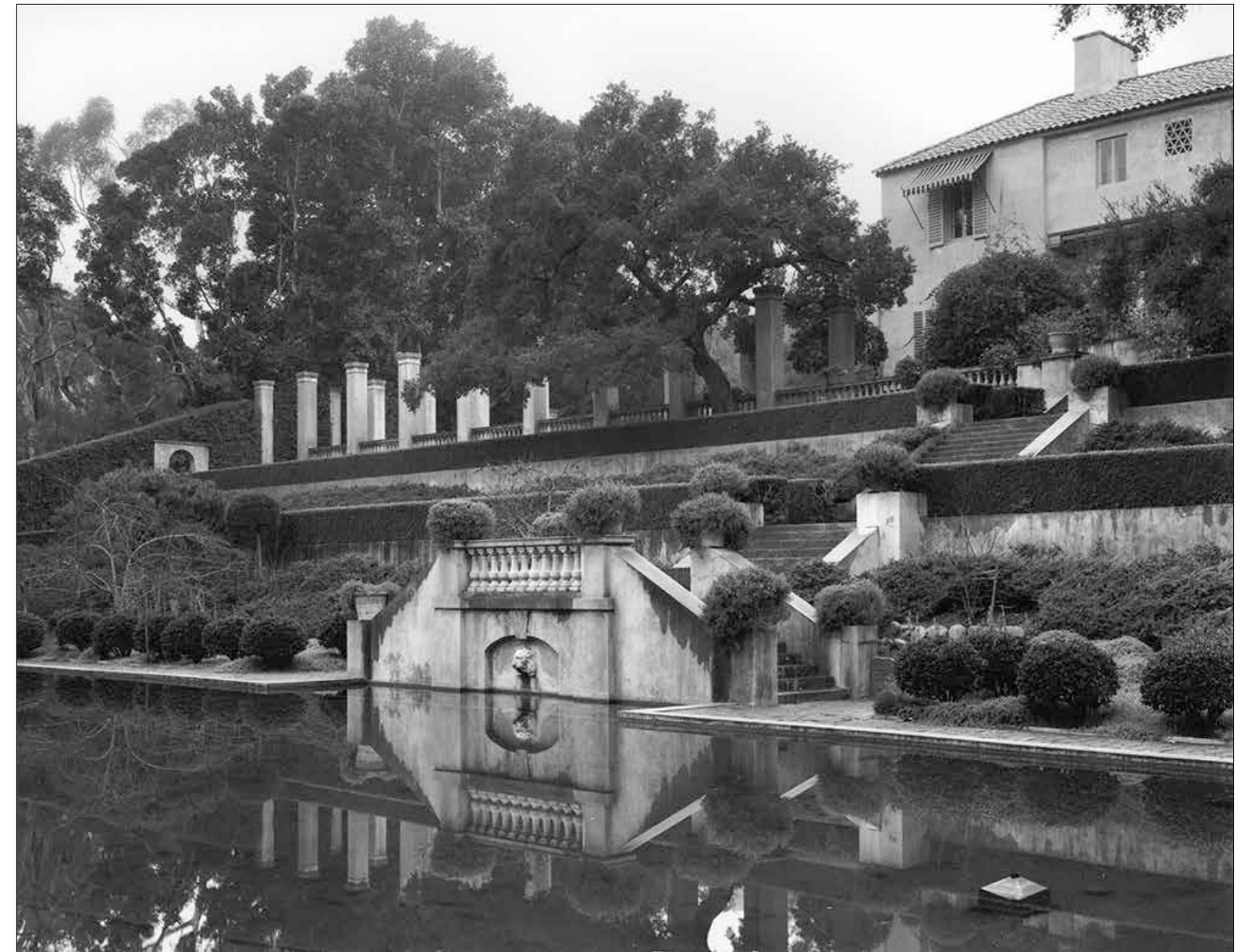
of decay.” Mac Griswold and Eleanor Weller see more ambiguous meaning, “the sense of roofless temples, an intimation of decay, but also of happiness . . . the supreme paradox of a paradise both lost and regained.”⁴²

The columns provided a new, vertical dimension to the core of the landscape, defining it as space separate from the middle landscape and structuring views out to it and beyond. They recall the genius stroke of Charles Platt at Gwinn, using a columned portico to frame views to Lake Erie, and they also bring to mind de Forest’s article about Naumkeag’s Afternoon Garden, which he published in the *Santa Barbara Gardener* the year before he created his feature at Val Verde. “Of course not many of us are going to find oak pilings which we can build into Venetian gondola ‘hitching’ poles,” de Forest had observed, “but pipe is cheap or we could use second hand telephone poles or even re-enforced [*sic*] concrete to get the same effect.” (The columns at Val Verde are of con-

crete blocks, covered with stucco.) In the end, though, it was the spatial impact that captured de Forest’s attention more than the material: “the way Mr. Steele has handled the enclosure of his garden to the south and west. It is genius.”⁴³

More than any other feature of the place, the loggia transformed the landscape of Val Verde into a melancholic Arcadian ruin, like the one Marguerite Yourcenar so vividly described in *Memoirs of Hadrian*, where its proprietor could retire to “garden pavilions built for privacy and for repose, to the vestiges of a luxury free of pomp, and as little imperial as possible, conceived of rather for the wealthy connoisseur who tries to combine the pleasures of art with the charms of rural life.”⁴⁴ (Fig. 13.30)

13.29. Formal Reflecting Pool, 1998. Photograph by Carol Betsch.



summer to celebrate Steele’s birthday, which also included Fairman Furness, the owner of Upper Banks Nursery in Media, Pennsylvania, and Grahame Wood, Steele’s old client from Blossom Hill.

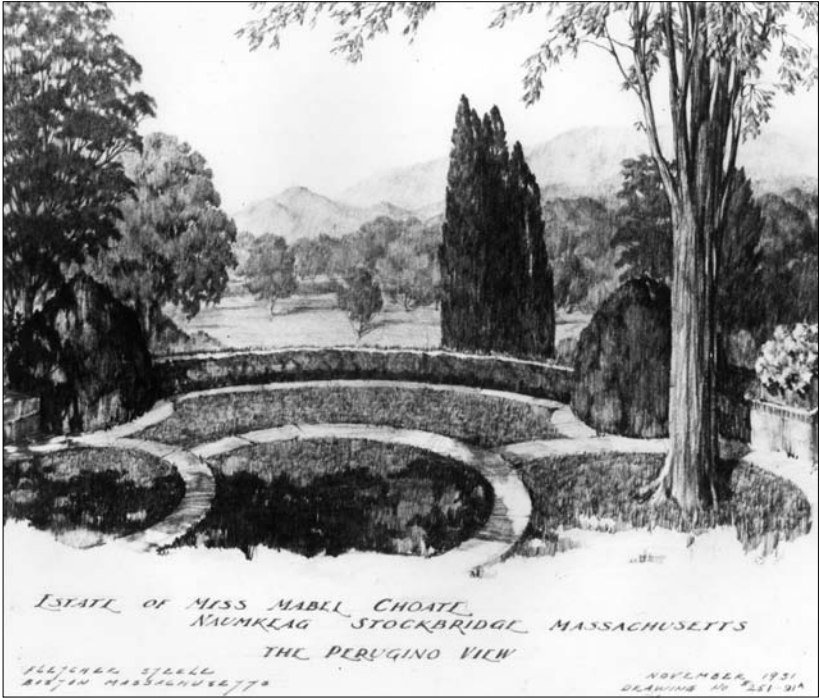
One of the most frequently recorded names in the guest book is that of Frank Crowninshield, the urbane editor of *Vanity Fair*, who had a summer place in Lenox. Crowninshield was also a member of the famed Algonquin Round Table, an avid collector of African art, early supporter of the Museum of Modern Art, and friend to Gertrude Whitney, George Gershwin, and many other Jazz Age figures of note, including Gertrude Stein, whose work he published, along with that of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Crowninshield was a figure in the Three Arts Society, an ad hoc committee that purchased the Stockbridge Casino (designed by Stanford White in 1888) from Mabel Choate and had it moved to Yale Hill Road, where it became the Berkshire Playhouse.⁵⁷

One visit of particular landscape architectural significance occurred in 1932, when Dan Kiley came to Naumkeag on Warren Manning’s recommendation. Kiley was a new employee of Manning’s, and Manning had told him of the imaginative work that Steele, a former employee, was doing there. Kiley remembered that he was

chatting (rather timidly, he said) with Mabel Choate when Steele arrived in his chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce. Just as it was opened for him, the car door fell off. Steele rescued the moment by pretending that nothing had happened, and simply walked over it, a show of sangfroid that impressed the young man. Kiley was even more impressed by the fact that at one point Steele got on Choate’s phone, apparently to talk to someone in Paris.⁵⁸ Later in his life, Kiley expressed a strong artistic debt to Steele, whom he considered the “only good designer” of the era.⁵⁹

If the weather was fine, Choate’s houseguests gathered on the Great Seat to watch the sun set behind Monument Mountain. (Fig. 15.31) Steele had redesigned the terrace in 1931 to create a long seat at the edge of it, incorporating materials from the house into a rich architectural amalgamation. Framing the vista to the southwest (pretentiously called the Perugino View, after the fifteenth-century Italian painter) were tall arborvitae and plantings of *Magnolia tripetala*, buckthorn, and silvery Russian olive. (Fig. 15.32) On the northwest corner of the terrace, Steele planted a large stand of devil’s walking stick (*Aralia spinosa*), an unusual spiny native that sends up plumes of ivory flowers in late summer. An espaliered apple hedge provided a railing along the western edge.

Since the 1880s the estate’s farm and greenhouses had been supplying the Choates’ New York townhouse with fruit, vegetables, and flowers through long winters, and dinners at Naumkeag typically featured produce from the farm—raw peas in season were served as a first course, eaten with spoons. A more important role for the farm may have been as a visual component in the foreground view. (Fig. 15.33) As the sun sank, Mabel Choate sometimes cued the estate farmer to prod the cows to saunter across the fields, Constable-like. For the American country elite, the farm still served as a source of patrician pleasure. (Once when he was asked about what he raised on *his* New England farm, Stormfield, Mark Twain answered, “Really nothing but sunsets and scenery.”⁶⁰) With its



15.32 Perugino View, 1931, drawing. SUNY ESF College Archives.



15.31. *View from Terrace*, 1998. Photograph by Carol Bestch.