



# CULTIVATING BEAUTY

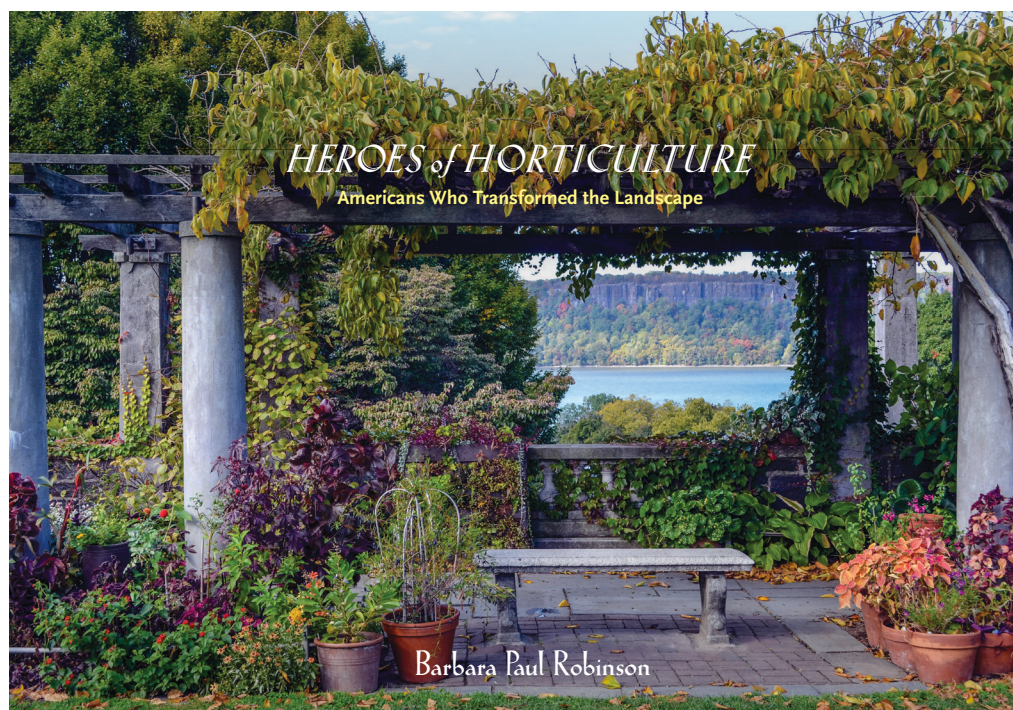
## THE VOCATION SHARED BY GARDENERS AND ARTISTS

Follow me, dear reader, along a path delineated by white Lenten roses in March, yellow lady slippers in May, and cadmium orange Japanese maples in October. Think of the sequences of color and fragrance that emerge with each season, and chances are you will conjure a garden that was conceived by a horticulturalist whose labor, invention, and fortitude brought this place into being.

Most gardens, like most art museums, are sites of contemplation, study, and sensate enjoyment. America's gardens, with their deep roots in the agricultural traditions of indigenous and immigrant cultures, as well as influences from gardens on five other continents, are urgently significant today: the demands of our digitally oriented lives constantly threaten to disconnect us from the open spaces, flora, and fauna that replenish us as human beings.

In her fascinating new book, *Heroes of Horticulture: Americans Who Transformed the Landscape*, Barbara Paul Robinson pays tribute to 18 individuals whose extraordinary efforts to cultivate places of beauty and respite revolutionized the field of American gardening. A New York City attorney who educated herself in horticulture by volunteering to pull weeds for the famed British gardeners Rosemary Verey and Penelope Hobhouse, Robinson has selected a group of distinguished women and men from across the field's many sectors. (Happily, all but two are still alive.) She highlights the expertise that underlies the formation of gardens while sharing previously unpublished, often surprising details about her heroes' paths.

The author draws a vibrant literary map that connects her subjects across a geography of teachers, mentors, and friends while illuminating how horticultural knowledge is acquired, shared (or protected), and passed down over generations. For example, the decades-long collaboration of Antonia Adezio (b. 1954), Tom Armstrong (1932–2011), and Frank Cabot (1925–2011) resulted in the 1989 founding of the Garden Conservancy, the first organization to support the preservation of outstanding gardens across America, many of which have also become National Historic Landmarks. And Central Park would not be the jewel in New



York City's crown were it not for the friendship of Elizabeth Barlow Rogers and Lynden Miller.

Robinson notes that each individual in her pantheon has worked across multiple professions — and that several have had a formative involvement in the visual arts. Tom Armstrong served as director of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Whitney Museum of American Art; Marco Polo Stufano, the first director of horticulture at Wave Hill in the Bronx, studied art history as an undergraduate; Lynden Miller was a visual artist before turning to landscape design; and Gregory Long, president emeritus of the New York Botanical Garden, studied art history before he catalogued European paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The book's structure allows the reader to appreciate the spectrum of specializations and institutions within the horticulture world, and to consider how a plantsperson might dedicate herself to one, or move across





(LEFT) Wave Hill (The Bronx): Flower garden and Marco Polo Stufano Conservatory; photo courtesy Wave Hill, which is also depicted on the book's cover ■ (BELOW LEFT) Windcliff (Washington state): Ceanothus, roses, and succulents; photo: Barbara Paul Robinson



disciplines over a lifetime. Its chapter groupings are The Garden Conservancy; Public Parks and Public Spaces; Public Garden Institutions; Plantsmen, Plant Finders, Nurserymen; and Garden Creators.

### PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Two of Robinson's subjects — Dan Hinkley and Elizabeth Barlow Rogers — also figure in my own development as an artist and horticulturalist. In 2004, when I moved from Seattle to New York City, I regretfully left behind a ritual sacred to Pacific Northwest gardeners — the annual buying trip to Heronswood Garden, on the Kitsap Peninsula overlooking Puget Sound. Heronswood, founded in 1987 by Dan Hinkley and his partner, the architect Robert Jones, was a laboratory and nursery where Hinkley cultivated and purveyed rare species he wild-collected from the more than 35 countries he has visited, including

China, Vietnam, Australia, and South Africa. There were few nurseries in America offering unusual plant selections beyond the familiar geranium/hosta/impatiens triumvirate, and the success of Heronswood coincided with (and helped further) America's growing interest in gardening. Heronswood was eventually sold to the Burpee Corporation, closed in 2006, and revived in 2012 when the Port S'Klallam Tribe purchased the property.

Hinkley's catalogues, illustrated by regional artists and filled with his poetic and humorously evocative plant descriptions, are hoarded by garden aficionados. "There is an ease and confidence to the Ceanothus," he wrote in 2005, "not to mention a blockbusting blueness, that makes them irresistible to gardeners who can abet their cultural obligations." Inside the home of Hinkley and Jones, named Windcliff, a mystical scene of salmon leaping above waves, painted by the Seattle artist Alfredo Arreguin, attests to the couple's appreciation of how artistic heritage intertwines with the Pacific Northwest landscape. Undaunted by my move to the Bronx, I ordered from the catalogue a selection of Heronswood hellebores. Never mind that they would find no shade, let alone soil, in my 16th-floor apartment. Creating a garden (like artmaking) teaches you that ambition, fantasy, failure, and humility are close cultivars.

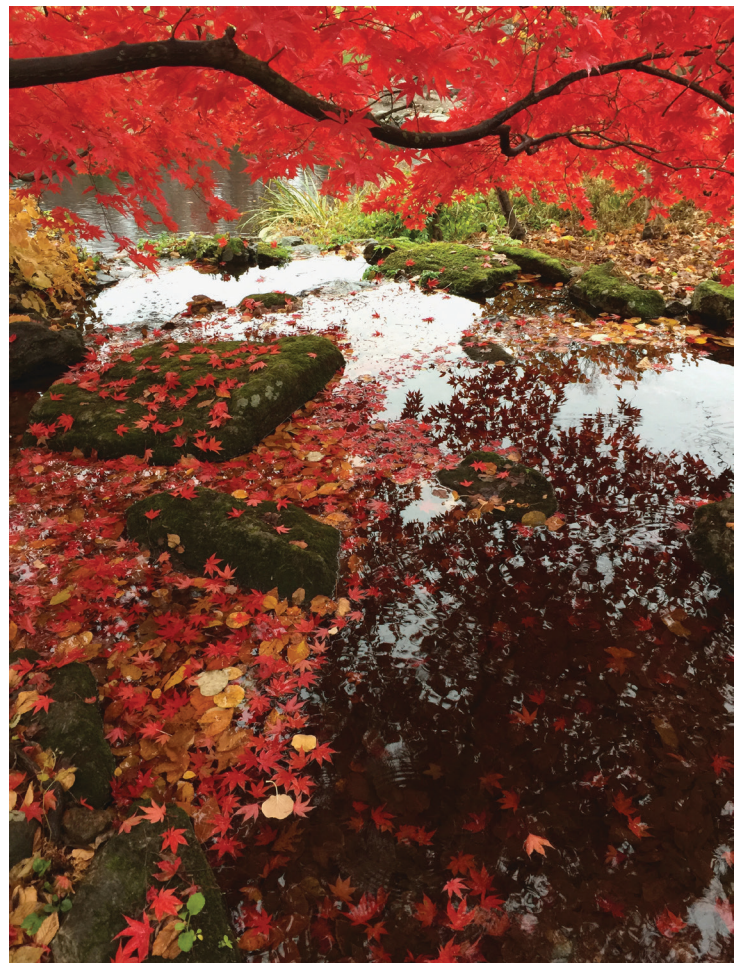
Robinson's profiles of Elizabeth ("Betsy") Barlow Rogers and Lynden Miller form a double portrait of two women whose friendship, artistic chemistry, and ambition to create a more beautiful city have directly benefited tens of thousands of residents and visitors every day, including me. While Rogers is best known for her leadership of the restoration of Central Park, Miller redefined New York City's shared spaces by developing the field of public garden design as a life-time commitment.

During the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, the city's parks fell into a state of decay. In 1980, Rogers was tasked to lead the newly formed Central Park Conservancy, which would raise money to restore the park. Rogers told Miller, a close friend and a painter, that she should consider restoring the Conservatory Garden at Fifth Avenue and 105th Street (once a significant formal garden, later filled with debris). Disregarding warnings from her friends, Miller threw

herself into this six-acre garden, which she organized into sections inspired by French, Italian, and English precedents. Miller went on to make significant contributions to many other sites, including Bryant Park, the New York Botanical Garden, and the Museum of Modern Art's sculpture garden.

While Miller had little professional experience as a garden designer, I fully understand Rogers's instincts for assigning her the task. I believe that gardeners and artists are cut from the same cloth, and in America we can find many examples of their influence on each other. They both harness color, light, shape, and texture to compose dynamic environments in which to experience our world in concentrated form. Another of Rogers's close friends was the landscape painter Jane Wilson (1924–2015), known for her evanescent abstractions of Long Island's sea and sky. "Growing up on a farm... you lived at the bottom of a sea of weather," Wilson once told Rogers.





(CLOCKWISE) Central Park: Glen Span Arch; photo: Sara Cedar Miller, courtesy Central Park Conservancy ■ Japanese maples and stream, Iroki Garden, Bedford, New York; photo: Rebecca Allan ■ **REBECCA ALLAN** (b. 1962), *Theodore Dreiser's Writing Garden*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 40 in., collection of the artist

As a painter who is also the plant records manager at Iroki Garden — the estate of Judy and Michael Steinhardt in Bedford, New York — I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the commitment and faith poured into the creation of a significant private landscape garden. Iroki, once the home of the American writer Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), contains one of America's most extensive collections of Japanese maples. It is overseen by Cathy Deutsch, the director of horticulture, who helps the owners realize their vision. Having interned at Wave Hill under her mentor Marco Polo Stufano, Deutsch has opened a window for me onto the evolution of this garden and has thus inspired my own art. I have observed her artistic process of re-envisioning areas of the garden (initially designed by Carole and Jerome Rocherolle) in order to integrate new accessions, and of composing new planting beds that relate spatially and chromatically to everything around them. This is like weaving new threads into a Baroque tapestry.

### LOOKING FORWARD

During my recent conversation with Barbara Robinson, we wondered who America's emerging horticultural heroes might be. I suggested Claire Davis, the new director of horticulture at Locust Grove in Poughkeepsie, New York. Having worked at Frank Cabot's renowned Stonecrop Gardens in Cold Spring, New York, before serving under Cathy Deutsch as a staff gardener at Iroki, Davis is part of a rising generation of innovative horticulturalists now restoring the landscape of the historic home of artist, inventor, and co-founder of the National Academy of Design Samuel F.B. Morse (1791–1872). This lineage of mentoring is reflected in

how the gardens inherited and (re)designed by emerging leaders both reflect and diverge from those of their predecessors, echoing the relationships of artists who admire and yet wish to distinguish themselves from their teachers.

Building upon Robinson's informative book, surely another volume could be dedicated to the staff gardeners who plant and maintain American gardens today — essential partners in realizing the creative visions of their founders. Without the skill, ingenuity, and endurance of gardeners at all levels of the hierarchy, the sites we enjoy could not go on.

As three-dimensional artworks with a temporal and ephemeral dimension, gardens have a relationship to painting and even performance art. Each day reveals a unique palette and perspective, from the fine details of leaves and groundcovers to the sweep of forms in a landscape prospect. We must treasure and protect these places, made by horticulturalists whose aesthetic gifts and civic generosity will continue to flower far into the future. ●

**REBECCA ALLAN** is a New York-based artist and gardener. Her artwork is represented by Anna Kaplan Contemporary (Buffalo) and David Richard Gallery (New York City). She has recently been painting scenes of Iroki, the garden in Bedford, New York, where she works part-time as plant records manager.

**Information:** To order Robinson's book, visit [godine.com](http://godine.com).





Perennial border at Locust Grove, Poughkeepsie,  
New York; photo: Claire Davis