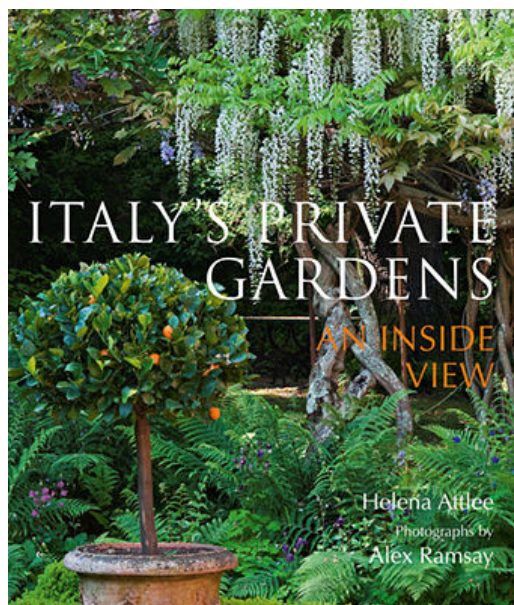


## BOOK REVIEW JANUARY 2011:

### Private Gardens in Italy; Conserved gardens in England, and an American landscape architect



#### Italy's Private Gardens: An Inside View

by Helena Attlee with  
photographs by Alex Ramsey

Published by Francis Lincoln

ISBN 9780711229105  
150 colour photographs

£35.00

*Garden Media Guild*

*Book Photographer of the Year 2010 Finalist*

We all know what December and January 2010/11 have brought us weather-wise. Snow might be beautiful for a while, but then our human desire to get out and about spoils all that. One antidote is to curl up with a good book - preferably one which can transport us to warmth, sunshine, the scent of lemon trees, cypress spires against blues skies, and the odd glass of wine - Italy!

This book did it for me - the atmospheric photographs of Alex Ramsey made me feel I could walk right into a wisteria pergola at La Foce, Tuscany; across a shadowed lawn at Villa Massei; past the cactus and up the weathered steps at Il Bisere, Sicily. Surrounding these images are the words of Helens Attlee, conjuring up more pictures - and people. Each chapter is a garden, with an owner, photographed and quoted. Each garden's history is recounted as well as a description of how it is now: "all night the garden was a concert hall for nightingales and the little scop owls", at La Ferreira, Tuscany. At La Pietra, "soil levels have been restored to save balustrades that stand proud of the terraces like teeth in a receding gum". Gardeners too talk of the gardens: "Carlo got bored with the strictly green and white colour scheme" so it was expanded by Stuart Barfoot at La Torrechia.

There is a chapter of the restoration of La Pietra, once owned by Arthur Acton, whose son Harold bequeathed to New York University. The restoration has been undertaken by Kim Wilkie and Nick Dakin-Elliott "to revive the gardens' memory of itself". There is a chapter on Ninfa, so popular for short break holidays, and its recreation and on an extraordinary garden at La Scarzuola, a mixture of ancient and *avant garde* architecture and sculpture. I like the way Helena Attlee has entwined the vision of the makers with the gardens themselves, and the way in which Alex

Ramsey's photographs of the former convey their personalities - unlike the staring-at-the-camera Sunday papers images. Dogs and cats are included. Helena Attlee and Alex Ramsey work well together, planning their trips and their final completely satisfying combinations of pictures and words like a good singer and accompanist.

Each chapter, then, is a tiny novella, in which you can lose yourself and dream of Summer, gardens and people - what more could you want! (There is another book on the gardens of Portugal waiting to be read....)

©*Bella D'Arcy Reed, January 2011*