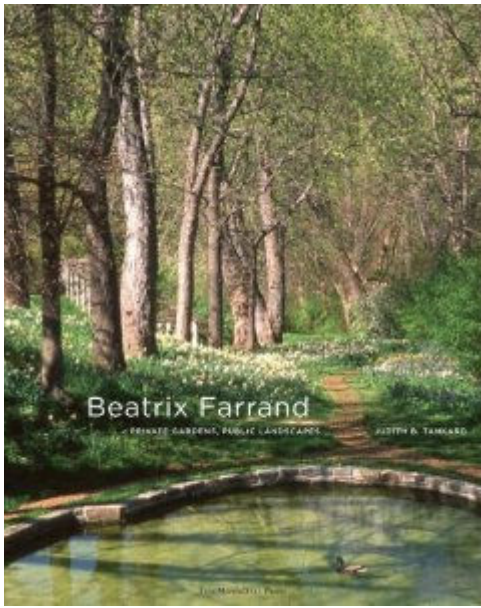


BOOK REVIEW JANUARY 2011:



Beatrix Farrand: Private Gardens, Public Landscapes

by Judith B. Tankard

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£40.00

I know this was published in 2009, but I have only just discovered this book about the first American woman landscape architect; the one who rescued the drawings of Gertrude Jekyll by buying them and then leaving them to the University of California at Berkeley. For that one act many of us owe her eternal gratitude. However, Beatrix was a professional in her own right, and brought the ideas of Jekyll and the other English Edwardian designers such as Harold Peto, as well as the Italian gardens of the 16th and 17th centuries to the USA.

Farrand was not the first female landscape gardener but she was the first to use the term 'Landscape Architect' and "was the one (female) most in competition with men, since her commissions extended to civic and university consultations". Indeed she was the only woman among the eleven architects who formed the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899.

Beatrix Jones Farrand had a well-known relative in Edith Wharton, the writer, with whom she travelled abroad, particularly on trips to Italy. (Wharton wrote a book on Italian Gardens). It was Edith who asked her advice on her new garden, and who introduced her to many wealthy clients. From then on, she did not look back. The photographs of her show a strong mature face, attractive, and a person of great self-possession. She was obviously helped a great deal by her marriage to Max Farrand, who was a great support to her work.

Judith Tankard takes us through her life, and her development as a Landscape Architect, showing how she brought the influence of Italy and Edwardian English designers (who were also influenced by Italy) to her work. One important design was for the First Lady Ellen Wilson in 1913, a design with Roman columns on two sides, and a formal pool, and planting like the gardens of Pompeii.

Her early designs look very similar to those of Thomas Mawson, and like him, she evolved into designing public landscapes. Her design for Occidental College, Los Angeles, shows her ability to divide large spaces between buildings to create gardens in the human perspective and to give a sense of airiness to the buildings. This airiness appears in other designs such as those at the Rockefeller gardens in Maine, (a consultancy which lasted from 1926 to 1935) with its wonderful moon gate in its walls. Her drawings are delightful, like those for the Willard and Dorothy Straight Estate in New York which she drew around 1914.

She collected books, plans and plants, which were drawn together in her home at Reef Point which she and Max developed from 1941 to 1955. After the Max's death, the house was dismantled, the collection of documents went to the University of California at Berkeley, while the plants were distributed to other collections. Farrand moved to Garland Farm where she died in 1959.

Betatrix Farrand was a woman of talent, discernment and achievement who left her own legacy of design as well as her collections. Judith Tankard's book has allowed us to see that, and to give to Farrand the prominent place in garden history that she deserves.

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