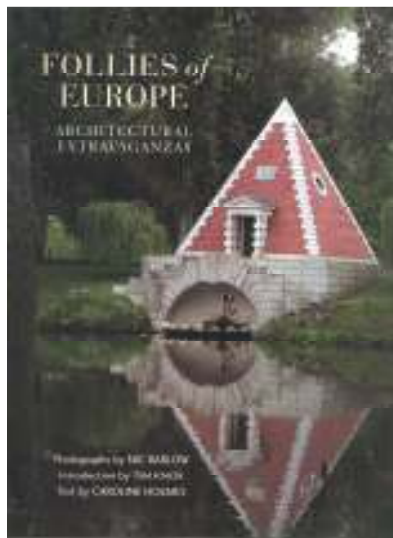


BOOK REVIEWS MARCH 2010

of newly-published books

Please see also Vintage Book Reviews



FOLLIES OF EUROPE: Architectural Fantasies

Photographs by Nic Barlow
Introduction by Tim Knox
Text by Caroline Holmes

Garden Art Press

ISBN 1870673565

RRP £35.00

The book is a series of magnificent photographs by Nick Barlow of follies throughout Europe, with an introduction by Tim Knox which gives an overall view of the garden style from Renaissance to Modern in which the follies sit, and text for each folly and location is by Caroline Holmes. The good thing is that all three have equal billing on the cover. Nice to see, as most books similar to this do not often recognise an equal partnership.

The definition of 'folly' through Dictionary Link is: *A costly undertaking having an absurd or ruinous outcome* while Oxford Dictionary give us: *an ornamental building with no practical purpose, especially a tower or mock-Gothic ruin, 'folly' deriving from the Old French 'folie' meaning 'madness'*. Not all of these definitions apply to the follies in the book, but they are worth bearing in mind as you go through the pages.....

The follies are grouped in chapters according to style and move chronologically. Included are well-know sites such as the Villa D'Este, Biddulph Grange and the Parc Guell (which Holmes tells us how to pronounce as 'gway' which I hadn't clocked before) and the not-so-well known, well, to me, plus some private follies. [The majority are part of garden designs, although the Brighton Pavilion is not known for its garden and is surely included simply because of its extravagance, the whim of 'Prinny' -the Prince of Wales, and the delicious verbal insults it attracted.

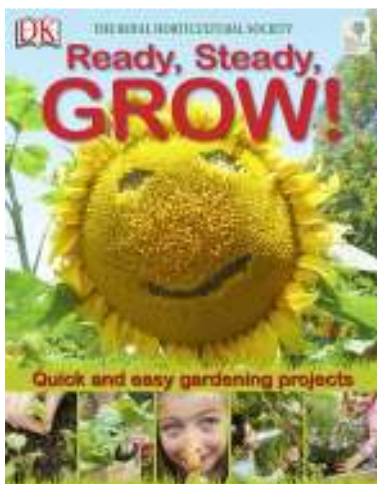
Caroline Holmes writes an excellent accompanying text which tells the when, by whom and how - sometimes even the why - although occasionally that has to be mouthed by eh reader with a large question mark (... as in *why???*.....) not Holmes; doing, simply the effect of the folly itself. Why did Raymond Isidore, a foundry worker in Chartres, France (pages 196/197) mosaic every last inch of his garden and interior - down to the kitchen sink? Also the *how?*: how on earth does that tower stay up on the dry stone arch (page 145)? and there *how on earth?* did they construct the

diminishing seven storey pagoda at Amboise (page 125)? This pagoda fulfils the first definition of the word 'folly' in that it cost £40,000 ecus (budgeted at 8,000) and forced the owner to sell in 1823. I would love to know what Caroline Holmes thought of them all, but she keeps to the informative road.

There are some 'wows' as the pages turn, such as the grotto *Salle de Fraicheur* at Chateau de Batie d'Urfe (pages 20/21) with its intricate rockwork and sculpture. there are also 'cor!' pages such as there aforementioned postman, and a definite 'cor blimey!' (I am of that age.....) when seeing the truly amazing Palais Ideal (pages 170/171). A reaction caused by learning from Holmes three pages before that this was made by Joseph-Ferdinand Cheval, a 'literate peasant, baker and postman... who gathered' stones of all kinds on his postal journeys. One envisages a small undertaking then, turns there page to find an extraordinary structure - Tom Knox likens it to Angkor Wat in Cambodia with its piles, lumps and intricate pebble mosaic work, and he is right The story and he work itself makes the eighteenth century English follies seem very tame - almost sane.

There are three modern 'follies' that are very atmospheric. One is a Russian church in a wood in a private garden: a construction born of a passion for the Russian domes and style. The other is not truly a folly as it is a row of houses: Rogner Bad Blumen Spa. but what a row. Constructed and decorated to accentuate curves and with brilliant colour, with grass roofs. truly stunning. A touch surreal, as is the Swarovski Kristallwelter in Innsbruck. Also of grass, with glass, a large head 'two glittering crystal eyes under heavy eyebrows' set into a hill with a waterfall from its mouth crashing into a lake.

A highly readable and truly enjoyable book. *BD'A*



RHS, Ready, Steady Grow!

Dorling Kindersley

ISBN 978-1-40535-238-3

RRP £9.99

The blurb says that the RHS, *Ready, Steady Grow!* is a fun new book that's guaranteed to inspire kids, and grown-ups alike, to get creative in the garden. It is like a scrapbook, lots of pictures and colours and easy to read for the children, or for a parent and child together.. Lots of ideas for families, and for schools as well.

I like the *Marigold Fish*, seeds planted in a fish shape which grows into a shining goldfish; and the *Nasturtium Nibbles*, referring to the fact that you can eat the flowers. although in my garden it's more a case of the flowers being eaten - by hundreds of stripy caterpillars. I used to tell, schools that if that happened they could still study the wildlife... There are Wild-West cacti, a bowl of tiny plants with toy


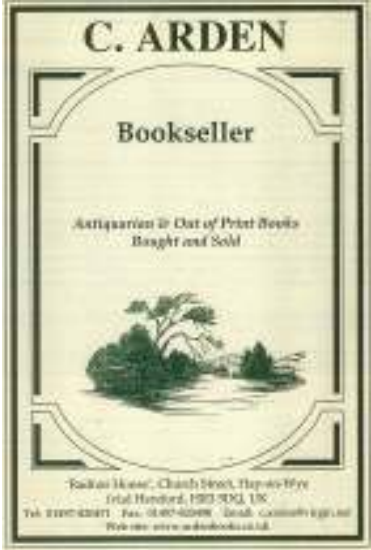
Indians on horseback amongst them, and the Radish Racers, for fast growers. Then there are others 'eats', the Pizza garden, Magic beans, a Strawberry boot....

The book has enough in it to make the spring and summer holidays fly by, and for schools to create many series of lessons, and the price is also encouraging. I like the fact that the children in the photographs are listed, by their first names, an acknowledgment without identification.

Good one RHS!

BOOK HUNTING

I have been collecting garden books for some time. Mostly those published in the 19th/early twentieth century, but others as well. Many of the books are found though www.abebooks.co.uk, and quite a lot then arrive from the USA – the excitement of finding the book is equalled only by the excitement of receiving a parcel with the custom declaration form on it! However, there are two booksellers in the uk who consistently come up with books that I want: **Mike Park**, Sutton, Surrey , and **Christopher Arden** at Hay-on-Wye Details below. Try them!

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