

Gardens of Divine Imitation

Book review by Pam Dodds - Cornwall Gardens Trust

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Gardens of Divine Imitation: A garden design timeline from the Renaissance to the Edwardian era via ancient Rome by Bella D'Arcy

Publisher: Gardens and People (October 2009) ISBN978-0-9563451-0-3 Large format softback £28

The author's sequence of careers as musician, performer, director, project manager, community arts administrator and scriptwriter, preceded retraining and launching herself as a garden designer. The background informs the content to this well-illustrated book.

As the title suggests, D'Arcy aims to trace the historical influence and links in garden design, adding her own insight. One of many examples she describes is a pebble design at the 16th century Villa D'Este in Tivoli, which reminds her of a similar circular pattern at Easton Lodge in Essex, designed by Harold Peto in 1902. She finds both schemes have their origin at the second century Roman villa of the Emperor Hadrian.

D'Arcy sums up her investigation into the process of garden design as follows:

For the gardens in the book, while a complete vision in the mind of the designer, were not always finished, and in some cases not even started. Here, these visions are interpreted by a garden designer whose interpretation may, or may not, be the reality. It is all after all, in the mind.

So, for whom is the book intended? It would obviously appeal to garden society and garden trust members, especially those who have toured Renaissance Italian gardens, Edwardian 'Italian' gardens in the British Isles, and those who have such travel in mind. For them it provides detailed accounts of the gardens' development. But for me, it is above all a reminder of personal experience of past delights. Bella D'Arcy reminds the reader that garden and architectural design should form parts of the same whole. Context is all.' The lack of an index is compensated by a detailed 'Contents' summary at the beginning. (Pam Dodds)