A SLEEPING BEAUTY

A classic Arts and Crafts garden in New Jersey, long forgotten and overgrown, is restored to brilliant new life

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When Marco Polo Stufano first set eyes on Greenwood Gardens in Short Hills, New Jersey, he was bowled over by what he saw. "My first impression was the grand scale of it," recalls Stufano, the legendary gardener behind New York's jewel-box Wave Hill for 35 years. In 2002 Stufano was asked to take a look at Greenwood by the Garden Conservancy, which helps to save exceptional American gardens and lends its expertise to those projects. "At the back of the house, there was a view to a garden and pool, and formal boxwood hedges, and in the other direction, there were a cascade and follies," says Stufano. "The bones of the garden made it possible to see the potential for a horticultural showplace within all its formality."

Although Greenwood was beyond disheveled, Stufano knew that he was looking at something special. Landscapes of this scale are the stuff garden tomes are made of, but there was no mention of Greenwood in the histories of American garden design. That's because its previous owners—the real estate mogul Joseph P. Day, followed by Peter and Adelaide Frick Blanchard—were notoriously private, and the residence was imbued with a do-not-trespass philosophy.

But in 2000, following his father's wishes, Peter Blanchard III and his wife, Sofia, established Greenwood Gardens as a nonprofit organization and reached out to the Garden Conservancy to lead the way. In addition to restoring the garden's geometry, views, textures, and hardscaping, the board charged the garden's horticulture director, Louis Bauer, with introducing a new level of interesting and varied plantings to the site, which had already been cultivated in different styles by the previous owners. With the first phase of work now complete, the garden is scheduled to open to the public on April 27.

It was Day, a real estate entrepreneur, who first recognized the site for what it was, and what it could become. Only 25 miles from Manhattan, the property runs along a ridge and flaunts a protected view of the Watchung Mountains and the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed South Mountain Reservation. After purchasing the nearly 80 acres in 1906, Day asked William Whetten Renwick, who worked for his uncle James Renwick, the architect of New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral and Washington, D.C.'s Renwick Gallery, to develop his estate.

Day's instructions were to build and acquire the very best of everything, and that's what Renwick delivered. In addition to designing Italianate terraces at the back of the house, summer houses, water cascades, footpaths, and walls, Renwick built grape-strewn pergolas alongside swaths of wildflower fields, commissioned statues and pottery from the finest artisans of the day, and constructed man-made lakes. He built a fanciful Arts and Crafts-style house on the property—a turreted concoction outfitted with grand staircases, Samuel Yellin gates, hand-painted murals, and the latest high-tech conveniences. Then he had pieces of handmade glazed Rookwood faience inlaid into the terraces, the follies, and the façade of the house. It is the blending of these Arts and Crafts embellishments into the formal language of the landscape that set the stage for the gentrified farm it became: Legend has it that Mrs. Day gathered eggs from the henhouse and vegetables from the kitchen garden and was chauffeured every Tuesday to Newark to sell her produce.

Following Day's death in 1944, the estate was divided and sold at auction; as it passed through several hands, the house and gardens fell into ruin. So when the newly weds Peter and Adelaide Blanchard
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Pegasus sculptures by Wheeler Williams and a bench on a terrace. A moss-covered staircase of local stone is flanked with antique cast-stone chess figures. A chair by Munder-Skiles in an area once used for croquet.  FACING PAGE: A Japanese granite lantern and a cast-iron greyhound mark a path, yew are underplanted with foxglove and campanula. See Resources.
purchased the then 26-acre property in 1949, they knew they were
taking on a project. Their first move was to demolish the house and
build in its stead a Georgian Revival manse furnished with 18th-
century highboys and secretaries, and old Frick family portraits
that Adelaide, a granddaughter of Henry Clay Frick, had inherited.
Peter, a high-ranking IBM executive, took on the gardens. Wanting
a French formal garden, he added hundreds of boxwood, bejeweled
the grounds with extraordinary sculptures, and, most significantly,
saved the Renwick landscape.

The Greenwood that horticulture director Louis Bauer is reshaping
today is both a palimpsest—now that the boxwood have been cut
down in size and number, the Arts and Crafts garden has begun to
reemerge—as well as the horticultural showplace that Marco Stufano
imagined so many years ago. “Because plants were always subservient
to the landscape architecture, the original palette was rather basic,”
explains Bauer, who has introduced a virtual embarrassment of
new plants, including historic varieties such as the tree peonies
bred by famed horticulturist Alice Harding, who lived in New Jersey
in the 1920s. “I also make choices based on easy-to-maintain plants,”
he says, “like variegated bluebeard, which has no diseases, needs no
deaddheading, and has a big color effect.”

This new layer of planting will bind together the gardens of the
past, while giving Greenwood a vivid new life. But Bauer has also
been mindful to maintain the garden’s patina—the alluring sense of
age, majesty, and drama that immediately entrances all who see it.
Loosely shaped American boxwood, edged with ‘Heuchera Brownies,’ acorns, and again flanks a path to the teahouse folly. FACING PAGE FROM TOP: The former croquet lawn, with a view of the house and pergola, is centered by a box-leaf holly and surrounded by boxwood and Hicks yew, as well as dogwood and azalea. One of eight artfully stone obelisks on the property.
The tiered terraces of Greenwood Gardens in Short Hills, New Jersey, originally designed by William Whetten Renwick, are lined with American boxwood and accented with golden spicata, the antique figures are two of a quartet representing the four seasons. The restored gardens open to the public the month. See Resources.