EXPANDING AESTHETIC BOUNDARIES OF AUSTRALIAN GARDEN DESIGN

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'Wigandia', Mt Noorat

Abstract

This article examines the development of Australian garden styles since colonisation to the present day. Including an analysis of gardens which have responded to the environmental peculiarities of the continent or to emerging notions of nation and post-colonial identity, it also discusses how these influences might extend to the development of uniquely Australian garden design styles of aesthetic interest and importance. It offers an historical overview of gardens which have utilised, both out of choice and necessity, native flora or other plant material suited to location, while countering arguments that 'native' is best (and indeed, rejecting such terms as native inexact and unhelpful). Ultimately this is an examination of how issues of sustainability and identity can be reflected in Australian gardens in exciting and innovative ways.

Tim Flannery recently remarked that 'roses, lawns, plane trees and the like … are a blot on the [Australian] landscape.' What follows is an exploration of the ideas, both historical and contemporary, that surround Australian garden design, analysing attempts at the creation and exhibition of a distinctively Australian garden aesthetic.

In the days following Dr Tim Flannery's Australia Day Address in 2002, newspapers around the country were bombarded with disparaging remarks about the scientist's suggestions for sensible and sustainable gardens in Australia. Most who disagreed with the idea that Australians have not developed 'deep, sustaining roots in the land'[1] felt that Flannery was not considering the full significance that we place on our gardens. '[Gardens] are places full of colourful, living things that make us feel good. To suggest that growing roses reveals a passion for a European environment is to need a closer look at roses. They're beautiful not because they're from Europe, but because they're roses',[2] complained one reader. Another felt that Flannery might be 'dressing up an aesthetic botanic prejudice in environmentalist clothing', and warned against 'obsessive ecological cleansing.'[3] One person quipped that we'd better get rid of other 'feral crops' such as wheat, rice and apples in order to preserve the vulnerable water supply.[4] While Flannery's suggestions may be those of an environmentalist rather than a garden aficionado, his words resonate with meaning for anyone who has attempted to understand why Australian gardens still look like they could be anywhere in the world – particularly puzzling given the unique appearance of Australian plants. What will be examined in the following pages are the chains that bind us to our colonial past; how

nationalism has induced aesthetic change; and lastly, how we currently interpret our landscape and translate it into gardens.

Colonial gardens

The earliest colonial gardens in Australia were necessarily utilitarian rather than aesthetic, the importance of self-sufficiency far outweighing the need for beautiful surroundings. Initially, at least, the first settlers were too busy eking out a paltry existence in the dusty plains around Port Jackson to be pondering the value of the eucalypt or the acacia, other than how they might be exploited for building or agricultural purposes. The First Fleet bore enough food to last for two years in Australia (consisting of salt meat, a few types of grain and some rancid dairy products)[5] and once this was spent there would only be what the colony produced for itself, punctuated with meagre and outrageously expensive stores from visiting merchants and subsequent convict fleets. The unfamiliarity with the conditions – soil, terrain and weather – meant that it took some time for the colony to begin to produce a surplus in food. Both the first and second crops failed to produce a return: the first failing altogether and the second generating enough only to use as seed for the next year's attempt.[6] Once the gardens did begin to produce, sabotage by the starving colonists – convicts and officers alike – was common, so the first civic kitchen gardens were placed out on an island in the harbour for safety.[7]

When the colonists had first arrived there were exclamations about the beauty of the flora: 'a variety of flowering shrubs abound, most of them entirely new to a European, and surpassing in beauty, fragrance and number…[these] deserve the highest admiration and panegyric'.[8] The surgeon aboard the *Lady Penrhyn* proclaimed in his journal on 26 January 1788:

> The finest terra's [*sic*], lawns and grottos, with distinct plantations of the tallest and most stately trees I ever saw in any nobleman's ground in England, can not excel in beauty those wh. [*sic*] Nature now presented to our view.[9]

As has been suggested,[10] these expressions of appreciation would probably have tumbled out of the mouth of anyone disembarking a stinking and confined transport, an unpleasant home for six months. Their florid language belies a desperation, a hope that other favourable comparisons (no matter how fanciful) might follow.

Certainly, earlier white spectators of the eastern seaboard of Australia had been less enthusiastic. Aboard the *Endeavour*, Joseph Banks (who had also been long at sea, but who was aware his voyage would not be over for many months yet) felt that what he saw represented far less than a southern paradise:

> For the whole length of coast which we sailed along there was a sameness to be observed in the face of the country very uncommon; Barren it may justly be called and in a very high degree, that at least that we saw…upon the Whole the fertile soil Bears no kind of Proportion to that which seems by nature doomed to everlasting Barrenness.[11]

The popularity of the *Endeavour* journals meant that these early perceptions were carried back to Australia in the minds of the men and women aboard the First Fleet, and continued to be maintained in the years after settlement.[12] The idea that the Australian landscape might have aesthetic value was dampened by overwhelming homesickness and nostalgia for the visual experiences of the northern hemisphere.[13] The early settlers had to 'battle' the bush, twist it into a recognisable shape; recontextualise the landscape to make it feel like home. The Government encouraged land-clearing through a financial subsidisation scheme, lending official sanction to the idea that native flora was useless and unappealing.[14] In fact, while the idea back in the mother country was to 'improve' upon the landscape by tending the established trees and shrubs, in the new colony the reverse appeared to be true. It was perceived to be more useful, and (although ugly by European standards) visually more attractive, to remove all plant material from a property than to have it adorned with natives.[15]

As the trickle of European flower seeds and plants that was arriving intact increased, domestic gardens began to spring up around the colony. Gardens would be planted according to hierarchy (that is, exotic plants placed in the most prominent position) rather than design, and usually there was no great distinction between ornamental and vegetable plots.[16] Some native plants were utilised 'for their novelty or their hardiness…The araucarias (notably the Bunya Bunya, the Hoop pine and the Norfolk Island pine) were favoured for their dark foliage and great height; some saw them as bizarre symbols of civilised dominance in the wilderness',[17] but emphasis was placed on the more cherished species from home.

The popularity of the few admired natives increased as interest was sparked back in England by the collections on display at Kew Gardens, which had increased to include some of the three hundred thousand specimens collected by Joseph Banks whilst aboard the *Endeavour*.[18] Banks organised ships bearing necessary crop plants to sail to the colonies, which could then return stocked with more strange and novel samples to examine. While the gardens in England incorporated some interesting species from the colonies into existing designs, the colonial gardens that were borne out of the incoming supply were more cobbled together than designed.

The first garden to be consciously developed as a symbol of success and power in Australia, rather than utility and comfort, was that within the grounds of the first Government House.[19] As can be seen from paintings of the era, it began as a simple affair consisting of straight paths leading to and from the building, dusty-looking lawns and very few plantings, save for a couple of non-indigenous trees which were given pride of place (in the representations as well as presumably in the gardens themselves).[20] But by 1828 Augustus Earle's painting *Government House and part of the town of Sydney* demonstrates how much the site had matured. Helen Proudfoot describes it as it would have been at this stage:

> By the 1830s the hill was 'carpeted with lawns', with trellis-work enclosures; the Domain was considered elegant, tasteful, romantic, and Old Government house was called,

> variously, a chateau, a country house, a charming retreat, a plaisance, chiefly on account of its fine setting and the quality of its surrounding gardens and landscape.[21]

By this time the exotic trees had matured, and had been accompanied by clumps of favoured natives, distributed upon sweeping lawns with the calculated informality of a Lancelot 'Capability' Brown design. Brown had been a key proponent in the British rejection of rigid formalism in gardens in favour of carefully staged naturalistic settings. However, by 1830, Brown was long gone and in his place had sprung Humphrey Repton (a follower of Brown but who felt his own style was 'decidedly more picturesque'),[22] and the wealthy designers, writers and general arbiters of taste, Sir Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. While back in England the landscape movement was dying out in favour of gardens enhanced with 'interest' and rustic eye-catchers (as opposed to scenes considered 'so dull and bare': Payne Knight wrote that features were required to break up the 'uniform, eternal green' of the Brownian landscapes),[23] the colonies were still stuck in the hopelessly unfashionable past.

Centennial Park, as Howard Tanner and Jane Begg point out, was an early version of the English landscaped park which utilised indigenous plants.[24] The site, which had from 1811 been set aside as a common, was located on a swamp. Tanner and Begg suggest that it was due to the sandy soil and high water table - unsuitable conditions for exotics - that natives were allowed to be grown there; however, Paul Ashton points out that the site was previously used by market gardeners due to its great fertility.[25] Ashton also puts the use of natives down to necessity, but suggests it was a result of overclearing, drought and depression which had turned the once fruitful land barren.[26] The park, so named because it was opened in 1888, was laid out on a typical English landscape design, but with plant displays (including labels, like a botanic garden) in the manner of the Gardenesque. The term Gardenesque described a style which in no way sought to emulate nature, but rather juxtaposed specimens of plants from different regions in non-natural combinations. While the colonies had been several decades behind English garden developments in the early years of settlement, by the 1880s the greater number of visitors and emigrants coming to Australia meant the ideas of John Loudon, the founder of the Gardenesque style, were more quickly taken up.[27] Moreton Bay figs, palms and melaleucas – used mainly to protect the less hardy exotics - were placed in an amalgam of English landscape and 'Loudonesque' formation. It was not until around the time of Federation, with its attendant nationalism, that the park would take on native plants as decorative elements rather than just out of environmental necessity. An area designated purely for the propagation and display of native flowers was developed in 1900, and by 1910 the park's Director, J H Maiden, had successfully introduced 'Wattle Day', perhaps hoping to inspire something of an antipodean parallel to the Japanese cherry blossom viewing festival.[28]

The 'native' garden

It has been suggested that the promotion of native plants, in any country, is inextricably linked with nationalism; that bound up in any such campaign will be a mixture of 'sound biology, invalid ideas, false extensions, ethical implications, and political usages both intended and unanticipated.'[29] This is recognisable in Australia as elsewhere, and it

is true to say that events such as Federation and the First and Second World Wars (where nostalgia for 'home' now unequivocally meant Australia) saw an appreciation for native plants increase. However, where Stephen Jay Gould points to nationalistic fervour demanding biological cleansing in Nazi Germany, it is difficult to equate this to the Australian position. The main difference between these cases is where the orthodoxy lay. While in Germany, Nazi botanists were adamant the pure beauty of the German countryside should not be polluted with inferior interlopers;[30] in nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth century Australia the dominant opinion was still that the Australian plants were inferior, and it was the exotics that were revered. While the distinctive shape of eucalyptus leaves, blossoms and 'gumnuts' might have, as symbols, been linked to a growing nationalism, the symbolism did not necessarily extend to an actual preference in gardens for gum trees over, for example, oaks. However, it appears that for some garden designers, the pride in the new Australian identity (sparked by events such as Federation and the World Wars) awoke an interest in how native plants might be integrated into garden design for purposes not merely utilitarian.

Edna Walling, although a Briton by birth, is commonly credited with bringing the native plant into the private Australian garden. She wrote of her burgeoning obsession with Australian plants in her regular column in *Australia Home Beautiful* and works such as *A Gardener's Log* of 1948 and *The Australian Roadside* of 1952. While her early designs were faithful reconstructions of those of renowned English designer Gertrude Jekyll, the 'pergolas, gates, fences, walls, paths and plantings identical in concept and detail to those illustrated in Jekyll's books';[31] she came to develop a style that included either 'wild' native areas or that were composed entirely of Australian flora.[32] Walling's colleague Ellis Stones, a stonemason she employed to construct many of the low walls, steps and rocky outcrops that became hallmarks of his work as well as hers, was simultaneously designing gardens which responded to the Australian landscape.

The inclusion of Australian plants into their designs was as much an aesthetic decision as pragmatic. Stones, whose gardens were soft, organic-looking constructions ('there was a kind of inevitability about them…they looked as if they had just "happened"')[33] felt exotic plants did not fit properly against his stonework. Instead, he drew inspiration from the way rocks looked in nature, especially around the stony region of his hometown Euroa, and the kind of plants that surrounded them.[34] Walling, for her part, seemed to turn quite quickly from an advocate of the English cottage garden style to a pioneer of the bush style. Peter Watts gives an example of her turnaround:

> The silver birch had been one of her favourite trees from the moment she began to design gardens, and she was probably responsible more than any other person for popularising its use in domestic gardens in Victoria... It is hard to believe that the same person in the middle 1950s, in response to a comment that the white trunks of birch trees gave a similar effect to some of the white trunked eucalypts, should reply 'Then why use the birches!'[35]

In one of her *Home Beautiful* columns of the mid-1940s, Walling described a plan for a 'lovely native garden… Many a half-acre could be delightfully treated in this way, and be easy to maintain when once established.'[36] This was a structureless garden planted

with unplanned waves and clumps of thryptomenes, tea-trees and waxflowers, plants sourced from various parts of the country.[37] It is possible that the non-design approach had roots in the associations with the term 'native', as a quote by Olive Mellor indicates. Mellor, the first female student at Burnley Horticultural College allowed to undertake the practical components of the course (through her petitioning of the Minister for Agriculture),[38] wrote: 'The word native always brings to mind something free and restful, with nothing prim or formal, so the lines are generous and the planting random…'[39] The garden she 'designed' along this theme, as Anne Latreille points out, 'is notable more for its cramming of almost eighty different species around the perimeter of a standard suburban block than for any great design achievement.'[40]

The premise that 'native' had to be random was adopted by designers countrywide. While Walling and Stones did provide very strong 'bones' for their gardens, the areas that were the designated native spots tended to be wild and bush-like, rather than being integrated into the formal structure. The reason for this appears to be due to an assumption that there was no aesthetic framework in which the plants could exist aside from a faux-bushland setting. Walter Burley Griffin, inventive in many other ways, determined that this was the model he should employ when designing his Sydney commune/suburb of Castlecrag.[41] While the design was interesting in that it rejected the notion of the quarter-acre block, ubiquitous red roof-tiles and the overwhelming similarity between one house from the next (as with Walling's Bickleigh Vale, each house within the suburb was individually designed in relation to its location and surrounds), the extent to which the gardens were designed was to keep them looking as much like the bush as possible.

While this model might have worked for an entire area like Castlecrag, its transposition to single domestic blocks, or even institutional and civic gardens, suffered through lack of design. The gardens created from the 1950s through to the 1970s which were based on ideological principles of environmentalism and national pride have possibly done more to damage the profile of Australian garden design than any others. At the first national conference of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture (AILA) in 1969, tireless bush garden advocate Bruce MacKenzie and architect Alistair Knox took a purist, almost pious stance:

> Understandably, Alistair Knox and I were appropriately passionate about our subject and stared out at the audience with eyes moistened by the poignancy of our personal sentiments and our pleas for respect for a design ethos inspired by our indigenous environment. Alistair required that this landscape should be accepted totally and proposed that it could not be subdivided and placed in convenient compartments for the use of 'modern man and his stereotyped surroundings … you have to accept it prickles and all … until death do us part.'[42]

But the bush garden 'non-aesthetic' propounded by these designers is not really palatable to most Australians. Visions of drab olive-grey scrub and railway sleeper benches are conjured by the very term, and, though the mission was always to advertise the beauty of the natural Australian landscape, in many instances it achieved the

opposite. Those who responded to Tim Flannery's Australia Day Speech were possibly thinking of the bush garden when they considered what a sustainable garden would have to look like. The 'design ethos' that McKenzie propounds is that of mimicking an imaginary, archetypal Australian landscape: in his words the way to accomplish this would be to 'bring together with skill and artistry the essential components of sustainable landscape practice and the challenging aesthetic of the authentic landscape Australia.' [43]

However, an examination of the history of gardening demonstrates a connection with the 'authentic' landscape is not always apparent. While the gardens surrounding the Oxfordshire country house of Rousham, for example, encompassed an essence of pastoralism, French formal gardens of the seventeenth century designed by Le Notre made only fleeting, if any, connections with what was previously on the site. Why should we make this connection in Australia? The most obvious reason appears to be that the bush garden school hoped to advance a national identity, one that had not been purposely expressed through gardens before. An article by Glen Wilson in an early issue of *Landscape Australia* highlights the impatience landscape architects were feeling in Australia with regard to this identity in the 1970s:

> The few regions throughout the world that have a recognisable landscape design style all have some history of development and tradition, and forcing the pace may have to be our substitute for this, as we have been so influenced by outside cultures I personally doubt in this day and age we can ever achieve a natural development. Surely it will have to be the product of a conscious effort.[44]

His solution, however, turned out just to be to 'observe more closely our natural environment, and apply some of the lessons learnt there'.[45] While this could be helpful when considering environmental issues (such as which species thrive under particular conditions), it offers only a limited choice of aesthetic possibilities. More interesting and exciting are gardens which can be designed in a manner which is responsible in regard to available resources, but which will also serve the interests of the people who will utilise the space. Gardens are not nature: gardens are spaces manufactured by humans which usually (but not always) include plants; they often incorporate other materials sourced from nature such as rocks and water; and they are generally, in some form or another, planned, laid-out, or designed (even the simple act of deciding on the location of a pot-plant in an urban front yard can constitute 'design'). While untouched, pristine nature is rare (and might encourage designers to 'reclaim' or recreate land in the interests of preservation), gardens are spaces for human activity. Writer Peter Timms encountered the problems involved with the distinction between 'nature' and 'garden' when attempting to create a garden that would blend so 'naturally' with the surrounding bushland that the line between the two would be impossible to locate; a garden that 'co-opted nature into artifact [*sic*]':

> My initial confidence quickly ebbed away as theories came up against reality. The vexed relationship between the garden and its surroundings has especially exercised my mind. It was a long time before I realised that any notion of integrating cultivated areas into

> bushland depended, ironically, on an artificial separation of 'nature' and 'not-nature' that, over the years, has become more and more difficult to come to grips with.[46]

While guests to his property might have been fooled into thinking what they saw was untouched bush, Timms points out that this illusion was constructed with the aid of 'chainsaw, bobcat…rake and secateurs.'[47] Timms found that although he cultivated a garden space that only used indigenous plants (i.e. species which occur naturally in that region), it was nevertheless an artificial allusion to nature – 'a kind of reference library or inventory' of local species which was, formalistically, distinctly man-made.[48]

Beyond the bush garden

One designer who argues against a prescriptive application of plant species (who will not, in fact, even enter the native versus exotic debate) while managing to create both sustainable and recognisably Australian-looking gardens is William Martin. Once a gardener at William Guilfoyle-designed 'Dalvui' at Noorat in the Western District of Victoria, Martin appreciates the beauty of such places but feels they are irreconcilable with either our culture or our climate. 'Garden culture as we know it could well be relegated to the archives filed under nice folly but hemispherically bizarre!'[49] he has warned, and so he strives to design places more suitable according to who and where we are.

One myth he hopes to dispel is that a sustainable garden is necessarily limited in colour. His garden 'Wigandia', (named after a flowering tree from Mexico), positioned on the side of Mount Noorat and watered only by rain,[50] is a wildly colourful display; it combines ornamental grasses, succulents and cacti, a great deal of allocasuarinas and a mixture of hardy perennials – even a rose or two. He is certainly unconcerned with restricting his plant material to that from the local region, rather he believes it is acceptable to use plants from any area as long as they can cope with the conditions. This approach can cause concern within the purist camps, due to the possibility of perfectly acclimatised plants from other regions escaping into the wild and overtaking local species. Gould has countered the argument that 'native is best for its own region', citing a non-scientific confusion between natural selection and optimality as the basis for that claim.[51] Gould posits that natives are not necessarily better suited to their region just because they have developed there, but only that they are adequately adapted. This means that some species, when introduced to a region where they did not previously exist, may (due to a 'superior' suitability to the conditions) overrun natives easily. This suggests that the argument that plants endemic to a region should be used in gardens because they are the best adapted is not necessarily true. While Martin concedes the protection of local species is protection against hegemony, he adds that most of the commonly cultivated 'natives' – plants endemic to the continent but not necessarily the specific locale - can be equally invasive and given that they often originate from the other side of the country, they are rendered just as alien as other, 'non-native' introduced species.[52]

It is apparent that Martin's aesthetic owes as much to visual as environmental concerns. Wigandia's design comprises meandering paths through banks and drifts of plantings

which are chosen for their individual colour and structure but which are coordinated with their neighbours to create a unified whole. The beds are planted in Guilfoylesque lozenge shapes, but where that designer's beds were separated by swathes of lawn, Wigandia is set on a base of red scoria. The vistas to the top of the hill and down across the flats are inescapable, and the designer has planted the garden in shapes that emphasise the rolling lines to one side and plunging depths to the other. Greyish brown she-oaks line the perimeter of the garden which gradually blur the foreground into the distance, 'borrowing' the views and bringing them into the design.

Martin acknowledges the effect of drought in his garden but uses it to advantage. Flowers are not dead-headed, rather they are allowed to dry and whither on the plant. Cacti that are past their prime are left to topple over and form both colour and structural contrasts with the plants around them. This acknowledgement of continual growth and regeneration, where death and decay are given equal right to display as greenery and renewal, displays an inventive application of colour. Unlike a visit to a European style garden in the wrong season, Wigandia is constantly changing and vibrant throughout the year. This philosophy is shared by contemporary European and American landscape architects such as Piet Oudolf, Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden. Their trademark grasses ('das Haar der Mutter Erde')[53] and perennial flowers are positioned in swathes and blocks, placed according to how they will appear together as they die off. The resulting effect is 'bold' and 'romantic',[54] the dazzling appearance poetically described as 'a form of natural, silent fireworks'.[55]

It is not only garden designers who are becoming more aware of the aesthetic possibilities of Australian conditions and plants; change is also occurring at an institutional level. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, have instigated two major projects in the past few years to increase public awareness of our native flora, but within designed settings that can be appreciated for their artistry as much as the intended didacticism. The Long Island project, started in 2000, might seem to be a hangover of the bush garden, but upon closer inspection we can see it actually operates in quite a different way. While it may use endemic plant materials in an apparently non-garden-like fashion, it is actually structured according to both a botanical and a visual order. It even borrows some devices from landscape styles that are present in the surrounding gardens, such as an 'avenue' of allocasuarinas and a 'bosquet' of swamp paperbarks. The island is located in the Ornamental Lake, where the Yarra river used to flow prior to its realignment in the first half of the nineteenth century. The intention was to recreate a section of the Lower Yarra, using plants specifically endemic to that area, and act as an illustration for a previous landscape. In this way, it functions primarily as an educational exhibit, but within this framework there are also conscious elements of design.

Among these design elements are the dead trees strewn in the water between Long Island and Baker's Island. These props represent the effects of flood, and are appreciated by the local water fowl as much as if they had been provided in the 'natural' way. But while the way the trees have been strewn is possibly strategic, it is more likely artful. Certainly the little stacks of rocks and bricks propping the trunks up are arranged in a

pattern, again referencing nature but simultaneously acknowledging the 'artist's hand'. Also interesting in this garden is the way colour has been exploited. Without much variation in the tonal range of the plant material, the designers have been resourceful. The swamp at the western end of the island not only alludes to drought (as seen by the low-tide marker stuck in the mud) but its hue is a fantastic clay-yellow – very Yarra, but also purposely complementary to the rest of the colours found on the island. While it may be questioned that the Long Island Project is indeed a garden, it conforms to my definition above in that it is a space that has been designed (including elements recognisable in other gardens), and it is a place for human activity.

The other project the Royal Botanic Gardens have implemented is called the Australian Garden. Located on 25 hectares within the existing Cranbourne site (established in 1970 with assistance from the Maud Gibson Gardens Trust to house a collection of native plants),[56] this garden has been designed by landscape architects Taylor, Cullity and Lethlean with horticultural advice by Paul Thompson. The design, the first stage of which will be executed over the next two years (with this section of the garden to be opened in 2005), comprises a philosophical examination of the environmental conditions of Australia and how they impact upon Australian society, and vice versa. The aim was not only to provide an educational, botanical display, but also an exciting visual and olfactory experience.

Walking from the car park towards the Visitor Centre, visitors will pass through a small forest of native pines, then another of she-oaks. This design is borrowed from a Japanese tradition of growing bamboo forests around temples, and aims to produce a similarly quieting experience.[57] Having passed through these contemplative spaces, where the noise (and memory) of the freeway and car park is diminished, the path opens out into the 'Cracked Earth Garden', an area devoted to rare plants, and decorated with ceramic sculpture by Melbourne artist Mark Stoner. This spot will be sheltered by the warm, reflective wall of the Visitor Centre and so will create its own microclimate able to support plants from hot and arid parts of the country. The earth will be sculpted up into hilly 'lunettes', one side covered with red sand and the other with vegetation.[58] This seems to be a common theme throughout the garden: green and red, cool and warm, wet and dry. As one section is passed through, the visitor will enter another that complements and contrasts with the last.

The plan was devised using a few foundation themes. First the area was divided into two sections, describing a basic nature/culture dialectic. One side will have obviously designed garden displays while the other 'takes its cues from the natural world', representing the 'Australian landscape with its qualities of mystery, age, [and] tenacity'.[59] The two sections are separated by water, starting out as the 'Dry River Walk' (populated with weird, soft, hedge-like forms; vegetal representations of the squiggles in the rocks and dust in the deserts of Central Australia when seen from the air)[60] and eventually coursing into a lake; this is the 'mediating' feature between the opposing forces. Further linking the sections are 'fingers' of woodland, avenues of trees which serve to connect the two sides visually and conceptually. They 'establish a rhythm of vegetation and linear voids, which create artificial edges in the otherwise treed fingers,

thus reinforcing the contrast and potential balance between the wilderness of the woodlands and the safety of the clearing.'[61]

Elsewhere will be a Sand Garden, a Eucalypt Walk, a Rockpool Walk and a Rock Garden, each representing different aspects of the Australian landscape and flora. On the 'human' side there will also be temporary to semi-permanent exhibition gardens, where designs by different individuals and groups will be displayed. And, in providing a design which, where possible, would 'reduce the use of non-renewable materials and those from ecologically sensitive environments [and] … reduce energy and water use in the garden',[62] the Australian Garden strives to meet the requirements of sustainability which will become moral and ecological imperatives of the future. Most importantly, while it still serves primarily as a Botanic Garden, including botanical and interpretive labels (and also that new essential element, the 'interactive'), it breaks from the traditions of the past to present and describe information within a new aesthetic framework.

Tim Flannery has called Australia the 'ultimate round peg in a square hole; the round peg being the colonial insertion of a European people, their domesticated species and their laws, while the square hole was the environment of the continent.'[63] With this 'colonial insertion' came a distinct and developed cultural heritage, which assisted a transplanted people in holding onto some idea of their identity. As that identity changed, so did the model within which their gardens could exist. Although the nationalism or environmentalism imbued in some of these styles sometimes overrode the possibility of an interesting aesthetic emerging, it was nevertheless necessary to encourage Australians' appreciation of their own flora. It has only been recently, however, that garden design has expanded to include both ideas of environmental sustainability and interesting, inventive design. This development shows there is the potential to refine our design aesthetic so it will include a response to our ecological conditions, appreciating both our past cultural forces and our contemporary position internationally, to create distinctly Australian garden styles.

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[1] Tim Flannery, *Australia Day Address 2002*, www.australiaday.com.au/tim_welcome.html, [accessed 13/03/2003].
[2] Chris Poole, 'Window on the mind? Where's the fertiliser?', *The Age*, Letters, 30/01/2002, 10.
[3] Richard Wright, 'More challenges to biodiversity than what gardens grow', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Letters, 25/01/2002, 13.
[4] Jim Devine, 'Channel that ire into saving an ecosystem', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Letters, 28/01/2002, 13.
[5] Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Collins Harvill, London, 1987, 96.
[6] Hughes, 97.
[7] Hughes, 97.
[8] Watkin Tench quoted in *Converting the wilderness: The art of gardening in colonial Australia*, exhibition catalogue, exhibition curated by Howard Tanner, Australian Gallery Directors Council, Sydney, 1979, 9.
[9] Arthur Bowes Smyth quoted in Hughes, 4. Indeed, among Smyth's exultations is also the identification of 'numerous parraquets, lorrequets, cockatoos and maccaws,' (p. 4) the latter of

course not in existence in Australia. Smyth's vision was overtaken by his imagination and what by he expected to see in this exotic locale.

[10] *Converting the wilderness,* 9, and Hughes, 3-4.

[11] Joseph Banks, 'Some Account of that part of New Holland known as New South Wales', *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks, August 1768 – July 1771*, The State Library of New South Wales, 287. Website: http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/banks/.

[12] It has been pointed out that some people, notably women, did go on to praise the native flora and habitat after the first six months of settlement, but they appear to be the exceptions proving the rule. *Converting the wilderness,* 9.

[13] This nostalgia remained an element of the Australian experience throughout the colonial years. An example is given by Dixon who describes 'the lithograph of Edward Hopely's *A Primrose from England*, published in 1856. The caption explains "that a primrose had been taken to Australia in a covered glass case, and when it arrived there in full bloom, the sensation it excited as a reminiscence of 'Fatherland' was so great, that it was necessary to protect it with a guard".' Robert Dixon, 'Nostalgia and Patriotism in Colonial Australia' in John Hardy and Alan Frost (eds.), *Studies from Terra Australis to Australia*, Occasional Paper No. 6, Highland Press, Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 1989, 211.

[14] John Zwar, 'Exotics versus endemics – that is the question', *Landscape Australia*, no. 1, 1996, 50.

[15] 'The system of "clearing" here, by the total destruction of every native tree and shrub, gives a most bare, raw, and ugly appearance to a new place. In England we plant groves and woods, and think our country residences unfinished and incomplete without them; but here the exact contrary is the case, and unless a settler can see an expanse of bare, naked, unvaried, shadeless, dry, dusty land spread all around him, he fancies his dwelling "wild and uncivilised".' Louisa Anne Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1973 (1844), 56. Obviously this behaviour had a great deal to do with the preparation of the land for agricultural purposes, but it simultaneously prevented the new settlers from developing an aesthetic affinity with their surroundings.

[16] *Converting the wilderness,* 10.

[17] *Converting the wilderness*, 11.

[18] Hughes, 55.

[19] *Converting the wilderness*, 9.

[20] *Converting the wilderness,* 9-10, 12.

[21] Helen Proudfoot, *Old Government House: the building and its landscape*, State Planning Authority of New South Wales in assoc. with Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971, 78.

[22] Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay, an Essay in Spatial History*, Faber and Faber, London, 1987, 237.

[23] From Payne Knight's 1793 poem 'The Landscape', quoted in Carter, 238.

[24] Howard Tanner and Jane Begg, *The Great Gardens of Australia*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1983 (1976), 45.

[25] Tanner et al., *Great Gardens*, 45; Paul Ashton and Kate Blackmore, *Centennial Park: A History*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, NSW, 1988, 16. Ashton quotes Majoribanks as describing the marshy areas within the swamp as 'uncommonly fertile, producing vegetables with the exception of potatoes, sufficient to supply the whole town [of Sydney]'.

[26] Ashton et al., 108.

[27] Although there was clearly development to include Loudon's theories, there were still those within the colony who felt the picturesque outlook was still wholly relevant. The following passage was written at the time when plans were being submitted for the design of Centennial Park: 'The Lachlan Swamp is a magnificent expanse naturally, and a man of picturesque ideas, of large grasp, combined with enthusiasm and experience in his art – a landscape gardener in fact – would by a wand of enchantment, clothe those hills and vales with beauty, making it the fairest spot in all Australia.' From an anonymous letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, cited in Ashton et al., 25.

[28] Ashton et al., 107-109.

[29] Stephen Jay Gould, 'An Evolutionary Perspective on Strengths, Fallacies and Confusions in the Concept of Native Plants', in Joachim Wolshke-Bulmahn (ed.), *Nature and Ideology, Natural Garden Design in the Twentieth Century*, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C., 1997, 11.
[30] 'As with the fight against Bolshevism, our entire Occidental culture is at stake, so with the fight against this Mongolian invader [the flower *Impatiens parviflora*], an essential element of this culture, namely, the beauty of our home forest, is at stake', quoted in Gould, 12.
[31] Tanner et al., *Great Gardens*, 48.
[32] This does not in fact vary too much from Jekyll's ideas of using plants that were indigenous to England, and incorporating existing heathland into her designs. However, the resulting appearance (as well as the popularity between the two regions' native flora) was markedly different, leading to Walling's reputation as a promoter of Australian plants.
[33] Anne Latreille, *Ellis Stones, His Life and Work*, Viking O'Neil, Ringwood, 1990, xi.
[34] Latreille, 87.
[35] Peter Watts, *The Gardens of Edna Walling*, National Trust of Australia, 1981, 48.
[36] Walling, 'Recipe for a Native Garden', quoted in Latreille, 85.
[37] Indeed, while Stones and Walling hoped to emulate nature through their use of native plants, their selection of plants from disparate regions secured their position as undeniably man-made. The selection of native plants in cultivation was, however, limited. Latreille shows that until the 1950s, the number of nurseries operating that stocked a wide range of Australian flora were rare. Latreille, 82-83.
[38] Latreille, 79.
[39] Olive Mellor in *Australian Gardening To-Day Illustrated* of 1939, quoted in Latreille, 81.
[40] Latreille, 81.
[41] Tanner et al., *Great Gardens*, 45.
[42] Bruce MacKenzie, 'An Australian landscape design ethos', Landscape Australia, no. 2, 1996, 123-4.
[43] MacKenzie, 125.
[44] Glen Wilson, 'Towards an Australian style of Landscape design', *Landscape Australia*, no. 1, 1979, 39. While I would argue that no landscape design style has developed 'naturally', it is interesting to read of this suggestion for forced change. It may be that a 'conscious effort', whether it were in the form of planning policy or a groundswell in the landscape design industry, would make a positive impact on our perceptions of the 'Australian style'. Equally though, it is impossible to completely cut the ties of our past - there must be acknowledgement of our cultural heritage in order to represent our identity truthfully, otherwise representations can be overshadowed by political considerations.
[45] Wilson, 42.
[46] Peter Timms, 'Chapter One - First Walk – Origins', *Making Nature*, website: http://www.austlit.com/chapters/timms-origins.html.
[47] Timms, http://www.austlit.com/chapters/timms-origins.html.
[48] Timms, http://www.austlit.com/chapters/timms-origins.html.
[49] William Martin, 'The importance of not gardening', *The Digger's Club Magazine*, Spring, 2000, 20.
[50] Leo Schofield, 'Garden Tome', (book review), *The Bulletin*, 22/01/2003, website: http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au. Sarah Guest has described it more overtly: 'Watering is done only when the urge to drag a hose about overcomes the more attractive option of leaving it where it is.' Sarah Guest with photography by Simon Griffiths, *Gardens in Australia*, New Holland Publishers, Sydney, Auckland, London, Cape Town, 2001, 102.
[51] Gould, 14-15.
[52] Personal communication with William Martin, 10/04/2003.
[53] ('The Hair of Mother Earth'), Karl Foerster quoted in Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, *Bold Romantic Gardens*, Florilegium, Melbourne, 1990, 39.
[54] From the title of Oehme et al.
[55] Adrian Benepe, quoted in Carol Stickland, 'A 'wild' tribute takes root in New York City', *csmonitor.com*, 5/02/2003.

[56] Peter Howson, 'The Cranbourne Botanic Gardens and the Maud Gibson Garden Trust', *Victorian Historical Journal*, v. 67, no. 1, April, 1996, 162-163.
[57] Paul Thompson, 'Planting Design, with particular reference to the Australian Garden at RBG Cranbourne', Public Lecture at the National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, 22/05/2003.
[58] Paul Thompson lecture at RBG, 22/05/2003.
[59] 'The Australian Garden Masterplan – For part of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne, Victoria: a Landscape Australia Report', *Landscape Australia*, no. 3, 1996, 207.
[60] These shapes have resonances with the topiary forms at Levens Hall, Cumbria, UK. This has not been made explicit in the literature available (rather it is my own comparison), however it can be seen that the design means to evoke a sense of pervading strangeness. It appears as though a similarly unusual experience will be created for visitors walking around these biomorphic, slow-growing, (yet undeniably alive) forms as that felt with Beaumont's topiary garden. The Edwardian fascination for fantasy seems to have resurfaced in recent years, although I would argue it has always been a framework that has been utilised for the appreciation and exploration of the Australian landscape. Consider John Glover's twisted Tasmanian trees or Russell Drysdale's claustrophobic scenes, or in film, the archetypal lost-in-the-bush experience typified in Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, where the landscape could be imagined as alive and menacing. This sense of 'otherness' is exemplified in the Australian Garden's design (divided as it is between the natural and the cultural), however this dialectic is taken advantage of as an identifiably Australian experience.
[61] Landscape Australia Report, 207.
[62] Landscape Australia Report, 210.
[63] Tim Flannery, *Beautiful Lies: Population and Environment in Australia*, Quarterly Essay, Black Inc., Melbourne, Issue 9, 2003, 4.