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C.C. Pat Fleming: Houston, Texas, landscape architect

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C. C. PAT FLEMING:
HOUSTON, TEXAS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Landscape Architecture

in

The Department of Landscape Architecture

by
Paige Allred Phillips
B.A., The University of the South, 1994
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to C. C. Pat Fleming and his family.

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ABSTRACT

C. C. Pat Fleming practiced landscape architecture in Houston and the surrounding South from the 1920s through the 1990s. He came to be considered one of Houston's preeminent landscape architects, and his role in the profession cannot be overlooked. This thesis traces the evolution of Fleming's design style over the course of his career, analyzing a selected cross section of his works against three design movements that occurred during his lifetime: the Beaux-Arts tradition, the Colonial Revival movement, and the Modernist movement.

For investigating the work of Pat Fleming, the method of historical research is used. A historical context study is conducted, covering design and social movements during Fleming's lifetime that relate to his work. This context study covers the international movements of Beaux-Arts, Classical European styles, and Modernism. The national trend of Colonial Revivalism is examined along with the regional mode of Southern gardens. The local context of Houston, Texas (Fleming's residence and primary place of practice), is then examined. After establishing an historical context, case studies of various Fleming projects are presented. Works for critique are chosen which illustrate Fleming's different design modes and those which portray an evolution of his sensibility.

Fleming's work was found to have evolved from his Beaux-Arts training to incorporate Modernist principles. This evolution was tentative at first: he characterized his more modern designs as "informal." A persistent Beaux-Arts principle throughout his work is the use of axuality, even in many modern works. He remained heavily deferent to the architecture of the buildings and homes he designed for; however, in areas more distant from those buildings and homes, Fleming engaged in convincingly naturalistic design. His early connections with respected architects and prominent families afforded him significant opportunities. His personality, evocative of Southern gentility, was gracious and inviting to clients who sought his work—especially those clients whose tastes stemmed from Colonial Revivalist inclinations. Fleming's engaging personality allowed him to closely observe how his clients lived and to design for that lifestyle.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

C. C. “Pat” Fleming practiced landscape architecture in Houston and the surrounding South from the 1920s through the 1990s. He came to be considered one of Houston’s preeminent landscape architects, and his role in the profession cannot be overlooked. This thesis traces the evolution of Fleming’s design style over the course of his career, analyzing a selected cross section of his works against three design movements that occurred during his lifetime: the Beaux-Arts tradition, the Colonial Revival movement, and the Modernist movement.

The first movement to be examined, the classical European tradition of the Beaux-Arts, was the dominant mode of design during Fleming’s early professional studies. The Beaux-Arts encompasses the Italianate tradition of landscape design, to which much of Fleming’s work is strongly linked. The architect Charles Platt was influential in the proliferation of the Italianate school and emblematic of its style adapted to America. Fleming’s works are analyzed for formal similarities with Platt’s.

The Colonial Revival was a national cultural movement whose effects were felt in many disciplines, including landscape architecture. The Colonial Revival represents the search for a national cultural identity within the United States, signaling a departure from pure imitation of European models. The country was becoming to some degree self-referential, signaling a formation of an indigenous sense of material identity. The Southern gardening tradition is a subset of Colonial Revivalism, and this tradition informed the regional mode of design for the South and helped to form a basis for regional identity within architectural design.

The third movement examined, Modernism, saw its genesis and flowering during Fleming’s lifetime. Of particular interest to observe is how Fleming reacted to and subsequently incorporated this style into his work. His attempt to incorporate Modernist ideas without losing touch with his other modes of design speaks volumes about Fleming’s flexibility as a designer. Architectural critic Marc Treib’s axioms for modern landscape architecture serve as a basis for the analysis of Fleming’s modernist expressions.

This thesis analyzes Fleming’s works against certain stylistic movements in the landscape profession. It is not an exhaustive account of all Fleming’s work, nor does it seek to be. Volumes could be written on Fleming’s projects, for they number in the hundreds. My objective is to select salient works that illustrate Fleming’s incorporation of certain styles into his own work. It focuses chiefly on Fleming’s residential designs, for they constituted the bulk of his commissions. However, commercial and institutional works are referenced, especially for their usage of modernist design vocabulary.

Above all, it is important to observe that Fleming was a commissioned professional, paid by clients with their own ideas and opinions, and he responded to each of his commissions in a unique way that was more than mere imitation of a particular style. His responses to the existing site as well as to his clients’ personalities were primary engines of his designs. Fleming’s own personality, his likes and dislikes, influenced his work as well. An examination of Fleming’s influences and his subsequent work offers an important perspective of the cultural legacy of landscape architecture in the twentieth century.

METHODOLOGY

To examine the work of Pat Fleming, the historical research method was used. Initial research involved searches for Fleming in publications. This yielded a small collection of magazine, newspaper, and journal articles. What was missing from magazine and newspaper articles was filled in more substantially by an article in *Cite*, a local Houston design journal, in which Fleming was interviewed. A fair selection of Fleming plans is housed at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. These plans were added to by my own efforts in locating past and present owners of Fleming gardens. A list of works by Fleming was generated by compiling various sources and references; a point of beginning for that list was the HMRC's records based on their small collection of plans.

I was able to contact Fleming's son, who provided me with various materials that belonged to Fleming: writings by Fleming, such as lecture notes for speaking engagements; a collection of magazines and journals in which Fleming's work appeared; a collection of approximately 200 slides of various projects; a series of portfolios which included photos, drawings, and resume materials; and other work-related papers. One portfolio included photos of his remodeled house, employing the technique of repeat photography ("before and after"). Fleming's son was also able to provide the names of some of Fleming's colleagues and employees. The person with the most comprehensive recollections of Fleming's work was Kenneth McMinn, an architect who worked in Fleming's office in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He also provided insights into Fleming's design approach and his personality.

After some initial research, I visited several Fleming gardens to experience them first-hand. Whenever possible, I documented them photographically. I spoke with existing and/or former owners of the gardens to establish any salient details or anecdotes about the design, construction, or history of the garden. This research helped to round out information found in published materials.

I then endeavored to research the historical context in which Fleming's work was done. This context study is arranged beginning with the widest international context, narrowing down finally to local context, with a roughly chronological progression. I provide contextual studies of design and social trends during Fleming's lifetime that relate to his work. This context begins with international and national context, then regional, and then local context. The national and international context will cover classical, Beaux-Arts, and European styles, with particular emphasis on the Italianate villa style as well as Modernism. Colonial Revivalism will be introduced as a national movement unique to America. This movement dovetails into regional trends of the Southern United States. Within the regional context comes the local context of Houston, Texas, Fleming's residence and primary place of practice.

After establishing the historical context, case studies of various Fleming projects are presented. Fleming's projects range in size from postage-stamp courtyards to large urban estate lots to state parks. I give a representative sampling of a variety of primarily residential projects that illustrate Fleming's different design modes and those which portray an evolution of his sensibility. The practical considerations that influenced my choices were the availability of drawings, photographic documentation, and the opportunity to visit the sites. Critiques of these projects are offered within the case studies as well as in the conclusion section.

Fleming's design philosophy is then explored, covering his general approach to his projects. His personal attitude toward various styles and design trends is also discussed. This information is drawn largely from Fleming's own words, taken from a variety of sources such as magazine articles and lecture notes. Of particular interest is an article written by Fleming for

River Oaks Magazine in 1939. In it, he categorizes all landscapes into three styles: formal, naturalistic, and informal. This article is important, as it is his self-classification for all his landscape works. Fleming's categories also provide hints as to his attitude toward various design movements that occurred during his lifetime as well as how he incorporated them into his design philosophy.

In the conclusion section, I attempt to synthesize Fleming's design approach and how it evolved over his career. With this in mind, the meaning and significance of the various design movements are assessed. Fleming's significance is then addressed within the profession and within the geographic area in which he practiced. I also hypothesize as to the factors that contributed to Fleming's success as a designer.

CHAPTER 2: BIOGRAPHY OF C. C. PAT FLEMING

C.C. “Pat” Fleming was born in Beaumont, Texas, on February 13, 1909. He was one of seven children. Christened Cauthen Cook Fleming, he often went by C. C. Fleming or simply “Pat.” His father, Joseph Vandever Fleming, was a lawyer and oilman; his mother, Keziah, was a doctor, although she never practiced. Fleming’s family moved to Arizona in 1918 in efforts to escape the humid climate of Beaumont, where they had contracted malaria. In 1928, Fleming left Arizona to begin undergraduate studies in architecture at the University of Texas in Austin. During his studies at the University of Texas, Fleming, while welding, suffered an accident which burned his eyes, and he was forced to abandon his studies.¹ Knowing that Fleming was eager to visit Europe to see its architecture, Fleming’s father arranged for a trip. A retired architecture professor by the name of Dr. Tandy served as Fleming’s guide. It was on this trip that Fleming realized that he was more interested in the setting and surroundings of a building than the actual building itself. This realization crystallized his desire to practice landscape architecture rather than architecture.



Figure 2.1 Fleming circa 1948.
Photo by Paul Hester.



Figure 2.2 Fleming circa 1990.
Photo by Paul Hester.

Although Fleming did not receive formal landscape architectural training, nor did he complete his architectural training, he began working in the landscape field. From 1930 to 1933,

Fleming worked under Mrs. C. B. Whitehead, an Austin landscape contractor, in executing planting for the University of Texas called for by the masterplan designed by Hare and Hare of Kansas City. Mrs. Whitehead sent Fleming across Texas and Oklahoma on a plant-buying trip for that project. Fleming recounts that he had never had a particular interest in plants prior to then, but on his trip he was very keen to learn as much as he could about them. After completing that job, Fleming was asked to work for the National Park Service. He served as a junior-grade landscape architect in the design of Palmetto State Park near Gonzales, Texas, from 1934 to 1935. Fleming was able to prove his dexterity at imitating natural forms in the retaining walls he built there disguised as rock outcroppings with waterfalls and pools (figs. 2.3 and 2.4).



Figure 2.3 Palmetto State Park during site regarding. From Fleming's portfolios.



Figure 2.4. Palmetto State Park after work shown in Figure 2.3. From Fleming's portfolios.

His next job with the Park Service was as supervising landscape architect for the planning and development of the San Jacinto Monument and Battlegrounds from 1935 to 1936. There, he worked with Albert Sheppard, a friend of Fleming's from UT architecture school who would later become his business partner from 1937 to 1942. As part of the research for that project, families whose relatives had fought in that battle were interviewed, many of whom had become prominent Texas families. The monument's architect, Albert Finn, was impressed with Fleming's work and recommended him to influential Houstonians. Exposure from this high-profile project garnered him an appointment to the City of Houston Planning Commission in 1936 by Mayor R. H. Fonville. In 1938, Fonville appointed Fleming as assistant director of the Houston Housing Authority.²

On April 10, 1937, Fleming formed a professional landscape planning practice with Albert Sheppard. They received numerous major commissions in the Houston neighborhoods of River Oaks, Shadyside, and Broad Acres, many of which involved the work of prominent Houston architect John Staub. Most notable among these was the Diana garden for Ima Hogg at her residence, Bayou Bend. During this time, Fleming and Sheppard also received prominent residential commissions in Dallas and Austin, Texas. The practice with Sheppard lasted until 1942 when Sheppard left to work for the engineering firm of Brown and Root, coinciding with America's entry into World War II. Fleming continued a limited private practice in Houston and Dallas from 1942 to 1943. From 1943 to 1945, Fleming served as the first director of the combined Department of Parks and Recreation for Houston. After the end of the war, he established Fleming Planning Associates in 1945.³ In the early 1940s, Fleming met Mildred Blair Hughes while he was working on a Dallas residential project. They married and had one son, Rick. They later divorced in 1964.⁴

Over the next thirty-five years, Fleming produced institutional, corporate, and commercial projects, with his chief emphasis being residential. His firm created the first corporate campus in Houston: the twenty-seven-acre Prudential Life Insurance Company headquarters in 1952 for which he received the 1955 Plant American Award from the American Association of Nurserymen (see fig 2.5). Other notable non-residential commissions were the R. E. "Bob" Smith fountain, a landmark in downtown Houston (fig. 2.6); the George Parker Memorial Garden at Trinity University and the Witte Museum, both in San Antonio; the Elmwood and Lake Terrace apartments in New Orleans; the Allen House, Westcreek, and Georgian apartments in Houston; and the Southwest Savings and Loan building and grounds, also in Houston. Fleming was given the International Award for Landscape Planning by the Garden Club of America for the Cecil R. Haden residence in 1962 and for the William McIver Streetman residence in 1963 (fig. 2.7), both in Houston. Other notable residential work over the course of his career was for Emy-Lou Biedenharn in Monroe, Louisiana; General and Mrs. Kemper Williams of New Orleans, founders of the Historic New Orleans Collection; former Texas Governor Allen Shivers; P. M. Schlumberger of Houston; Pio Crespi of Dallas; and Mr. and Mrs. George Parker, Marion Koogler McNay, and F. G. Oppenheimer in San Antonio. Fleming designed selected projects in Louisiana, New Mexico, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Arkansas, Colorado, Minnesota, Canada, Mexico, and Europe. His work also appeared in various issues of *House Beautiful*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Southern Accents*, *Houston Home and Garden*, *Texas Homes*, and *Landscape Architecture*.⁵



Figure 2.5 Prudential headquarters.
Fleming's portfolios.



Figure 2.6 R. E. "Bob" Smith fountain.

Fleming involved himself in multidisciplinary activities designed to preserve Houston's history and enhance its resources as a city. In 1954, he, along with a dozen other citizens of the county, formed the Harris County Heritage Society. This organization was and is important to Houston in promoting awareness of its history and in preserving its architectural heritage. He was also an advocate of the utilization of Houston's bayous as an amenity for the city, rather than their current state as a concrete drainage ditch. In figure 2.8, one can see a conceptual sketch (dated prior to 1966) of Buffalo Bayou between River Oaks and downtown Houston (now known as Allen Parkway) that his office prepared as a gift to the city of Houston. The plan included trails for horse, buggy, and walking; low-power boating facilities; restaurants; and recreational facilities. Designed to promote interest in the Bayou's development, the project was not undertaken due to lack of funds, its cost estimated at the time to be three million dollars.⁶



Figure 2.7 William McIver Streetman residence.

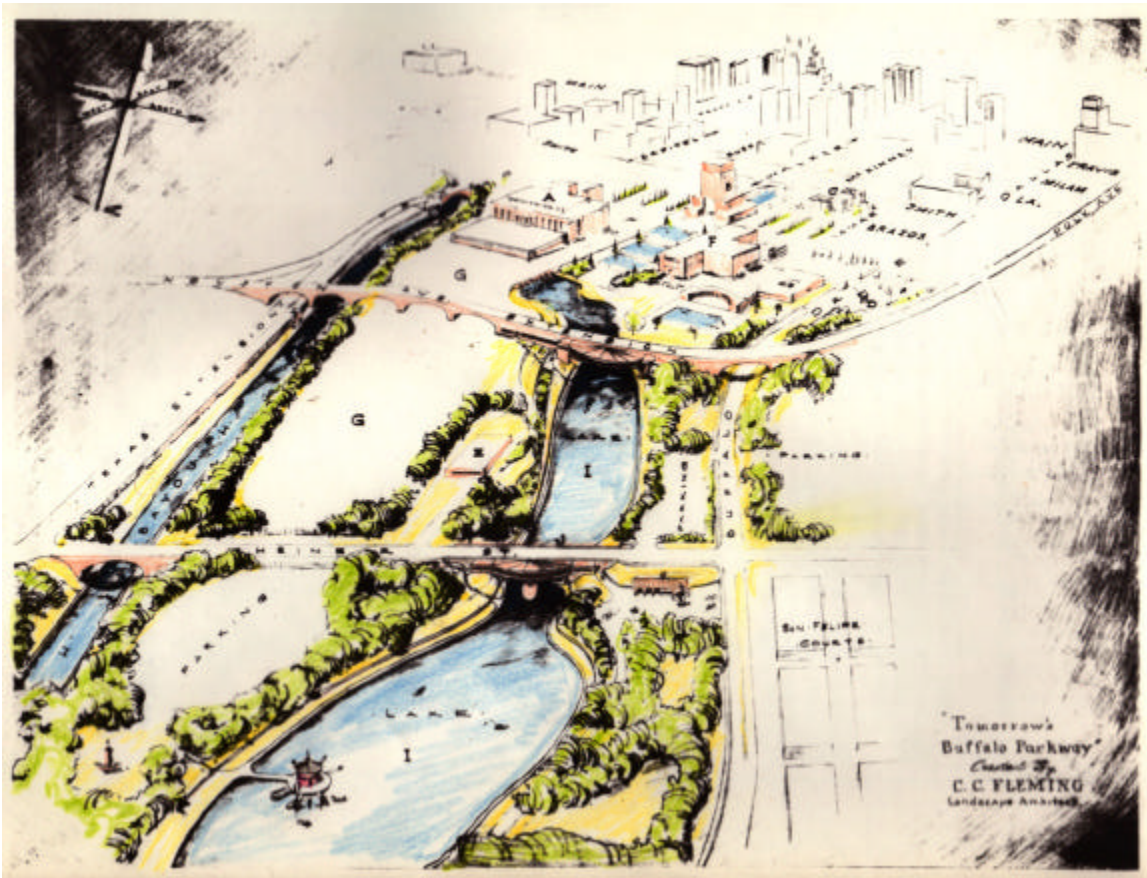


Figure 2.8 proposed plan for Buffalo Bayou.

In 1970, Fleming retired and moved to the Texas Hill Country. Two years later, he married Mrs. Erwin W. Smith of Houston, and they moved to Kerville, Texas.⁷ During his years in Kerville, Fleming took a renewed interest in xeriscaping and native plants of the area. He started a tree farm on the Guadalupe River to experiment with the use of native plants.⁸ Fleming also embarked upon a project to research early Texas gardens and related structures. He organized a team of researchers with the intention of publishing a book on the topic; however, the project never came to full fruition. In 1984, he returned to Houston and resumed his practice, engaging in mostly residential commissions for former and new clients.⁹ One notable commission of that time was the installation of gardens at the Oscar F. Holcombe estate in Houston, which was being utilized as a medical hospice and healing garden.¹⁰ Fleming's work continued to be published during these years. Fleming died on February 7, 1996, after a prolonged illness, leaving many drawings and papers to the Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

Fleming's interests were wide and varied. He was an avid reader with an extensive knowledge of history and art.¹¹ Trying to re-establish his library has yielded spotty results. Fleming gave a portion of his books to a niece who was studying architecture; attempts to contact her have been unsuccessful. When Fleming died, Houston landscape architect Dennis Wright was given "first pick" of Fleming's books. Although Wright does not have a catalog of the books he was given, he does recall topics such as English ironwork, French gardens, Mississippi river plantations, and many plant-related books.¹² Kenneth McMinn, an employee of

Fleming for several years, recalls that Fleming had many books on Asian gardens and design.¹³ One specific book that Fleming had is referred to in a letter he wrote to the book's author: *The Renaissance of Italian Gardens* by Lorenza de' Medici. However, this book was published in 1990, relatively late in Fleming's life.¹⁴

Details of Fleming's travels are somewhat sparse. Bits and pieces have been relayed through Fleming's family and friends. Fleming went to visit McMinn in Hong Kong in 1985. During that trip, Fleming bought many books on Asian design. Fleming considered this trip to most likely be the last major trip that he would undertake. Neither McMinn nor Fleming's son recall any visits to California,¹⁵ although Fleming did travel to Hawaii. One of his clients lived there and was referred to as the "pineapple king" of Hawaii, after his fruit business. Those close to Fleming do not recall his making many trips to the East Coast, though McMinn does recall that Fleming visited the Biltmore (the Vanderbilt home) in North Carolina. McMinn recalls Fleming's interest in that homesite, particularly its fruit tree orchard.¹⁶ Fleming does allude to travel in Europe in 1939, which followed his first trip there by about ten years. In the letter Fleming wrote to the author Mrs. de' Medici, Fleming says he spent time in England, France, Spain, and Italy; however, he was "completely captivated" by the Italian gardens. Of all the gardens he saw on his trip, Fleming recounts, "the most fascinating gardens were Italian." He wrote this letter in 1991 to ask the writer for more information on books covering gardening techniques, procedures, and maintenance. He was interested in how the old, great gardens of Italy were maintained and what equipment was used, particularly for maintaining tall hedges. Even late into his life, he showed an interest in better maintaining gardens, not only designing them. The letter attests to Fleming's extremely inquisitive mind. His desire to learn informed his varied interests and allowed him to contribute much to the field of landscape architecture and to the City of Houston.¹⁷

END NOTES

1 Raequel Roberts, "Still Changing the Face of Houston's Landscape: Pat Fleming: The Creative Force Behind the Designs of Some of the Grandest Gardens in the City," *Houston Post*, 12 February 1989, p. F1(FINAL).

2 Anne Schlumberger Bohnn, Edwin A. Eubanks, and Stephen Fox, "An Interview with C. C. Pat Fleming," *Cite*, Fall 1992-Winter 1993: 32-36.

3 C. C. Pat Fleming, "Memo: Life History," [after 1984], A Private Collection.

4 Roberts, F1.

5 Bohnn et. al., 32-33.

6 Fleming Associates, "A Proposal Providing Professional Services Pertaining to Preliminary Planning of the Proposed Addicks and Barker Park Sites," [stamped 6 December 1966 on cover], A Private Collection.

7 C. C. Pat Fleming, typed notes, [after 1984], A Private Collection.

- 8 Kenneth McMinn, interview by author, phone conversation, Houston, Texas, October 2003.
- 9 C. C. Pat Fleming, "Memo: Life History," [after 1984], A Private Collection.
- 10 Bohnn et. al., 33.
- 11 Kenneth McMinn, interview by author, tape recording, Austin, Texas, 3 December 2001.
- 12 Dennis Wright, interview by author, phone conversation, Houston, Texas, October 2003.
- 13 Kenneth McMinn, October 2003.
- 14 C. C. Pat Fleming to Mrs. Lorenza de'Medici, 7 May 1991, A Private Collection.
- 15 Kenneth McMinn, October 2003; Rick Fleming, interview by author, conversation, Houston, Texas, October 2003.
- 16 Kenneth McMinn, October 2003.
- 17 C. C. Pat Fleming to Mrs. Lorenza de'Medici.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Pat Fleming's career spanned a significant number of years and design trends. His work often followed the national design trends of the time. However, certain characteristics of his earlier work persisted throughout his career. An examination of the context in which Fleming's work took place helps to better define the environment that shaped his work.

CLASSICAL TRADITIONS

Beaux-Arts Classicism

Much of Fleming's formal designs can be described as classical Beaux-Arts. The term comes from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, a design school established in Paris in 1819, which many American architects and landscape architects attended from the 1880s onward. It was the principal course of career training for United States architects and landscape architects until World War II.¹ At that school, comprehensive design was stressed, covering site planning through finishing architectural details. According to Griswold and Weller in *The Golden Age of American Gardens*, Beaux-Arts essentials include "a reliance on garden architecture, a symmetrical plan, a fanatic attention to detail and proportion, and most of all, a fluent mastery of three-dimensional space."² In a Beaux-Arts landscape design, axes of the house are carried out into the landscape as sight lines that often lead to focal points such as statuary, water features, or even distant views³ (see fig. 3.1). The World's Colombian Exposition of 1893 brought to physical form the Beaux-Arts ideals of design, as illustrated in the Court of Honor (see fig. 3.2). This mode of design became very popular around the end of the nineteenth century, and it continues today as an enduring design tradition.



Figure 3.1 A Beaux-Arts style garden.
Reprinted from *The Golden Age of American Gardens*, p. 77.



Figure 3.2 Court of Honor, 1893 World's Colombian Exposition.
Reprinted from <http://columbus.gl.iit.edu/>, Paul V. Galvin Library Digital History Collection.

This school of design was the prevailing mode during Fleming's years in architecture school at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, from 1928 to 1930. Inspection of the curriculum listings and course descriptions for those years reveal that there was an emphasis on the study of classical (Greek and Roman) models of art, architecture, and design. Architectural history courses covered Egyptian, Western Asiatic, Greek, Roman, Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance architecture. The history of Greek art was required as well. In design classes, there was a heavy reliance on Beaux-Arts design problems. Architectural design students were required to undertake problems prepared by the Society of the Beaux-Arts in some of their design classes. In other classes, students were given the option to undertake Beaux-Arts design problems and submit their solutions directly to the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design for an additional fee.⁴ The Beaux-Arts therefore served as a starting point for Fleming in his design education. It would be the lens through which he examined the many works of architecture and landscape architecture that he encountered in his subsequent tour of Europe.



Figure 3.3 A Houston Beaux-Arts garden. From Fleming's slide collection.

The Italianate Tradition

The Italianate tradition can be considered a subset of the classical Beaux-Arts mode of design. The Italian villa (figs 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7) serves as the best example of the Italianate tradition. It is important to note that the Italian word *villa* refers not simply to the house but to the house and grounds as a whole, which points to the most important principle at work in the villa: the integration of house and landscape as a single unit. Norman Newton, a well-respected landscape historian, describes the Italian villa as “a marvelously integrated combination of indoor and outdoor space, of architecture and landscape architecture, fitted with consummate felicity to its site....”⁵ Newton describes the typical form of these outdoor rooms: “the individual spaces...were as a rule crisply geometric, usually rectilinear, always firmly under control.”⁶

This relation of indoors to outdoors came from the deliberate organization of space. Newton distills the spatial organization of the villas to two fundamental principles:

The first [principle] is the observable fact that a line of sight connecting one space to another, or several spaces in a series, ties them together visually and imparts to the beholder an appreciable and satisfying psychological sense of clear inter-relationship, of structure, of strength. The second [principle], an antecedent to the first, is the equally observable fact that, when the spaces thus tied together are unequivocally formed, having their boundaries perceptibly defined or implied by vertical planes so that each individual space is easily grasped as an entity, then the sense of structural strength is even greater and more satisfying.⁷

Newton is explaining the psychological effect of the villas’ treatment of garden space, which causes them to resonate so powerfully as a design form.

An often-overlooked aspect of the Italian villas is the role of meaning and symbolism found in its gardens. In the Italian villas of the Renaissance, gardens were an opportunity to tell a story, often of an allegorical nature. Classical sculpture was employed at various areas in the garden, often part of a proscribed garden itinerary. These itineraries would have a message to be imparted to the visitor about the nature of human experience, frequently with flattering references to the owner of the garden, or posing a riddle with symbolic answers embedded within.⁸ Implicit within most of the Italian villas is a central theme of the Renaissance: “...Nature’s abundance and generosity and the relationship between Art and Nature....”⁹



Figure 3.4 Villa Medici. Reprinted from *The Landscape of Man*, p. 157.



Figure 3.5 Villa Lante. Reprinted from *Italian Gardens*, p. 21.

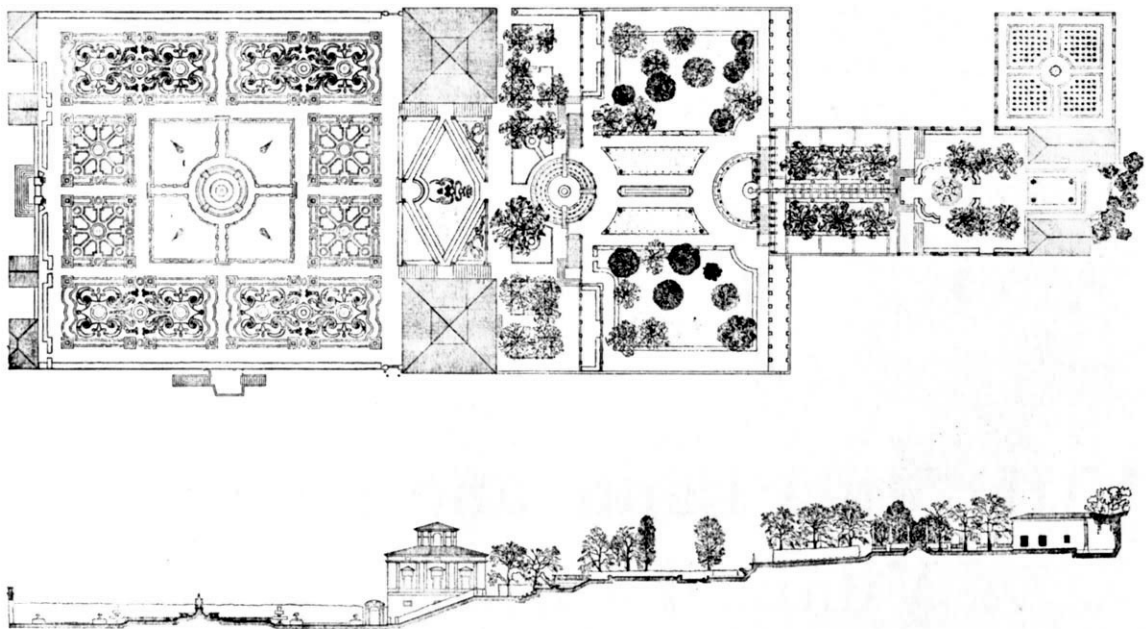


Figure 3.6 Villa Lante plan and elevation. Reprinted from *Design on the Land*, p. 100.



Figure 3.7 Colonna gardens. Reprinted from *Italian Gardens*, p. 21.

The repopularization of the principles of the Italian villa came from several publications. These publications were largely descriptions of the Italian villas themselves. Leading this reintroduction was *Italian Gardens* by Charles Platt in 1894. It was probably the most influential one as well, and it will be discussed in greater length. In 1905 the novelist Edith Wharton published *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*. She describes more than seventy-five villas. Although detailed plans are not in this volume, it contains many drawings, an extensive bibliography of reference works in four languages, biographies of fifty-five architects and landscape gardeners from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, and a detailed index. Other works on Italian gardens followed—such as Harold Donaldson Eberlein’s *Villas of Florence and Tuscany* in 1922, John C. Shepherd and Geoffrey A. Jellicoe’s *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance* in 1925 (which features plans and elevations), and Rose Standish Nichols’

Italian Pleasure Gardens in 1928. Shepherd and Jellicoe's work contains wonderful ink wash plans, perspectives, and elevations of villas (Hood 132).¹⁰

However, the person who is credited with the most influential publication on the Italian villas was Charles Platt in his book *Italian Gardens* in 1894, which, combined with the legacy of his own designs, helped to bring Italian-derived landscape ideas to light. In his book, Platt gives an objective analysis of the design of the villas and supplements his writings with wonderful renderings and photographs of the villas. Platt's experience of the villas was precipitated by an invitation to travel to Italy with his brother. During Platt's trip, he "made voluminous notes, sketched avidly, and became wholly enamored of the strength and integrity of the Italian villa as a work of art."¹¹ As Rogers describes, Platt "understood that compartmentalized gardens –and the opportunities for concealment, surprise, and spatial intimacy they offered—constituted the essence of Italian garden design."¹²

Platt's intention in his book was to illustrate the appropriateness of the Italian model for home sites in the United States. Implied in Platt's intention is an awareness of a vacuum of original models for U.S. architecture. As Shoemaker relates, "Assuming that the United States lacked its own architectural tradition, New World architects were obliged to model their work on an Old World inheritance, where the 'eternal verities' of design had long ago been discovered."¹³ Platt saw the Italian villa as a solid basis that American designers could adapt and use as a springboard to form a design tradition for America. Platt appreciated the relevance of the villa to the outdoor lifestyle that many people led in the States, which called for an equal balance of indoor and outdoor living. With those ideas in mind, Platt brought to America an Italian sensibility that elevated the importance of the garden in the design process. These ideas fed a new generation of architects and landscape architects in America and abroad.¹⁴ They became a foundational teaching of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and Fleming incorporated those ideas espoused by Platt into his own design process.

Rogers comments on how the Italianate style was received in America and the popularity it attained during the Gilded Age: "...the Italianate style became an expression of the cultural status of the successful industrialists and financiers who saw themselves as the successors of the Italian princes of the Renaissance..."¹⁵ The Gilded Age was a time in America during the late nineteenth century when industrialization was causing great change, and large fortunes were made. The newly wealthy were making decisions about how to enjoy and project their wealth. The Italianate style emerged as an appropriate model to achieve that end.

The Country Place Era

At the same time, Americans were experiencing a nostalgia for rural living, and the establishment of National Parks reflected an awareness of and respect for the nation's natural beauty. Perhaps this awareness indicated a newfound security of Americans in their own landscape as well as a final feeling of establishment that allowed a withdrawal of their adversarial attitude toward nature. Concurrent with this rural nostalgia, the new cadre of wealthy Americans decided to build their homes in more rural settings, away from the cities and on large tracts of land, bringing them "closer to nature." This trend began for landscape architects a period known as the Country Place Era.¹⁶ Newton writes that this period was one of "remarkable progress in quality of landscape architectural design."¹⁷ He characterizes the designs of this era as having "meticulous care for detail, for proportion and scale...; simple clarity of spatial structure, with space treated as a plastic material—always positive and primary, not just left over; clarity of circulation...; rightness of relation between form and material...; usually short

and generally restrained plant lists, with [plant] materials tending perhaps more often toward firmness than airy looseness and with reliance on evergreen compactness to convey a sense of the architectonic...; [and] understatement and reserve rather than exaggeration.”¹⁸

The Country Place Era has also been described through other related terminology, such as the concept of the Edwardian garden and the Gilded Age. Rogers describes characteristics of the Edwardian garden, which could be compared to the Country Place Era gardens:

The principle design premise of the Edwardian garden was one of sheer aestheticism; it was an expression of art for art’s sake. As such, it represented no ideological set of values and existed only in the context of style...period style itself became a dominant cultural value...design had become a matter of mere choice involving selection among several available historical styles...As such, it no longer expressed the philosophical or literary values of its own age, being instead a graceful echo of forms whose original meaning was now lost... Edwardian landscape’s purposes were those of idyllic retreat or recreational refuge from the increasing freneticism of modern life...a place of play.¹⁹

One can see that a prime emphasis of the Country Place Era was providing a haven for the pleasure of the property’s owner; expressing the owner’s values through aesthetic form was not a priority.

The Gilded Age was a time in America during the late nineteenth century when industrialization was causing great change, and large fortunes were made. The newly wealthy were making decisions about how to enjoy and project their wealth. The Italianate style became an appropriate model to achieve that end. In times of change, the concept of identity is often challenged. It is interesting to note that during the Gilded Age, Americans still turned to Europe for their identity. However, that notion was about to be challenged by a cultural movement known as the Colonial Revival.

COLONIAL REVIVALISM

Colonial Revivalism: An Overview

The Colonial Revival was a national cultural movement whose effects were felt in many disciplines, including landscape architecture. The Colonial Revival represents the search for a national cultural identity within the United and is characterized by an attitude or sentiment of Americans towards their past as it relates to their current state and their future. This sentiment manifests itself as a yearning for, or idolization of, America’s past—a time thought of as more simple, honest, and stable.

The Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia is often used as a beginning point for Colonial Revivalism; however, the World Colombian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 gave a much wider audience to Colonial Revival ideas.²⁰ Susan Hitchcock, a landscape historian with the National Park Service, recounts that “By the 1860s...Americans were becoming disenchanted with the environments created by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration....It seemed that the values on which America had been founded had been lost....”²¹ Rogers speaks of the “enormous stresses associated with accelerating scientific discovery, which increasingly undermined religious conviction....”²² Even those who had faith in scientific exploration were affected by a sense of unease. The Industrial Age brought with it a more impersonal attitude, reaping such negative effects as “physical and emotional dislocation” and an “often inhuman disregard of people’s lives.”²³

In an effort to rekindle this more comforting American past, environments that evoked that past were called for through the use of historical designs or techniques. As Dale Allen Gyure describes in his essay prepared for the National Park Service, Americans who were “Torn between a nostalgic yearning for the past and the seductive promise of the future...negotiated a compromise between the past and the future through the use of colonial imagery.”²⁴ Therefore, Americans were eased into the adoption of their new circumstances by anchoring themselves aesthetically to the past. In this way, their traditions (and their identity) were not lost. This process is referred to as the “dialectic between tradition and progress.”²⁵

This re-creation of the past was not an exact copying of the past, however. While some people may desire more rigorously accurate recreations, others may be concerned only with the evocation of a feeling of the past. Because this impulse to Colonial Revivalism was emotionally motivated, what was sought is to achieve a *feeling*, by whatever means appropriate, for an individual or a group. Either approach, however, involves interpretation; and it is in this interpretation that the distinction between historical fact and subjective elaboration is often blurred.

In America and abroad, the effects of the sudden changes brought about by industrialization were causing a crisis of identity. The United States, however, was, as a country, already dealing with a crisis of identity prior to industrialization. The first settlers identified themselves as colonizers of the countries from which they came. However, with the War of Independence, America had distinguished itself as separate and different. What, then, were the modes and traditions of America that distinguished it from other countries? Americans often harkened back to European traditions in an imitative manner. Rogers eloquently describes this crisis of identity in aesthetic terms relevant to the garden design of the times:

The rich vocabulary of forms inherited from France and Italy furnished British and American garden designers with many motifs, which they borrowed freely. The students at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Rome Prize winners at the American Academy did not ponder deeply the humanist iconography informing these now agreeably mellow garden landscapes, but sought instead to appropriate their aura of venerability along with their undeniably fine compositional elements. They looked to these antique landscapes because...they were subject to a peculiar American sense of cultural inferiority. Regular transatlantic travel by steamship, another industrial Age transportation advancement, made them acutely aware of their own country's narrow history and thin civilization when compared with the many centuries of human artistic endeavor recorded in the stones of Europe's ancient ruins, medieval cathedrals, and Renaissance villas and chateaux.²⁶

The United States lacked many of the grand monuments of Europe. Numerous American designers attempted to evoke some sense of this European grandeur in their buildings and landscapes. However, there was still a desire on the part of some to have something unique to this country that went beyond imitation. For some, the national parks served this purpose. The first national parks were created in 1872, and “were soon equated in the eyes of many Americans with the cathedrals and other important historic monuments of Europe as icons of national identity.”²⁷ Fleming himself worked on two Texas state parks in the 1930s: Palmetto and Garner State Parks. Therefore, Fleming was exposed to the mindset of looking to indigenous, regional features upon which to draw character and identity for his designs.

Recognizing Characteristics of Colonial Revivalism

Enumeration of physical characteristics of a Colonial Revival garden is a slippery proposition. The ephemeral nature of Colonial Revivalism has more to do with perceptions and ideas rather than physical traits. However, a loose set of physical characteristics can be generalized. Hitchcock describes the origins of this term in relation to landscape architecture: “During this period of eclecticism, practitioners such as Charles Platt advocated a more unified connection between house and garden in the site plan. Thus, garden design became part of the Colonial Revival style.”²⁸ The return to a conception of integrated house and garden helped to associate the gardens of Colonial Revival houses with Colonial Revival architecture. This process of association between garden style and architectural style is also described by architectural historian Davyd Foard Hood in a slightly different context: “Something similar happened in respect to Southern gardens at the turn of the century, when what could best be called late-Victorian gardens were described as ‘Colonial’ when planted around houses modeled on eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century architecture.”²⁹ One begins to understand that the defining characteristics of Colonial Revival gardens become somewhat amorphous when subjected to such loose associations. Therefore, for better or for worse, Colonial Revival gardens have much to do with associations, be they associations with the architecture that they surround or the past to which they refer.



Figure 3.8 A Colonial Revival garden.
Reprinted from *The Golden Age of American Gardens*, p. 39.

However, there are some general characteristics that help define Colonial Revival gardens. Griswold and Weller describe a typical Colonial Revival garden as “a return to straight lines, box borders, old perennials and roses, and a final abandonment of exotic bedding-out plants in island beds, squiggly paths and any other Victorian flourishes.”³⁰ One can see from this description that landscape architecture mirrored architecture’s evolution in its rejection of the exotic, ornate Victorian style for a cleaner, more organized approach. What superseded the Victorian style was a blending of formal European Renaissance traditions with the naturalistic style of the English Landscape Gardening School of the 18th-century.³¹

The interpretation of what constitutes Colonial Revival architecture and landscape architecture, however, has changed over time. As Dale Allen Gyure describes in his essay for the National Park Service, Colonial Revival architecture was originally considered anything from the time of the first settlers in America through the 1840s. It later grew to encompass not only colonial architecture but also Federal, Greek Revival, and high Georgian styles. In the 1920s, Colonial came to mean anything that was pre-Victorian.³² This rather fluid dynamic illustrates the psychological and perceptual nature of Colonial Revivalism: it is not so much a formal, physical set of characteristics as it is an attitude or conception of what the past was like. Colonial Revivalism involves interpretation of the past rather than literal re-creation of the past.

Perhaps the most notable example of Colonial Revivalism in landscape architecture was the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. Hitchcock describes the process involved in determining the look and design of the “restored” gardens, recounting that research and archeology were conducted to a point; then, subjective additions were made to the restoration plan, some of which stemmed from the taste of the financial sponsor of the restoration. This restoration, by its comprehensive scope and high-profile nature, served as a model for others in observing restoration efforts and “discovering” the designs of the past.³³ One can see from the story of Williamsburg’s restoration that subjectivity and bias enter the picture and in turn have influenced others’ perceptions of the past.

Colonial Revivalism and Southern Gardens

The development of the idea of “Southern” gardens can be compared to the concept of Colonial Revivalism. It follows a similar pattern of “real” and particular antecedents, popularization of certain ideas, and the remaking or retooling of those ideas to produce a pseudo-historical idea or genre that edits and adds to the original antecedents. The new incarnation of the idea is often mistakenly assumed to be totally historical in nature. Consequently, its historical accuracy has little to do with its power as a cultural force.

“Southern” is a term frequently used to describe gardens; however, its real meaning in this context is often ambiguous. When such a reference is made, it is often unclear whether one is describing a garden’s location, its plant materials, its general style, or a combination thereof. Perhaps the most illusive aspect is what—if any—*style* a Southern garden connotes. It is therefore necessary to explore what associations one can make with the term Southern *in general* and then address the term’s application to landscape architecture.

Southern Identity

The distinctness of a Southern identity seems to have ebbed and flowed with the collective psyche of the South. The South’s willingness to assert its identity had often been affected by its level of regional pride—particularly as affected by the Civil War. In *The Journal*

of *Garden History*, C. Allan Brown cites the period immediately preceding the Civil War as one of increasing Southern nationalism in which certain gardening ideas (and even plant stocks) which were perceived as “Northern” were often shunned. After the Civil War, attitudes changed, and Southerners did not eagerly assert their cultural traditions as they once had. Brown asserts that the South’s defeat in the Civil War signified “a general repudiation of Southern culture,” causing Southerners to “somewhat suppress...their distinctive cultural traditions,” triggering “a crisis of identity” in the South.³⁴

However, a renewed interest and pride in Southern heritage began to take hold nearly 50 years after the end of the Civil War. This Southern cultural revival coincided with the Colonial Revival, which harkened to a more distant past. The confluence of these cultural trends may have actually exacerbated the South’s problems with its own identity. In terms of architecture, what may have been more accurately described as “Southern” was often lumped together with simply “Colonial” examples in the literature of the day, thereby almost subverting its Southern identity, its unique classification as Southern. Davyd Foard Hood states that, at times, “The entire panorama of the Southern past was collectively represented as ‘Colonial,’” speculating that this representation may have been indicative, of a still lingering wish to “avoid...association with the humiliation of defeat in the still recent Civil War.”³⁵

Defining Southern Gardens

In ascertaining what a Southern garden is, a basic geographic approach to what constitutes Southern is a rather simplistic proposition but a good place to start. Commonly, the southern states are considered to be the Confederate states of the Civil War: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. However, in terms of examining particular gardens, this geographic guide falls short; for many examples exist of gardens in the Confederate states which would not be considered Southern. Other factors have a more direct effect on the “Southernness” of a garden, such as the use of certain plant materials or design approaches.

Many consider the use of particular plants as characteristic of a Southern garden. Camellias, crape myrtles, Indica azaleas, Southern magnolias, Live oaks, roses and boxwoods would form a partial list of typically Southern plants.³⁶ This list, of course, might vary from person to person, but similarities tend to cluster around the given list. It is interesting to note that all of the aforementioned plants (except the Southern magnolia and Live oak) are not actually native to the South. Again, we see the result of an “invented” history where perception takes a front seat to historical truth.

Publications also played an important role in promoting certain plants to Southern gardeners. Two key publications geared toward gardening in the Lower South helped to promote certain plants for use in the area where Fleming would come to practice. *A Garden Book for Houston* was published in 1929 by the Houston, Texas, Forum of Civics, and *Gardening in the Lower South* by H. Harold Hume was published a year later.³⁷ These books provided very relevant information on the installation and care of plants that would flourish in the Coastal South.

Southern Style

The most elusive factor of what connotes a Southern landscape is its *style*. Many people refer to images of the Antebellum South with its plantation homes. Hood suggests that several factors played a role in forming a basis for a popular gardening tradition in the South: “a

selection of plant materials that experience had shown to be reliable for the Southern climate,... the presence of many surviving Colonial (pre-1780), Federal (c. 1780-1830), Antebellum (c. 1830-1860), and Victorian (c. 1860-1900) gardens that served as direct sources of inspiration[, and] an abundance of published [materials] containing photographs and descriptions of these earlier Southern gardens.”³⁸ Hood’s conception seems to capture a realistic idea of what contributed to people’s conceptions of a Southern garden.

Such traditions do indeed come from historic precedents, but they also come from sources of popular culture. The intense popularity and cultural resonance of such films as *Gone With the Wind* are partially responsible for people’s conceptions of the Southern past (see fig. 3.9). *Gone With the Wind* was only one in a series of “plantation epics” that included *So Red the Rose* and *Jezebel* among others. Other seminal films such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Birth of a Nation* informed people’s notions of their Southern heritage.³⁹ However, when popular media is passively imbibed, it can result in an assumption of historical fact rather than a questioning of filmic creative license. An almost unconscious impression is made, which becomes part of a person’s perception of the past.



Figure 3.9 Image from *Gone with the Wind*. Reprinted from *Landscaping the American Dream*.

Another example of a popular remaking of the past lies in the “traditional” Spanish fountain of the French Quarter in New Orleans. The popular conception of a French Quarter garden usually includes the image of the multi-tiered iron Spanish fountain. However, this is not a historically accurate detail, though it is assumed to be. The emergence of this artifact can be traced to architect Richard Koch, who in the early 1900s decided that Spanish fountains would be appropriate for an area of New Orleans with Spanish influences. He recommended Spanish fountains be installed; many people chose to install them, and from there a popular cultural myth was set in motion. The physical presence of the fountains then serves to reinforce this cultural myth.⁴⁰

Very real, practical factors are also at work in creating a Southern style. Differences in climate between the Northern and Southern states exist and necessitate different responses. Intensity of light, air circulation, humidity, and soil drainage affect the ability of certain plants to

grow. Different climates give rise to different man-made responses to climate—namely, different forms of architecture. A home may be designed for easy cross-ventilation or abundant shade. Landscape architecture is no exception to these practicalities. As Griswold and Weller write, “The very design of a garden—the location of trees for shade and avenues to admit breeze—was part of the art of Southern living.”⁴¹

J. B. Jackson, a prominent landscape historian and cultural observer, makes further practical distinctions between North and South in *The Southern Landscape Tradition in Texas*. He details the differences in crops and agricultural practices and also attributes differences to the cultural background of the region’s inhabitants. He then goes further into more tenuous territory with his theory of the Four Elements. He speaks of “an ancient and respected tradition, [a] nature philosophy older than our civilization” that shapes people’s impressions of their environment.⁴² He draws a distinction between the inhabitants of New England (the “North”) versus those of Virginia (the “South”): “the very first settlers of Tidewater Virginia responded primarily in a sensory way to [their] new environment.”⁴³

He asserts that this more direct sensory response was largely abandoned by the educated English people of New England. Jackson uses the Puritans as an example of the more New England-like (read “Northern”) response to the New World. He characterizes the Puritans’ response as more intellectual, for “They were not looking for easy living in a land of abundance; they were looking for a place where they could establish a Christian social order.”⁴⁴

In contrast, the Southern colonists “continued to remain loyal to that obsolete but very attractive natural philosophy of the Four Elements.”⁴⁵ When the first settlers came to America, they had to evaluate the best spot for colonization. The settlers of Tidewater Virginia (southern colonists) judged a landscape in “a more personal and more instinctive” way: by their primal sensory responses.⁴⁶ Sight, smell, taste, and touch each “corresponded to one of the four humors and to one of the four elements, and ultimately to cosmic powers...”⁴⁷ Jackson describes settlers’ early reports of the Virginia soil as “aromatic...spicy...dark...sweet to the taste and slimy to the touch.”⁴⁸

Jackson has not been the only one to make reference to this more “sensual” nature of Southerners. And although this idea may seem most tenuous in quantifiable terms, it seems to ring truest. Newton refers to New England as where “the stern demands of an austere morality tended to emphasize plain practicality” over a more indulgent pleasuring of the senses or an outward expression of material wealth.⁴⁹

Hence, Southern gardens do carry a loose set of physical characteristics which can be recognized. However, they also contain subtle cues as to the history and culture of their inhabitants. The physical manifestations of these cultural origins become canonized into a tradition from which people derive their identity. What was motivated by practical and ideological considerations takes form, and that form then becomes symbolic. Just as Americans reached to colonial precedents to make a symbolic link with a nobler past, Southerners reached toward their own symbols. Some reached to “the white columns of all the plantations that marched with cotton across the South, symbols of stability and gentility.”⁵⁰

MODERNISM

In the face of a changing world, some people reacted against those changes by adopting an aesthetically distanced stance in the form of Colonial Revivalism. Others, however, embraced new technologies and attitudes, seeking to express them aesthetically and functionally. That

expression took the form of Modernism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Industrial Revolution culminated in the Machine Age. Machines now displaced a great deal of human labor power in production and sped up its pace. Products could now be made available quickly and in vast quantities. Therefore, it “greatly accelerated the pace of change and the pace of life.”⁵¹ The nature of society was changing. Leisure time was a more widely enjoyed commodity. Personal mobility was accelerated by the advent of the automobile. Building technology made it easier to remove, revamp, or rebuild. One consequence of the speed and power of modern life, says Rogers, “is that everything is provisional, in flux; progress depends on the willing and unsentimental sacrifice of what has gone before....”⁵² People pursued physical recreation in their leisure time and wanted more informal surroundings to complement that. The average residential home and lot were shrinking in size, though, and space was at a premium. This made utilization of the entire property more important. To maximize property usage, people began to play and entertain outdoors more, especially since modern technology made swimming pool construction much more affordable to the average homeowner.⁵³

Modern architects sought a new form of architecture that conveyed the new culture of machine technology. This new culture was expressed in a more plastic manipulation of space, less rigidly defined. Overlapping planes and volumes replaced rigid axial composition. New building materials were incorporated, such as steel, plate glass, and plastic (see fig. 3.10). Free-form amoeboid, biomorphic, and other non-traditional shapes were used (see fig. 3.11). Rogers describes that Modernism manifested itself in architecture “as design that honors industrial technology and materials by divesting itself of the proportions and ornament of classical humanism and the structural means and decorative vocabulary inherited from the medieval and renaissance past....”⁵⁴ Modernism was also a reaction against the persistence of Neoclassical design which was seemingly anachronistic in this new age. Modernism proclaimed itself to be without *a style*; nor was it an eclectic assemblage of past styles. Applied ornamentation was disavowed; it was considered a frivolous and dishonest pursuit. The technology, the materials, or the space were presumed to carry their own expressiveness and ability to engross the occupant that was not dependent on ornamentation. Rogers defines Modernism as “the movement that responded optimistically to machine technology and the speeded-up tempo of twentieth-century machine-age civilization.”⁵⁵



Figure 3.10 A modern home and garden.

Reprinted from *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*, p. 61.

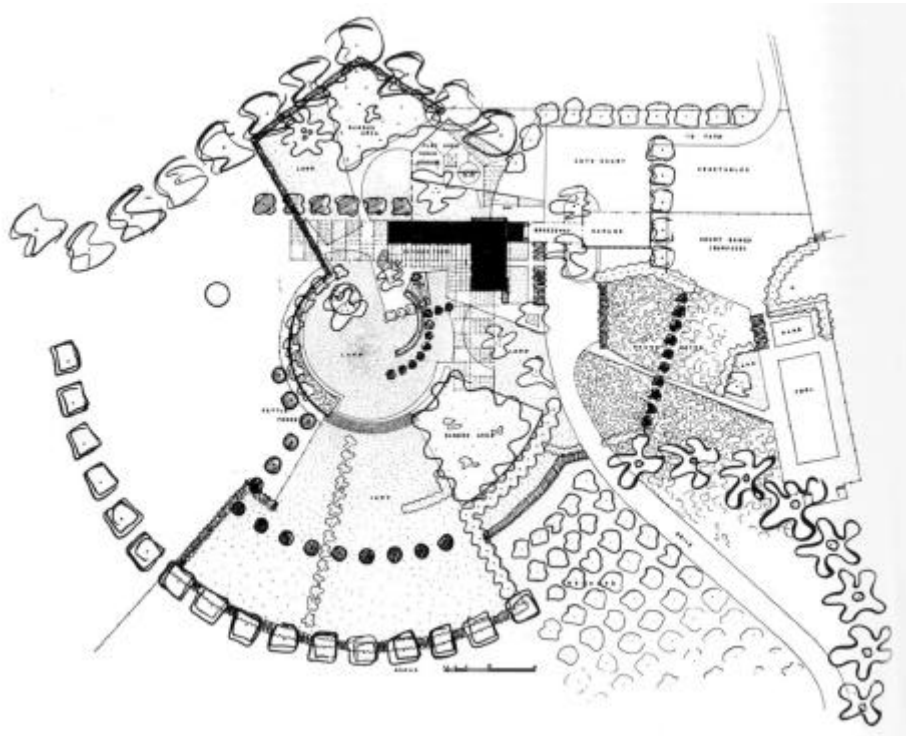


Figure 3.11 A garden plan by Garrett Eckbo, 1945.
Reprinted from *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*, p. 202.

Architectural critic Marc Treib puts forth a set of characteristics that define a landscape as modern in an article entitled *Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture*. The first axiom is the “denial of historical styles.”⁵⁶ One arrives at a particular design “from a rational approach to the conditions created by industrial society, the site, and the program” rather than by simply picking from a list of historically used forms or devices.⁵⁷ The second axiom is a “concern for space rather than pattern, deriving a model from contemporary architecture.”⁵⁸ This axiom emphasizes the use and impact of three-dimensional space rather than the more two-dimensional aspect of mere “pattern.” Treib also notes that three-dimensional space had been dealt with before, so modernism dealt with “discovering a new *form* of space.”⁵⁹

The third axiom is “landscapes are for people.”⁶⁰ That is, landscapes are “outdoor spaces for human use.”⁶¹ Rather than being only a visual conceit, landscapes must be useful and serviceable to people, actively engaging people as much as possible. The fourth axiom is “destruction of the axis.”⁶² Modern landscapes are “multifaceted and omnidirectional,” free from “the restricted view of linear perspective.”⁶³ Modern landscapes are freer to engage the viewer from many different physical perspectives. Without this restrictive hierarchy of spatial organization, it is not necessary to create symmetrical compositions. The eye is freer to roam the composition without being drawn to rest at a predetermined axial focal point.

The fifth axiom states that “plants are used for their individual qualities as botanical entities and sculpture.”⁶⁴ Treib describes this as a more “economical” use of plants; for to appreciate a particular plant, Treib implies, one must isolate it to a degree from other plants or from more specimens of itself. Therefore, massing of plants sublimates the individual form of a

plant to the form of the mass. Massing obscures and distracts from the inherent features of a particular plant.

The sixth is “integration of house and garden.”⁶⁵ Here, the point at which one begins and the other ends is blurred. They are seen as one unit rather than two objects sitting side by side. Spaces are not so clearly delineated and compartmentalized. Volumes overlap each other. This “modern” integration could therefore be seen as being taken even further than the Italian villa’s idea of integration.

Treib’s axioms address how the ideas of modernism took form in the field of landscape architecture. His axioms are merely one interpretation; however, they have been regarded as a solid touchstone in an area of landscape architecture for which relatively little has been written. Therefore, they will serve as a standard of evaluation in this discussion of Fleming’s work.

LOCAL CONTEXT: HOUSTON, TEXAS

Fleming lived nearly all of his adult life in Houston, and the vast concentration of his works occurred there. In an effort to understand what gave rise to Fleming’s work, the local context of Houston, Texas, must be studied. An awareness of the local economy, social environment, and design trends gives a deeper appreciation of Fleming’s work.

Two major events contributed to Houston’s economic rise to preeminence: the devastation of Galveston by the hurricane of 1900 and the discovery of oil at Spindletop near Beaumont that next year. Houston’s population doubled between 1890 and 1900, and again between 1900 and 1910.⁶⁶ These events would set in motion a new phase of economic prosperity for Houston which would, in turn, create a demand for landscape work such as Fleming’s.

Houston followed many of the national trends in landscape architecture. In *Houston’s Forgotten Heritage*, Sadie Gwin Blackburn, a Houston landscape historian, cites three trends at the turn of the century that influenced Houston and the nation as well: “the idea of integration of house and garden into a unit for domestic living; the idea of using a particular historical style as a point of departure in architecture and landscape design; and the idea of the superior value of country living over life in the city.”⁶⁷ Blackburn notes that this ideal of Country Place living did not mandate a life far from the city; its spirit and form could be recreated in “a cluster of homes in an enclave in a small community or around a country club, or even a home on a spacious lot in a planned suburb.”⁶⁸ As Houston’s booming oil-centered economy grew, a new demand for residences followed. The business center downtown expanded and began encroaching on the existing residential areas. This demand provided the opportunity for new residential developments to be built that were driven by Country Place ideals. Houston had economic and social connections to the city of St. Louis, which boasted its own models of such developments. Such residential sites “were relatively small, one or two streets by a few blocks long, conforming to the city grid pattern...” with “layout [utilizing] landscaping to create a park-like setting...” and often incorporated deed restrictions.⁶⁹

In 1906, one such Houston enclave to utilize this formula was Courtlandt Place (see fig. 3.12), and, later in 1916, Shadyside (see fig. 3.13). Both provided some of the home sites for which Fleming would later produce his designs. J. S. Cullinan, a prominent wealthy Houstonian, commissioned George Kessler to design Shadyside. Kessler incorporated this enclave into the city’s framework by extending one of Houston’s major boulevards, Montrose, so that it intersected the boulevarded Main Street, creating a traffic circle as a focal point at that

intersection. Across from that circle in the newly delineated wedge of land, Shadyside was created.⁷⁰ These oak-lined boulevards formed a city-neighborhood pattern focused on vistas that would integrate well with Fleming's residential designs in those neighborhoods.⁷¹

Another exclusive residential development in Houston was River Oaks. Development began in 1924, spearheaded by three prominent Houston businessmen: Hugh Potter and brother Will and Mike Hogg. Built on one thousand acres, it was intended to serve as a "model suburb that would influence Houston's city planning"⁷² Hare and Hare of Kansas City was contracted to do the master planning. It was intended to be a nearly self-sufficient community for people of moderate to high income. Picturesque design and deed restrictions were employed to maintain a consistent aesthetic.⁷³ This suburb was also to be integrated thoughtfully into the city. Stephen Fox describes that there is a "design sequence from the Civic Center downtown, west to the Allen Parkway, to Kirby drive [which runs through River Oaks]. [We have] an entire designed landscape sequence of the 20s...."⁷⁴

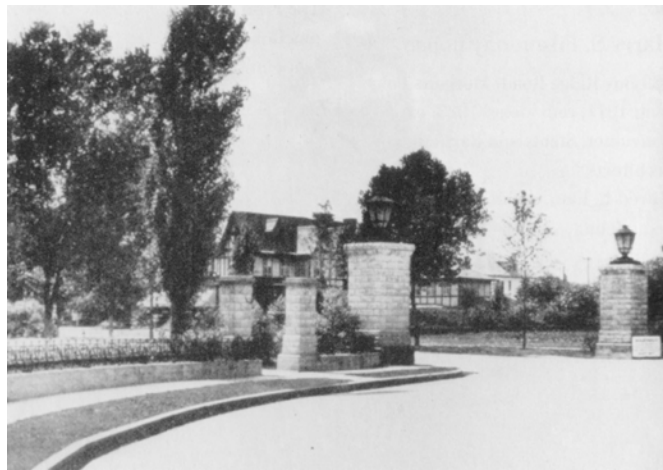


Figure 3.12 Courtlandt Place entry. Reprinted from *Houston's Forgotten Heritage*.



Figure 3.13 Main Street and Montrose Boulevard at Shadyside. Reprinted from *Houston's Forgotten Heritage*.

Such sophisticated urban planning was a testament to Houston's interest in establishing itself as a first-class city. Another legacy of Houston's growing civic pride was the Forum of Civics which Commissioner Will Hogg created in the 1920s.⁷⁵ Houston's desire for prominence in the nation was also reflected in its domestic activities. Suzanne Turner cites the selection of Houston for the annual meeting of the Garden Club of America in 1939 as a possible impetus for significant residential landscape commissions for which Fleming was a part. This meeting put Houston on the map in a national gardening context.⁷⁶ It led to coverage in 1939 in *Landscape Architecture* magazine of homes featured as part of the meeting. Two of the gardens featured were creations of Fleming and his business partner, architect Albert Sheppard. Their designs were displayed alongside work of Ruth London and the Olmsted (figs 3.15 and 3.16). This Garden Club meeting was an opportunity for the citizens of Houston to impress the rest of the country, and prominent Houstonians rose to the occasion. New standards of excellence for Houston residential landscapes were established, and Fleming's role in this advancement cannot be overlooked.

Fleming was one of the founding members of the profession of landscape architecture in the city of Houston. When Fleming came to Houston, there were few professional practitioners. In the 1920s, Houston's city directory listed florists, nurseries, and landscape gardeners—but no landscape architects. However, by 1932, five landscape architects are listed.⁷⁷ In the early 1900s, two prominent nurseries were in Houston. In 1910 Edward Teas established Teas Nursery. The Japanese Nursery was started by Saburo Arai during this time as well. Arai's nursery had a large selection of native and imported plants, especially azaleas and camellias. He was also responsible for introducing the waxleaf ligustrum to Houston in 1910.⁷⁸

A few nationally recognized landscape architects had commissions in Houston. Hare and Hare designed numerous residences in addition to their city planning work. The well-known Olmsted firm performed one commission in River Oaks for the Neal residence (see fig. 3.14). The plan in figure 3.14 is dated as a 1936 revision of a 1931 plan. The plan integrates picturesque and formal elements into the property. Images of this residence were featured alongside Fleming & Sheppard's work in *Landscape Architecture* magazine in 1939 (see figs. 3.15 and 3.16).

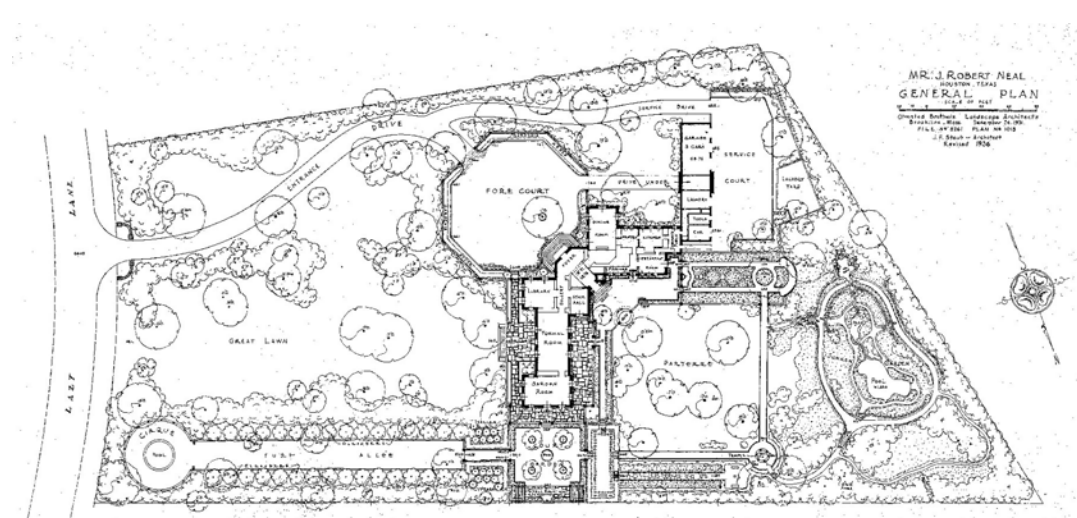




Figure 3.15 Neal residence.
Reprinted from *Landscape Architecture*,
July 1939, p. 186.



Figure 3.16 Neal residence.
Reprinted from *Landscape Architecture*,
July 1939, p. 186.

Ellen Shipman had at least two commissions in Houston. One was the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen P. Farish in River Oaks, named “Ravenna,” for which she designed the general layout of the gardens in the 1930s. Ruth London then designed the cutting garden, the breakfast terrace, and a formal area at the north side of the property.⁷⁹ Shipman also designed the masterplan of the residence of Mrs. Richard Neff in Broad Acres (see figs. 3.17 and 3.18). The plan by Shipman is dated 1938. Notable in the plan are strongly geometric formal spaces, contrasted with an adjacent informal wooded area.

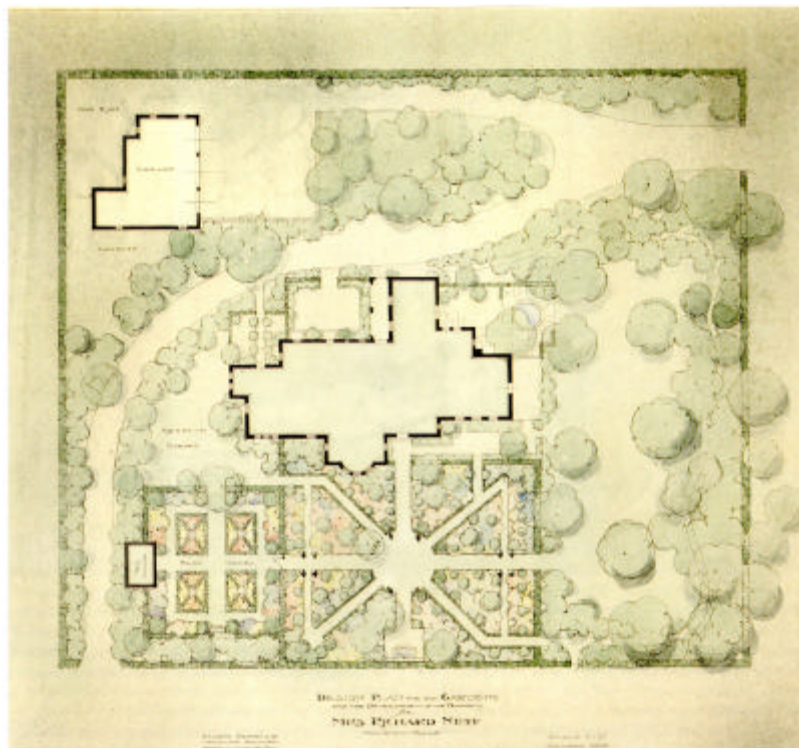


Figure 3.17 Plan for the Neff residence.
Reprinted from *The Golden Age of American Gardens*, p. 248.



Figure 3.18 Photo of the Neff residence. From A Private Collection.

Because of Fleming's social and business connections, he was likely to have seen or visited some or all of these significant projects. Being able to observe how landscape architects of national acclaim created designs for Houston's foremost homesites must have made an impression on Fleming. Houston represented an opportunity for architects and landscape architects. Its economic prosperity afforded the creation of such extensive residential projects, and its precedents in architecture set a standard which landscape projects could aspire to. Preliminary work of nationally recognized landscape firms was sparse, and Fleming would fill the vacuum of local high-quality landscape architects.

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CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

The case studies that follow were selected for their demonstration of Fleming in his various design modes. Certain projects exemplify more stylistic purity; others are hybrids which show Fleming's incorporation of various modes of design. Examples were selected because either they had adequate documentation or they clearly showed a certain design style or because they were seminal works in Fleming's career.

BAYOU BEND

Bayou Bend was the residence of Ima Hogg in Houston, Texas. Built in 1929 with Fleming's primary involvement from 1937-1939, it has become known as one of the flagships of residential home-and-garden design in the South. Bayou Bend utilizes a sculpture of Diana, goddess of the hunt—a copy of the Diana of Versailles (visible at top of fig. 4.1 behind pool and in fig. 4.2). Providing focal points at the end of the cross-axis are the statues of Clio and Euterpe (fig. 4.3, areas 2 and 5), muses of history and music, respectively. These three sculptures reflect the interests of the owner, Miss Ima Hogg. She was an avid supporter of the arts, and American history was of great interest to her. Much thought went into generating the form of the house and gardens at Bayou Bend (see fig. 4.4); it was Miss Hogg's desire to have a regionally relevant homesite. Therefore, similar care was exercised in the selection of appropriate statuary.¹

Fleming's best-known work, perhaps his signature work, was for Ima Hogg at Bayou Bend. In the Diana garden, Fleming created a dramatic axial vista, which extended from the centerline of the house. It is called the Diana garden after the statue of Diana the huntress that serves as its focal point. Located on heavily forested woodland, the Diana garden had a practical impetus for which Fleming takes credit. Fleming recounts that upon having tea outdoors at Bayou Bend on a particularly still and mosquito-ridden day with Miss Hogg, he suggested the cutting of trees to create sun and airways at the back of the house. This newly formed sun-drenched area would encourage breezes that would sweep away the mosquitoes.²



Figure 4.1 Aerial view of Bayou Bend. From Fleming's portfolios.



Figure 4.2 Diana Garden. From Fleming's slide collection.

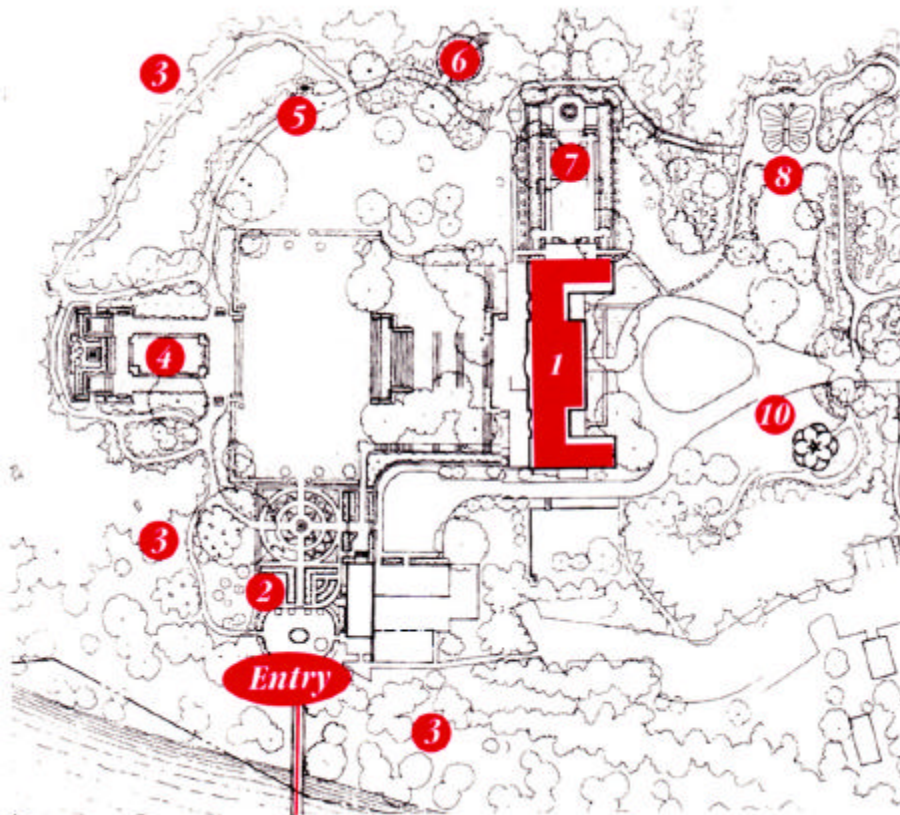


Figure 4.3 Plan of Bayou Bend. From <http://www.mfah.org/bayoubend>.

The Diana garden is carved into and framed by the woodlands that compose the Bayou area. Clipped yaupon hedges and the cylindrical Japanese yews which form the backdrop for the sculpture give it definition. The Diana fountain is a simple rectangular pool with arching jets defined at its corners by low yaupon hedges. The area is accented with the pink flowers of magnolia, azalea, and crape myrtles.



Figure 4.4 View from Diana Garden towards house.
Reprinted from *The Architecture of John F. Staub*, p. 106.

Bayou Bend's architecture has been described by Hogg and her architect, Staub, as "Latin Colonial." That is, it takes a Georgian form, with French Creole or Spanish accents. Griswold and Weller describe the garden as "an eclectic version of an Antebellum Southern garden."³ It is no secret that Miss Hogg's intention was to evoke a history on her home site. Weller and Griswold state that "[a]lthough Bayou Bend was not the first of its kind, it consecrated and popularized the formula for hundreds of later gardens."⁴

THE DOGWOODS

Next door to Bayou Bend, Ima Hogg's brother Mike built a house with his wife, Alice, called The Dogwoods (fig. 4.5). The work that Fleming did (within a year of the work at Bayou Bend) consisted of a formal area adjacent to the house (fig. 4.6) and a naturalistic area further from the house in a ravine area that flowed into Buffalo Bayou (figs. 4.7-4.10). Of particular note in the formal garden is Fleming's deference to existing trees. Figure 4.6 shows the formal area with one tree in the lawn which is independent of the symmetry of the space. Similar deference can be seen in the gravel path (fig. 4.10) which is interrupted by another tree. This

must have been a conscious choice of Fleming's part because this path could have easily avoided the tree.

If the property merited it, Fleming would create naturalistic or informal spaces to complement or contrast the more architectonic spaces. These informal spaces are usually found further from the house. Norman Newton describes the reasoning behind this relationship of proximity found in Fleming's work in *Design on the Land*: "Given the framework of such an architectonic complex, it is obvious that an overall scheme could not well contain any of the undulating surfaces and soft pastoral spaces of the park-like 'landscape style' until one got beyond the influence of the perceptibly geometric."⁵ However, on smaller Fleming commissions, one may find the placement of these spaces adjusted to be further from major axial sight lines such as doors and windows rather than at a great distance from the house. Newton states that this "gradation from the architectonic into the park-like became, in the opinion of many critics, one of the specific contributions of American landscape architecture."⁶

What the designer is addressing in such cases is the transition from the totally man-made (a building) to the larger scope of the natural world (such as a forest or meadow). For Fleming, this transition is expressed on a smaller scale in a more contrived way—for on a suburban lot, the existence of a larger wooded area on or contiguous with the property is less likely. Depending on the character of the land, there may be little opportunity to take advantage of wooded areas. Therefore, in some cases, Fleming created the "larger woodland" in vignette form. Examples of these miniature "woodlands" can be seen in such sites as the Smith and Slumberger residences in Houston, Texas, and the ELSong garden in Monroe, Louisiana. On these sites, a strolling area consisting of an informal grove of trees with understory plantings was created adjacent to the main axis of the garden.

The ravine garden at The Dogwoods represents a truly amazing understanding of naturalistic forms. Fleming's early Park Service work must have informed this design. The garden consists of an elevated seating area which overlooks a man-made pool complete with flowing water as from a cascading brook or spring. Steps lead down from the seating area to water's edge. Fleming comments, "We were seeking a blend of recognizing nature and its refinements and expressing Alice Hogg's flair for continental gardens."⁷ This ravine garden represents some of Fleming's most sensitive work.



Figure 4.5 Dogwoods entry. From A Private Collection.



Figure 4.6 Dogwoods formal area. From Fleming's slide collection.



Figure 4.7 Dogwoods ravine garden during construction. From Fleming's portfolios.



Figure 4.8 Dogwoods ravine garden one year after construction. From Fleming's portfolios.



Figure 4.9 Dogwoods ravine garden circa 1960. From Fleming's slide collection.



Figure 4.10 Dogwoods gravel path. From Fleming's slide collection.

ELSONG GARDEN

ELSong Garden could be considered the “Bayou Bend” of Monroe, Louisiana. It is the garden of the family home of Emy-Lou Biedenharn. The house and gardens were converted into a museum that encompasses the adjoining Bible Research Center as well. Emy-Lou was the daughter of Joseph A. Biedenharn, who in 1894 became the first person to bottle Coca-Cola. Along with the success of a candy company and real estate company, the family became very prosperous. Emy-Lou was afforded the opportunity to study voice; and in the 1930s, she toured Europe, garnering critical praise for her singing. In 1939 she was compelled to return to Monroe as Hitler waged war in Europe. Inspired by the great gardens she had seen in her European travels, she endeavored to recreate some piece of that at her family home in Louisiana.⁸

In 1946, planning of the garden was begun under the direction of Pat Fleming. Emy-Lou’s desire was to create a place of great beauty that could be shared with others, which would be a “fitting stage for music and the related art forms.”⁹ Therefore, music became a driving force in the theme of the gardens. With visitors in mind, Fleming suggested an itinerary for the gardens. In that itinerary, the themed garden areas are described (see figs. 4.11-4.13). The Entrance Court was considered the appropriate place for visitors to begin their garden tour. It contains the Musician’s Grotto (fig. 4.12) made from deeply creviced limestone. Like a traditional grotto, it contains a hidden spring and carved statuary, taking the form of cherubs. The upper level of cherubs represents classical music, while the lower level, with cloven hoofs, represents “earthy” folklore music. In another garden area is the Garden of the Four Seasons, used to showcase flowering plants typical of each season. Traditional statues of four youthful spirits representing the four seasons are placed prominently. Nearby, the Tea House of the August Moon is an Asian-inspired gazebo with a related fountain which employs a large circular shape on the wall behind it, evoking the scale and form of a Chinese moon gate.

The main axis of the garden is referred to as the Wagnerian Water Garden (fig. 4.13). It is bounded by five large caryatids, one of which serves as the focal point behind the large, round fountain with water jets that arc into the air. Additionally, each caryatid holds aloft a miniature fountain within an open shell form over its head. The round area immediately in front of the large fountain is referred to as the Ballet Stage, and the long piece of lawn between the house and fountain is called the Ballet Lawn. These areas were conceived of as an area for performance of ballet or dance. Alongside the Wagnerian Water Garden is the Stroll Garden, a naturalistic, informal meandering woodsy path, a theme utilized in contrast to the formal main garden axis in many Fleming gardens. Off the south balcony of the house is the Mozart Shadow Garden consisting of two statues of Hebe, goddess of youth and wine-pourer to the gods. At the end of the Mozart Garden is a wrought-iron staircase that leads up to an elevated iron balcony that looks out over the Mozart Garden. This is called the Minstrel Gallery, and it was conceived as a stage from which songs could be performed for an audience seated in the Mozart Shadow garden or on the adjacent bowed porch of the house.¹⁰

The inclusion of mythical statuary in these two gardens was purposeful and relevant in their subject matter, for the statuary referred to the interests of the owner. As in the Italian villas, they also referred flatteringly to the owner as a patron of the arts, or as a participant in the arts in the case of Mrs. Biedenharn. Unlike the villa gardens, however, the various areas of the garden did not tell a story as a group or carry an allegorical meaning significant to the order in which the garden spaces were experienced. This use of statuary and themes is only somewhat typical of the trend in gardens of the time to employ items more for aesthetic value, rather than for the

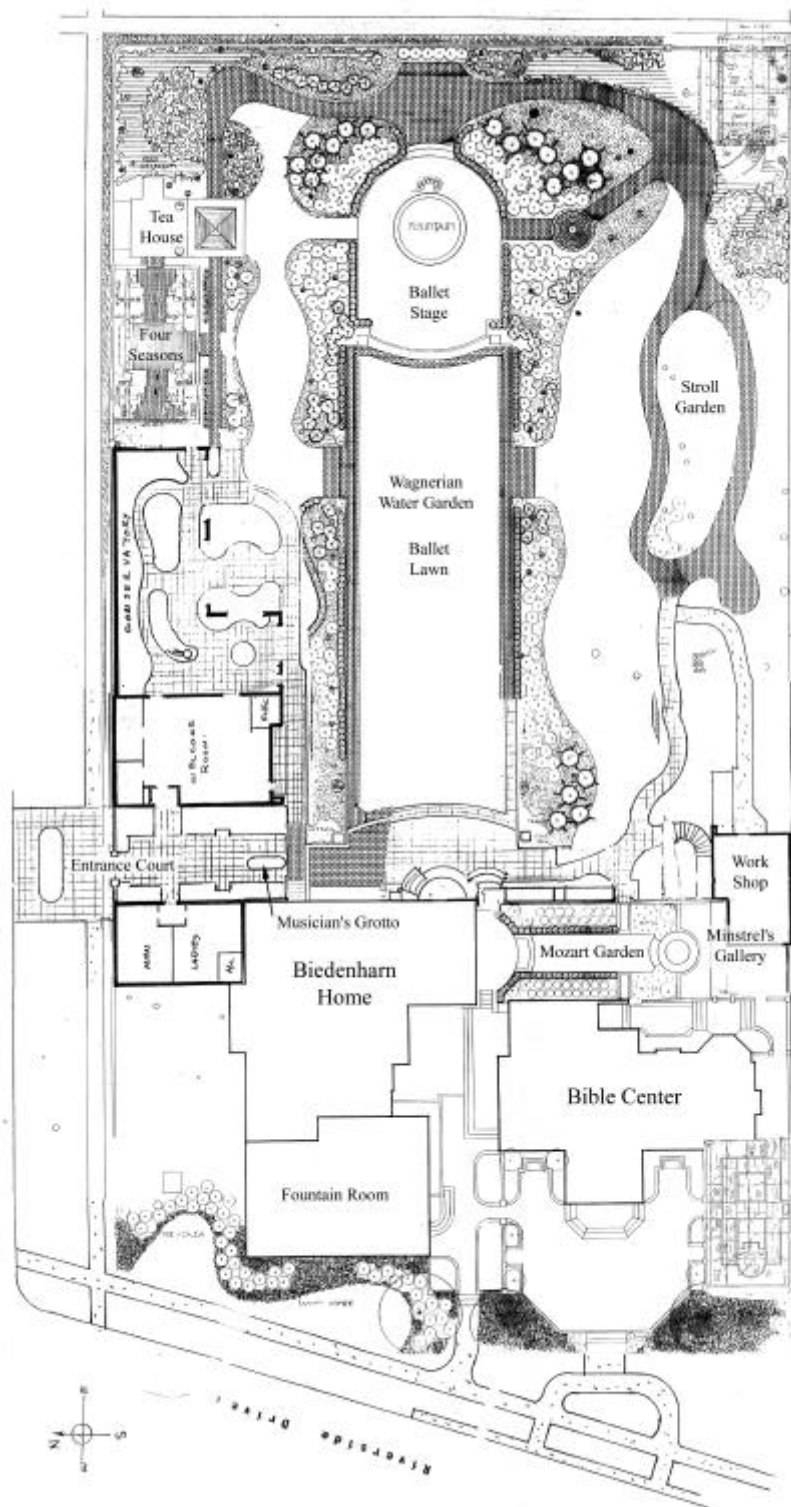


Figure 4.11 Biedenharn home, gardens, and Bible Research Center.
From Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Fleming Collection.



Figure 4.12 Musician's Grotto. Photo by author.

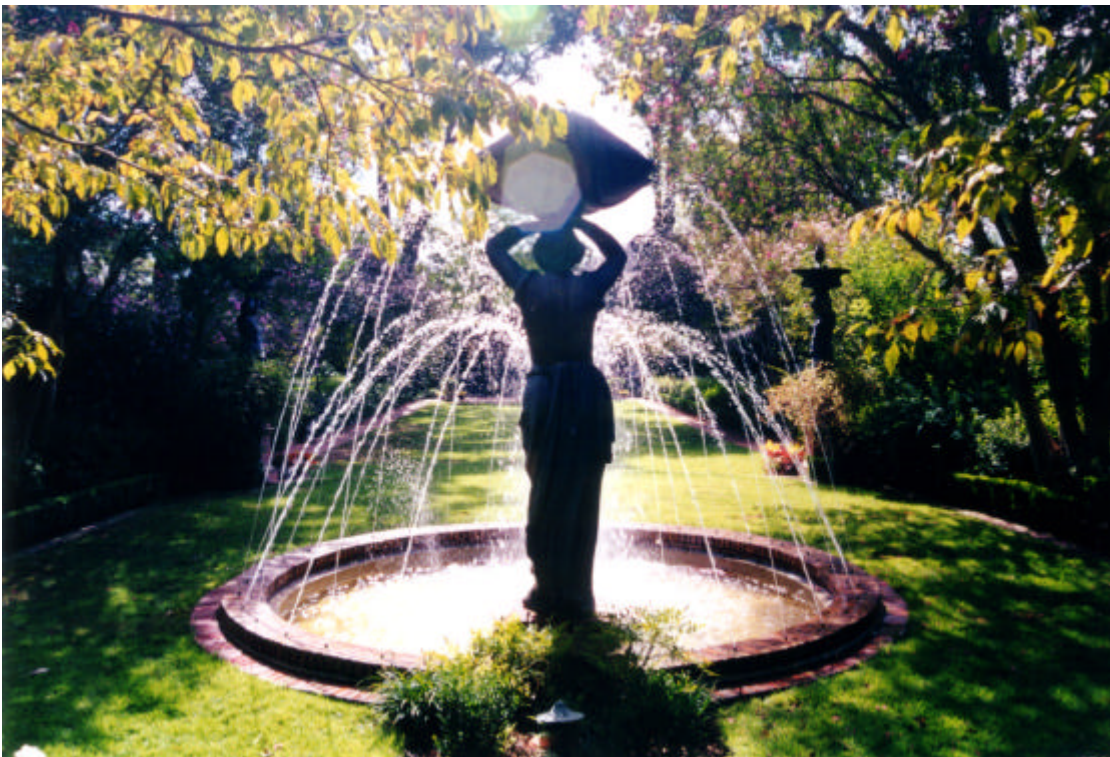


Figure 4.13 View of Wagnerian Water Garden from Ballet stage towards house.
Photo by author.

meaning they had individually or as a group. Rogers comments on this trend: "...by the twentieth century[,] mythology no longer had allegorical significance for designer or client but served as a branch of storytelling, providing a genteel foretaste of the role of fantasy in the thematic landscapes of the present day."¹¹ In the case of ELSong Gardens and Bayou Bend, the meaning or symbolism is inherent in individual statuary pieces and in the general theme of the grouping, but meaning does not carry into the garden route as a sequentially-experienced story of an allegorical nature.

FLEMING AND CHARLES PLATT

Because Charles Platt's designs so clearly demonstrate the design vocabulary of the Italian villa, they are used here for side-by-side comparison with selected works of Fleming. However, certain contextual differences do exist between the two designers. Fleming's plans were usually devised for smaller properties than those of Platt. Space was at a premium, so Fleming's designs usually incorporate all available property. Platt's commissions, on the other hand, are often set in vast expanses of land, and the periphery of his designs are usually rendered as fading into forest or meadow. Consequently, Platt's plans do not address the edge or perimeter as much as do Fleming's. This difference is reflected in the different contexts that Platt and Fleming were designing for: Platt designed for country place estates, and Fleming for more suburban properties. Direct interest in Italian gardens was expressed by some of Fleming's clients. The Dan Harrison family requested that Fleming create a fountain reminiscent of the "singing fountain" of Villa d'Este (see fig. 4.14).

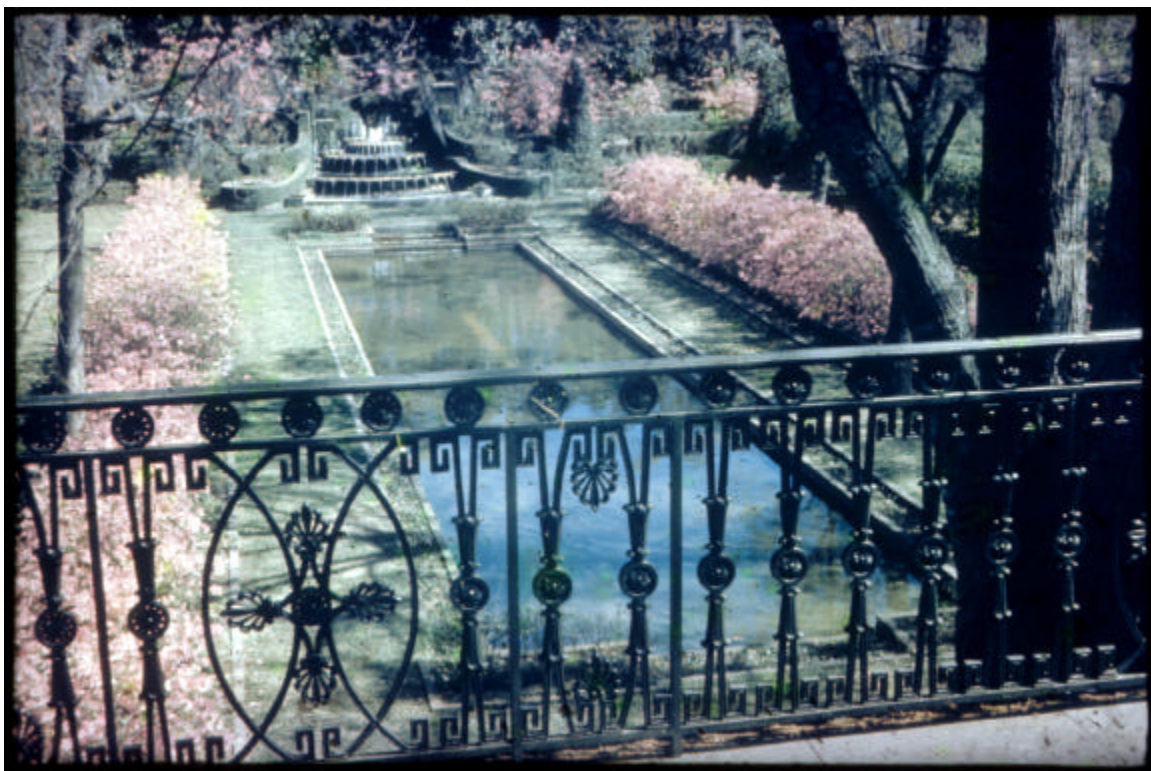


Figure 4.14 Dan Harrison residence. From Fleming's slide collection.

One can see similarities when comparing Platt's plan for Faulkner Farm (fig. 4.15) with Fleming's plan for Ray Dudley's home, Oak Shadows (fig. 4.16). In both projects, various projections in the footprint of the house give rise to edges of garden spaces, which form the basis for walkways or paths. This similarity is particularly evident in the paneled garden areas, which project downward from the façades of Faulkner Farm and the Dudley house. In the Faulkner Farm, there are two façade depths which create three façade segments or sections. Platt then echoes those segments in the three grass panels adjacent to that side of the house. The tripartite grass panels of Faulkner Farm become five garden panels in the Dudley residence. These five garden panels are driven by the three façade depths creating a hierarchy of five divisions of the backyard.

Comparing the left wing of each house, there is a similarly formed area which projects from it. The Fleming design takes the form of a long rectangular pool that terminates at a teahouse. In the Platt design, the equivalent area appears to be either a grass lawn or terrace, which terminates in a largely vegetative backdrop. The overall grid pattern dominates both layouts, with frequent punctuation of important axes with focal features. The rosette in the central upper portion of Platt's design is transformed in the Dudley residence to a much larger scale, taking the form of a rose garden. However, a flower garden of equivalent scale to the house exists on Faulkner Farm. It projects from the right wing of the house and takes a more rectilinear form.

In Platt's Maxwell Court design (fig. 4.17), as well as Faulkner Farm, one sees the use of scalloped corners just above the house in the motor court area. Fleming was very fond of this line form, and one can see a similar use of it in Fleming's plan for the Wallace residence (fig. 4.18). There, Fleming forms the motor court with a scalloped rectangle that relates to the front façade of the house. The size of the motor court in relation to the house—as well as the scale of the scallops themselves—is very similar in both Maxwell Court and the Wallace residence.

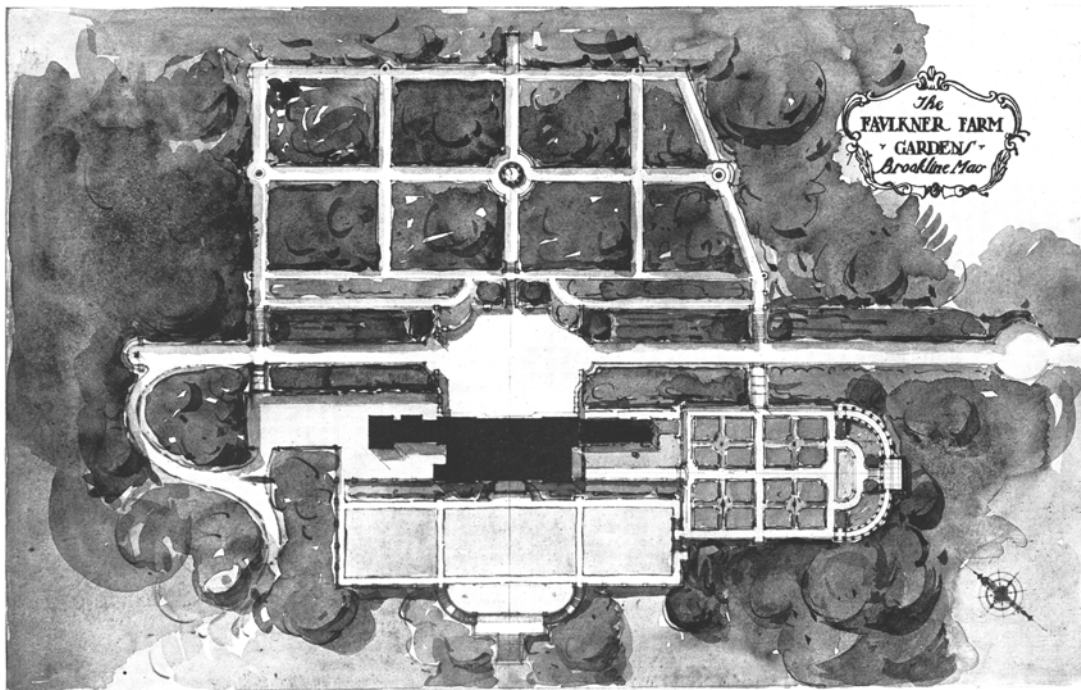


Figure 4.15 Faulkner Farm. Reprinted from *Monograph of the Work of Charles A. Platt*.

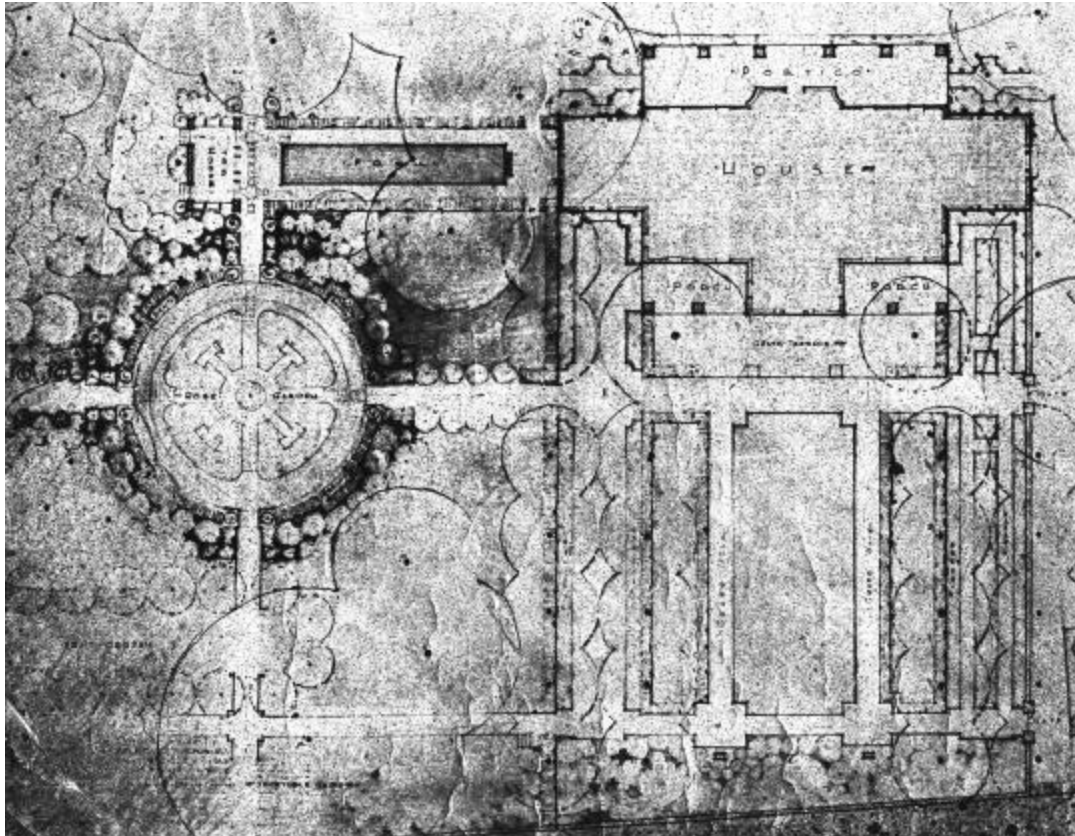


Figure 4.16 The Dudley residence.
From Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Fleming Collection.

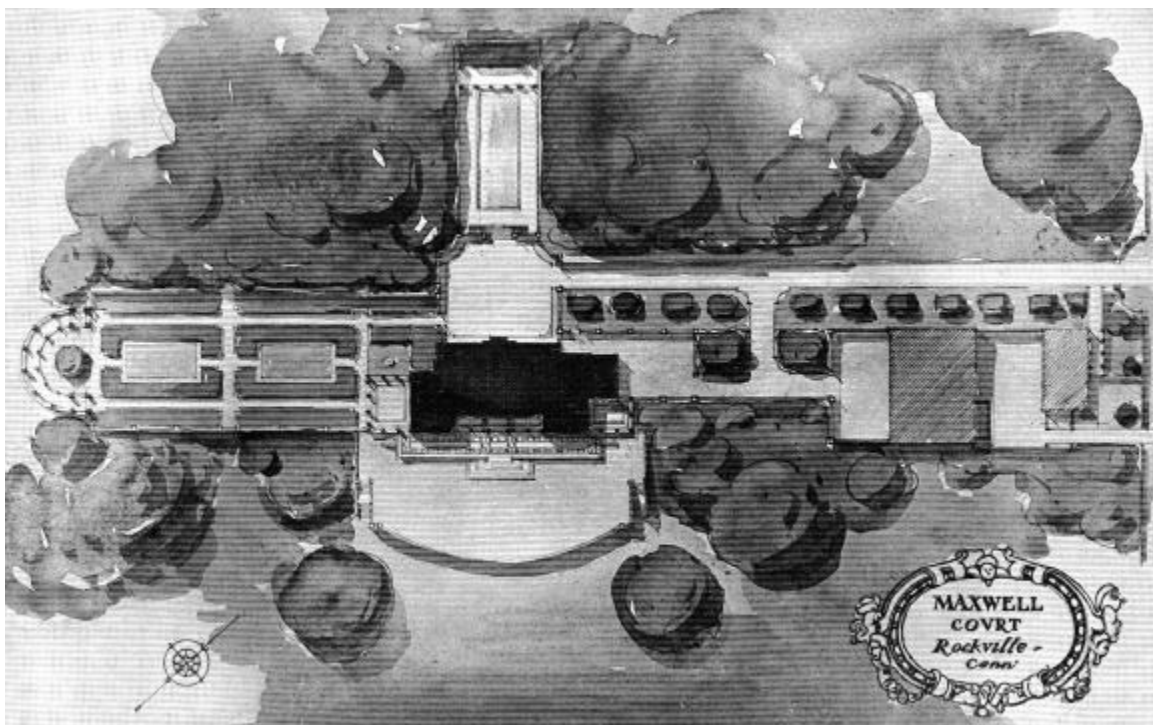


Figure 4.17 Maxwell Court. Reprinted from *Monograph of the Work of Charles A. Platt*.

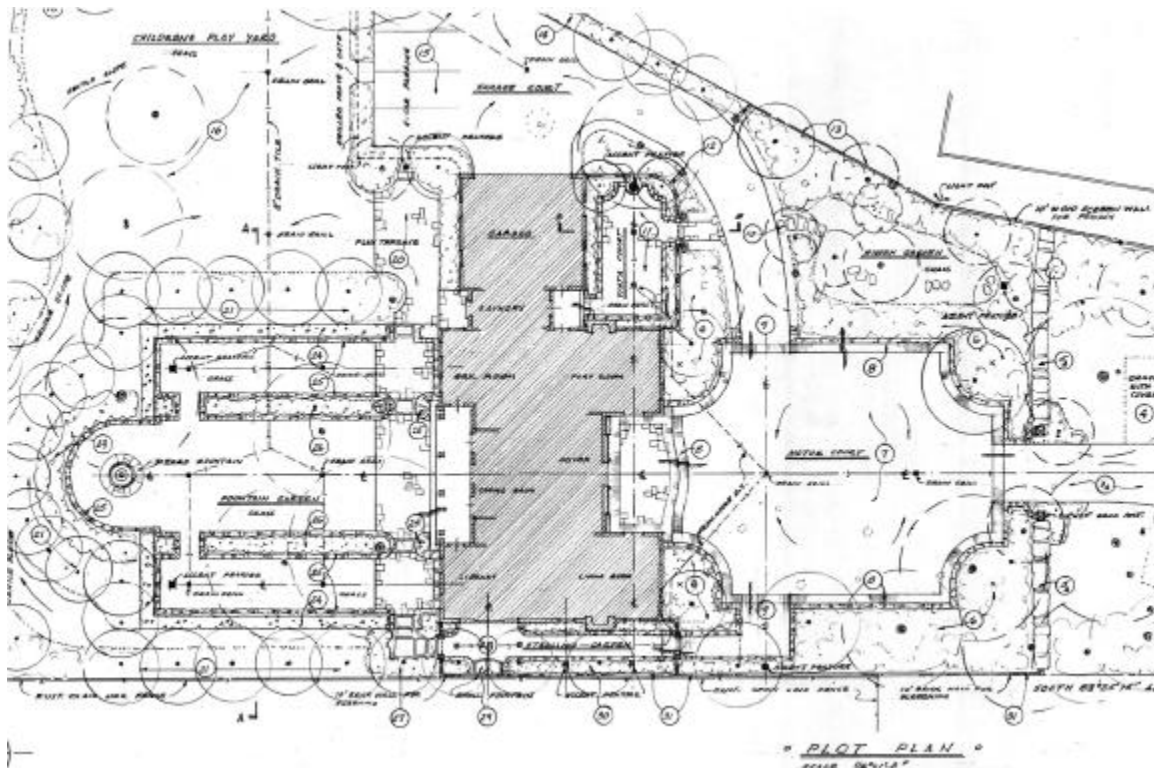


Figure 4.18 The Wallace residence.
From Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Fleming Collection.

It is interesting to note that similar forms are utilized in the garden area to the left of the Maxwell Court home and in the back garden area (shown on the left) of the Wallace plan. In both spaces, a long rectangular garden space is terminated by a half-circle with a focal point positioned in the radial center of the circle. The use of “side-aisles” or axes is also present in each design, parallel to the main central axis. The overall proportions of both of these spaces are also uncannily similar. In Fleming’s Catledge residence of New Orleans (fig. 4.19), one again sees the scalloped motor court with area nearly equal to that of the house. One can even infer this equal spatial portioning in the motor court and house size of a private modern residence in Houston, Texas. (see top right of fig. 4.20). One can see this similar portioning in John Staub’s preliminary landscape plan for the Hugh Roy Cullen residence, circa 1933 (see fig 4.21).

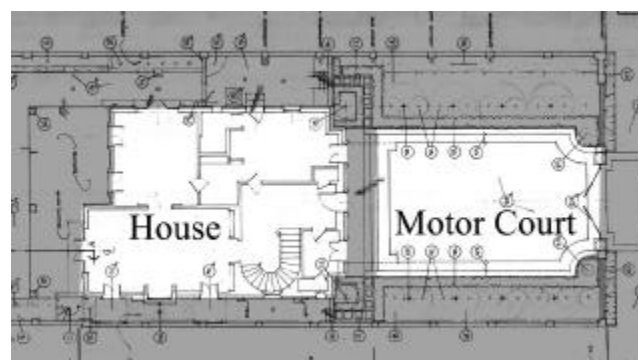


Figure 4.19 The Catledge residence.
From Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Fleming Collection.



Figure 4.20 A private modern residence, designed by Staub.
Reprinted from *The Architecture of John F. Staub*, p. 298.

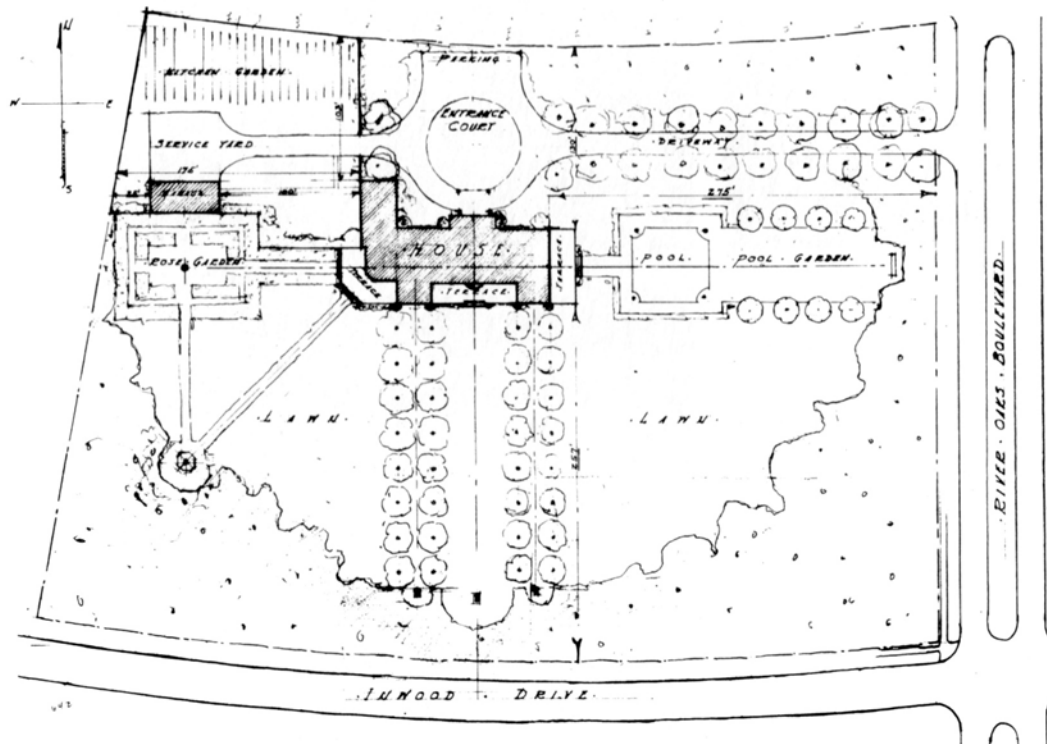


Figure 4.21 Cullen Residence master plan, by Staub.
Reprinted from *The Architecture of John F. Staub*, p. 178.

A comparative analysis of Platt's and Fleming's work reveals certain similarities, particularly in layout and response to architecture. Both respond to the architecture of the house, taking direct cues from the forms and various articulations in the footprint of the house. Both divide the outdoor areas into room-like spaces, which feel separate but are connected to other areas by interlocking axes and sightlines. Areas more distant from the house are generally less derived from architecture and take on a more inventive or fanciful character, creating unique geometries. Was Fleming exposed to the work of Platt? It seems likely. However, if Fleming had not seen Platt's work, then the similarities are even more uncanny.

THE NEUHAUS RESIDENCE

The Neuhaus residence (figs. 4.22-4.25) is a prime example of Fleming exercising a modernist vocabulary. Much of this modernist program is presumably driven by the architecture of the house itself. Designed by Hugo V. Neuhaus as his own residence, it is a "series of [brick] walled...subhouses [connected by glass-enclosed formal\public areas]...grouped around a number of patios."¹² Fleming designed the landscape in 1950. Perhaps the least modernist area of the landscape is the entrance court (fig. 4.24). Its spatial organization is symmetrical about two cross-axes: one from gate entry to front door, and one from pedestrian garage door to the center of the opposite wall façade.

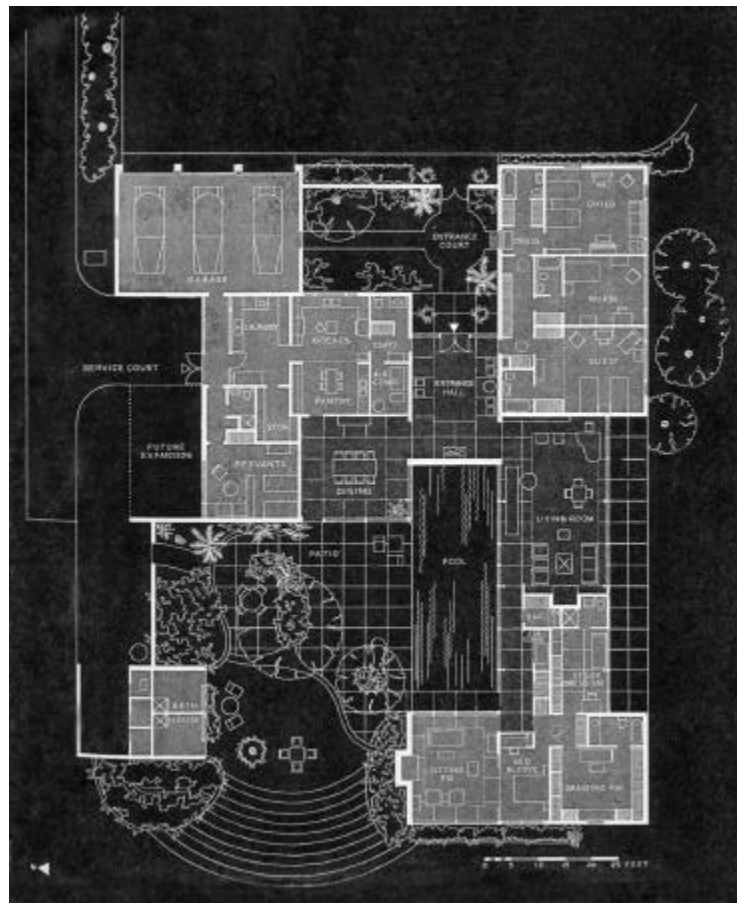


Figure 4.22 Plan of Neuhaus residence.
Reprinted from *House and Garden* magazine, c. 1950.

While in the entrance court, one does not develop quite as distinctively a modern impression as when one encounters the rear patio garden (figs. 4.23 and 4.25). It is divided into several subspaces for sunbathing, dining, dancing, and lounging. These garden spaces are admittedly driven by function. They are designed to be actively experienced, not merely viewed from indoors. The article cites one reason for this division as being to not dwarf smaller social gatherings. The different patio areas, though subdivided, have more ambiguous boundaries. Space flows more fluidly between these overlapping areas. The geometry of the terrace and planting areas take on free-form, amoeboid shapes.



Figure 4.23 Neuhaus residence. Reprinted from *House and Garden* magazine, c. 1950.

House and garden are highly integrated. Patio areas freely penetrate the house. Extensive use of large glass panes as walls minimizes separation of indoors and outdoors. Notice that the modular floor grid inside the house continues seamlessly onto the patios. Although plant massing does occur, some plants are featured more singularly such as the sago palm in the entry court. Ornamentation is withheld. In 1955, Thomas Church published *Gardens are for People*. One can see the employment of similar forms by Thomas Church and Fleming, such as the paisley. In figures 4.26 and 4.27, this form is employed in a very similar manner to the Neuhaus residence as a planting area anchored by a tree within a paved terrace.



Figure 4.24 Neuhaus residence entry. Reprinted from *House and Garden* magazine, c. 1950.

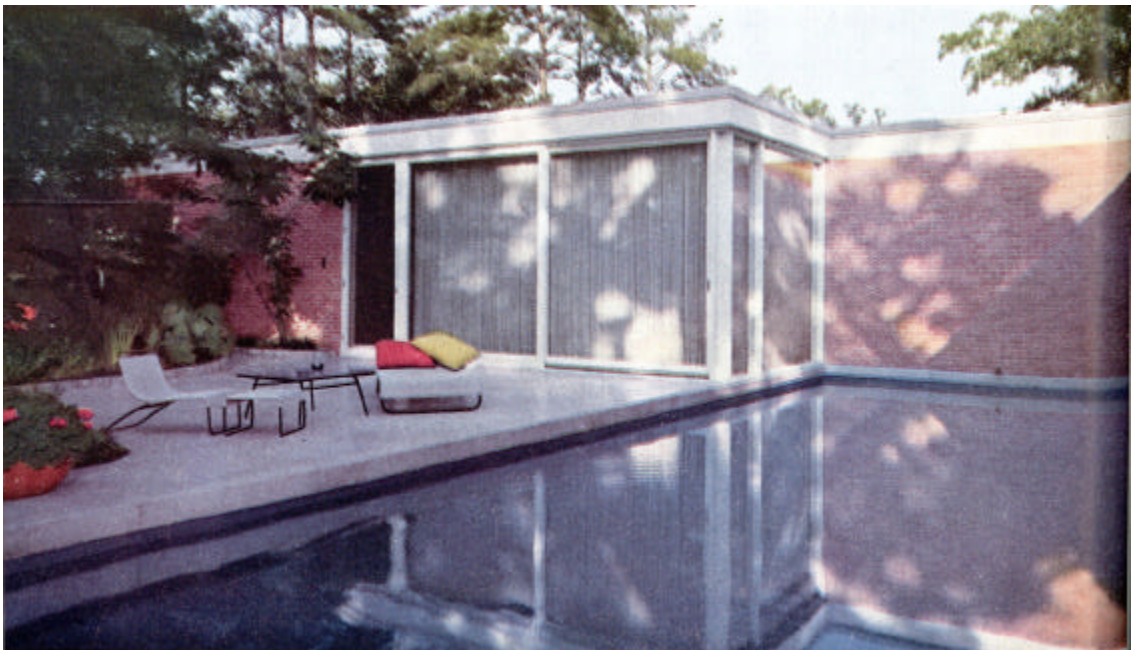


Figure 4.25 Neuhaus residence pool. Reprinted from *House and Garden* magazine, c. 1950.



Figure 4.26 Garden by Thomas Church.
Reprinted from *Gardens Are for People*, p. 82.



Figure 4.27 Garden by Thomas Church.
Reprinted from *Gardens Are for People*, p. 87.

SOUTHWESTERN SAVINGS ASSOCIATION

A prominent commercial project of Fleming's was the Bellaire, Texas, branch office for the Southwestern Savings Association (fig. 4.28). Located in a narrow wedge of land on a busy corner, it had quite a radical appearance for 1960. A relative of Fleming was the owner of Southwestern Savings, and he commissioned Fleming to design the building and landscape. Fleming conceived of the building as a pavilion in the landscape. He called into his office two architecture students, Kenneth McMinn and Kit Barkley, to bring his concept to life.¹³

It was made of steel and glass and took the form of a parabolic Y-shape. Modern in its use of metal and glass, it carried an almost Japanese feel in its form with its sloping glass sides and decorative metal trim.

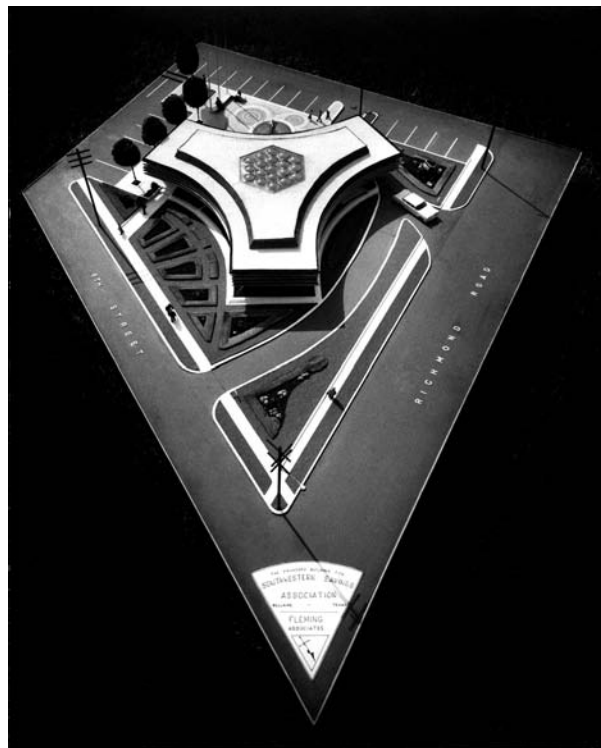


Figure 4.28 Model of Southwestern Savings Association. From Fleming's slide collection.



Figure 4.29 Southwestern Savings Association. From Fleming's portfolios.

The landscape itself bears modernist characteristics. It undeniably takes people into account in its master plan. Ease of movement was a chief priority. Being a commercial business, its ability to move people and cars through was a necessity. The drive-through lanes were designed to facilitate easy entrance and egress. Axiality was dispensed with entirely. Although there was perhaps a tip of the hat to Japanese style in the use of rocks and boulders combined with plants (fig. 4.29), the design bears little resemblance to historical styles.

As in the Neuhaus residence, Fleming employed groupings of plants rather than sculptural display of singular plants. A notable exception, also seen in the Neuhaus residence, would be a Sago palm. Building and garden seem well integrated because of the strong use of line that ties the two together. Once again, plate glass helps to blur the boundary between architecture and landscape. The use of a raised planter that echoes the building's footprint helps to bring the presence of the building into the landscape. It also reinforces Fleming's conception of the building as a garden pavilion within a landscape. The use of modern sculpture (fig. 4.29) reinforces the modernity of the site design. These sculptures actually function as a flue for the building's heating system. Here, form follows and is expressive of function. Their Noguchi-like forms further link the site to a Japanese and modernist aesthetic.

PASADENA PUBLIC LIBRARY

This Texas atrium courtyard (fig. 4.30) bears modern characteristics. It utilizes an asymmetrical modular layout derived from the glazing of the building. Planting is sparser, allowing plants to be showcased more individually. This sparing use of plants may also derive from a need for lower maintenance. Fleming again uses a pebble mulch combined with larger rock formations for a low-maintenance Japanese aesthetic.



Figure 4.30 Pasadena Public Library Central Court. From Fleming's portfolios.

THE STRAUS RESIDENCE

One work of Fleming's of a more transitional nature is the Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Straus residence. Once again, Fleming's respect for the architecture of the house is evidenced by his endeavor to impart the landscape with a closely matched style and feel. Howard Barnstone describes the Staub-designed house as incorporating elements of Moderne style. That is, its massing and layout are classically derived, but much of the expected ornamentation and articulation is foregone.¹⁴ If one examines a plan of the residence (fig. 4.31), one can see that Fleming created a simple geometric layout. Axial symmetry is maintained throughout most of the spaces. Examination of Fleming's slide of the garden (fig. 4.32) reveals that Fleming adhered to that theme of minimal ornamentation both in architectural details and in plant materials. Low clipped hedges define bed areas in which azaleas are massed. Bed edges are trimmed with a simple raised brick edge. Fleming's signature of notched corners is kept to a minimum.



Figure 4.31 Plan for Straus residence.
Reprinted from *The Architecture of John F. Staub*, p. 219.



Figure 4.32 Straus residence. From Fleming's slide collection.

One might compare this project of Fleming's to some of the transitional work done by Thomas Church (see fig. 4.33) where classical symmetrical forms are referenced but ornamentation is abstracted and simplified. In fig 4.34, one can see out the Straus dining room window to the wall fountain. The fountain coping and wall cap employ simplified detailing. Materials are kept simple, with a change to dark brick behind the seated Buddha fountain feature to contrast the light-colored surrounding wall.

In the Strauss residence, Fleming created a "tentatively modern" garden, incorporating the proscription of detailing and a simplified material palette. It is most likely that Fleming initiated this tentative modernist design as cued by the architecture of the house itself

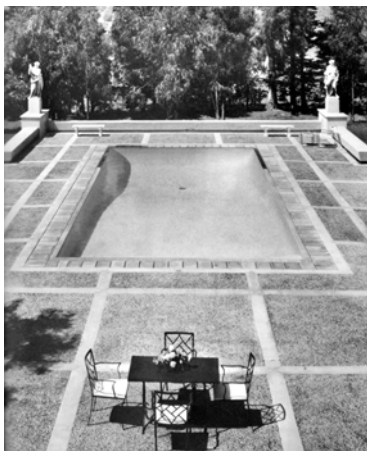


Figure 4.33 Garden by Thomas Church.
Reprinted from *Gardens Are for People*, p. 133.



Figure 4.34 Straus courtyard garden.
Reprinted from *The Architecture of John F. Staub*, p. 219.

THE FLEMING RESIDENCE (LARCHMONT DRIVE)

Examination of Fleming's masterplan for his own residence at 1928 Larchmont (fig. 4.35) reveals a more eclectic approach. One of the most striking characteristics of the plan is its heavy deference to the automobile. A very significant portion of the lot is dedicated to passage and parking of automobiles. The driveway runs up both sides of the house, connecting in a rear motorcourt area of which a maid's quarters is a part. This siting of the driveway effectively reduces the largest continuous garden area to the front of the house, which, enclosed behind a brick wall, was slated to be a pool garden. Although the pool garden was never realized, both a plan and perspective by Fleming show what was intended for the space.

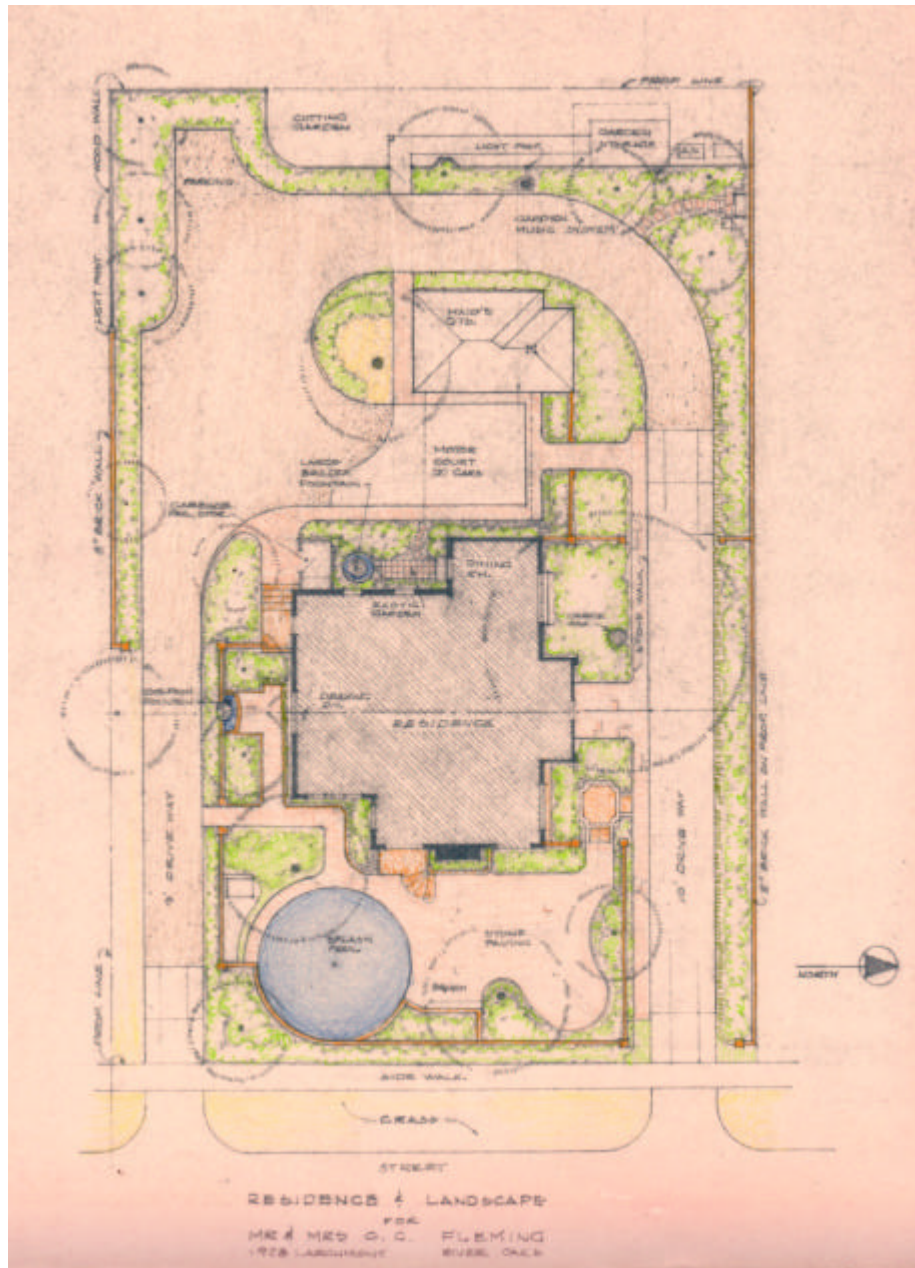


Figure 4.35 Plan of Fleming residence. From Fleming's portfolios.

The pool garden contains the most modern features of the entire master plan. The main feature of this garden was to be a large circular swimming pool (fig. 4.36). Although the circular form is not modern in and of itself, its large scale and relation to the house conveys a non-traditional feel. Instead of being centered along the dominant façade of the house front (at the chimney), it is centered on a window in a recessed façade. The perspective drawing of this space shows a more restrained use of detailing in the pool and its wall. The dozen or so fountain scuppers located near the top of the wall provide interest without focusing one's attention on a single water-emitting feature, as might be more expected in a Beaux-Arts style garden. The scuppers' placement is also asymmetrical to the axis from the pool center to the related window. The overall forms of the beds that surround the pool terrace are curvilinear and amorphous. This layout more loosely defines sub-areas of pool garden without the use of more rigidly Italianate definition.



Figure 4.36 Perspective drawing of Fleming residence. From A Private Collection.

Despite the more modern characteristics of his plan, Fleming by no means abandoned classical design in his home garden. Many axially symmetric relations exist in his home landscape. He completely remodeled his house to enhance the dialogue between indoors and out. The front door was moved from the east side of the house to the north side, and a plate glass window was added to the south side of the house on axis with the new front door. Upon entering the home, then, one is able to see through the curved stair rail through the drawing room into the courtyard which contains the pillar-like “dolphin fountain” (figs. 4.37 and 4.38).

Fleming used many of the house's windows and doors as axes from which to lay out garden features. Nearly every major feature of his home relates to one of these axes. He used Beaux-Arts principles as a starting point; however, he felt free to pursue a more relaxed and informal layout. Each garden room's boundary was fairly well delineated. However, none of those rooms was fully separated; one side usually opened onto an adjacent space.



Figure 4.37 Fleming residence interior 1.
From Fleming's portfolios.



Figure 4.38 Fleming residence interior 2.
From Fleming's portfolios.

His eclectic approach can be seen in the creation of different thematic areas in the various garden areas. At the west side of his home, he created an intimate space which he refers to as the "Exotic Garden" (figs. 4.39 and 4.40). There, he used tropical plantings combined with an unusual feature. It consisted of a large, shallow iron dish on a low base which was filled with water, and a small boulder was placed into it. The boulder was treated in the Japanese style as a small island which was decorated with miniature Asian figurines: temples, boats, and huts. The boulder was planted with small ferns and sedums. He had an area for a bench and table for him to draw. According to Kenneth McMinn, who worked with Fleming and lived with Fleming's family for a time, that garden became Fleming's most inspirational spot. Fleming's various garden rooms in his home lent a variety of moods and experiences which invited the viewer's mind to wander. McMinn states, "...what [Fleming] loved about these rooms is that he could go around the world in one house by extending this axis off that window. He could be in Japan in that little Japanese garden. He could then go into the drawing room and be in a villa he had visited in Italy."¹⁵



Figure 4.39 Exotic garden. From Fleming's slide collection.



Figure 4.40 Exotic garden fountain. From Fleming's slide collection.

THE FLEMING RESIDENCE (SHARP PLACE)

Fleming lived in this residence with his family prior to moving into his home on Larchmont. The layout of the garden (fig. 4.41) is much more formally-derived than that of Larchmont. The most highly developed area of the property lies at the back of the house, which backs up to Kirby Drive. A pedestrian entrance off of Kirby Drive leads to a formal gate which enters onto a D-shaped terrace containing a small ornamental fountain (figs. 4.42 and 4.43). This fountain gives a small amount of separation to this bricked terrace from the ensuing lawn. These features are all centered off the dining room windows which assume a dominant role on the back façade of the house. A cross-axis is positioned along the length of the lawn terminates with a gate to the front yard and a sculpture beyond (fig. 4.44). Fleming does account for practical considerations such as service areas, for which a significant portion of yard is dedicated (see upper left of fig. 4.41).

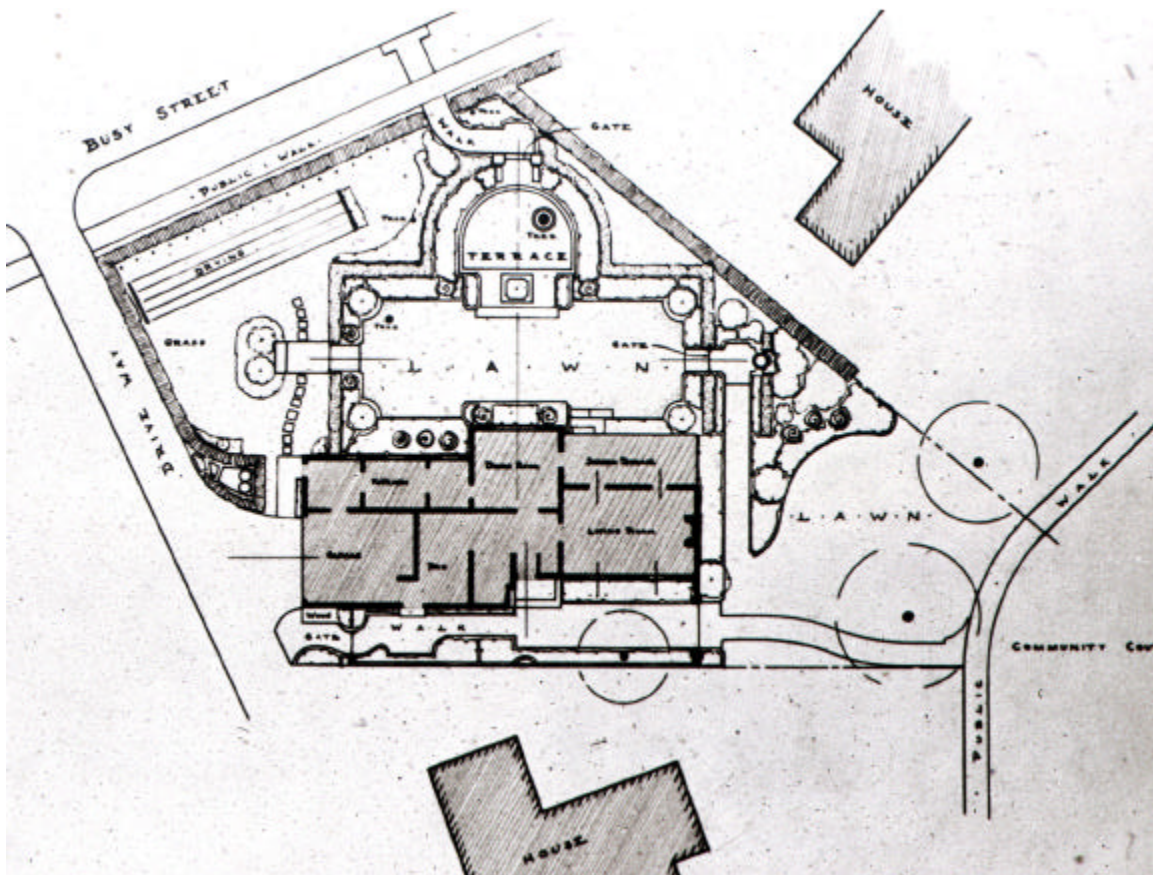


Figure 4.41 Sharp Place plan. From Fleming's slide collection.



Figure 4.42 Sharp Place rear entry. From Fleming's slide collection.



Figure 4.43 Sharp Place rear entry from gate. From Fleming's slide collection.



Figure 4.44 Sharp Place statuary. From Fleming's slide collection.

THE FLEMING RESIDENCES IN KERVILLE, TEXAS

Fleming moved to Kerville in 1970. There, he made a home for himself with a garden that appears to have been much more informal. He named it Hillside. Photos of this residence appeared in *Texas Homes* magazine in 1974. This home (figs 4.45-4.47) utilized an informal layout with the incorporation of a dry stream bed and more drought tolerant plantings. Fleming did, however, have a formal area (fig 4.47). It appears to be a departure from his first Kerville residence (named Jack Rabbit Hill) which from fig 4.48 is much more formal. Attempts to find more information on this residence have been unsuccessful. This change from a formal first house in Kerville to a more informal second one in Kerville mirrors the progression of Fleming's Houston residences from Sharp Place to Larchmont. This may signify a pattern in Fleming's career as adhering to formality as an initial approach, then departing from formality as his comfort grew within a particular situation.



Figure 4.45 Hillside entry. From *Texas Homes* magazine, July 1981, p. 119.



Figure 4.46 Hillside garden. From *Texas Homes* magazine, July 1981, p. 116.



Figure 4.47 Hillside formal garden. From *Texas Homes* magazine, July 1981, p. 114-115.



Figure 4.48 Jack Rabbit Hill. From Fleming's portfolios.

THE SCHLUMBERGER RESIDENCE

In 1980, Pat Fleming was coaxed from retirement in Kerrville, Texas to design his third garden for the Pierre M. Schlumberger family. Bohnn et. al. comment that this garden “demonstrates the evolution of [Fleming’s] sensibility. Rather than axially framing a *tapis vert* with linear plantings of shrubs and trees, Fleming laid out the Schlumberger garden as a relaxed sequence of interlocking spaces, primarily planted or paved in character” (Cite winter 1993). If one examines figures 4.49 and 4.50, one can see the relations of the pool, lawn, and parterre spaces as more loosely associated than in other gardens by Fleming. Please note that in figure 4.50 the smaller lawn panel was subsequently replaced by the owner with an arbor structure and related parterre.

If one compares this garden to the Scott residence that dates from 1967 (fig. 4.51), one can see what Bohnn et. al. refer to. The Scott residence also involves accommodation of a swimming pool into the landscape plan. In Scott, Fleming frames the pool with plantings on either side to enhance the formality and separation of the pool area. Edges of different garden areas are in more rigid alignment with each other. There is little if any overlap between garden elements. One could make the argument that the layout of the house in the Scott residence is more formal with its twin wings that project into the backyard, and it therefore demands a more formal response. By no means does Fleming forego the use of axial relations; he simply composes more loosely within the axial framework.

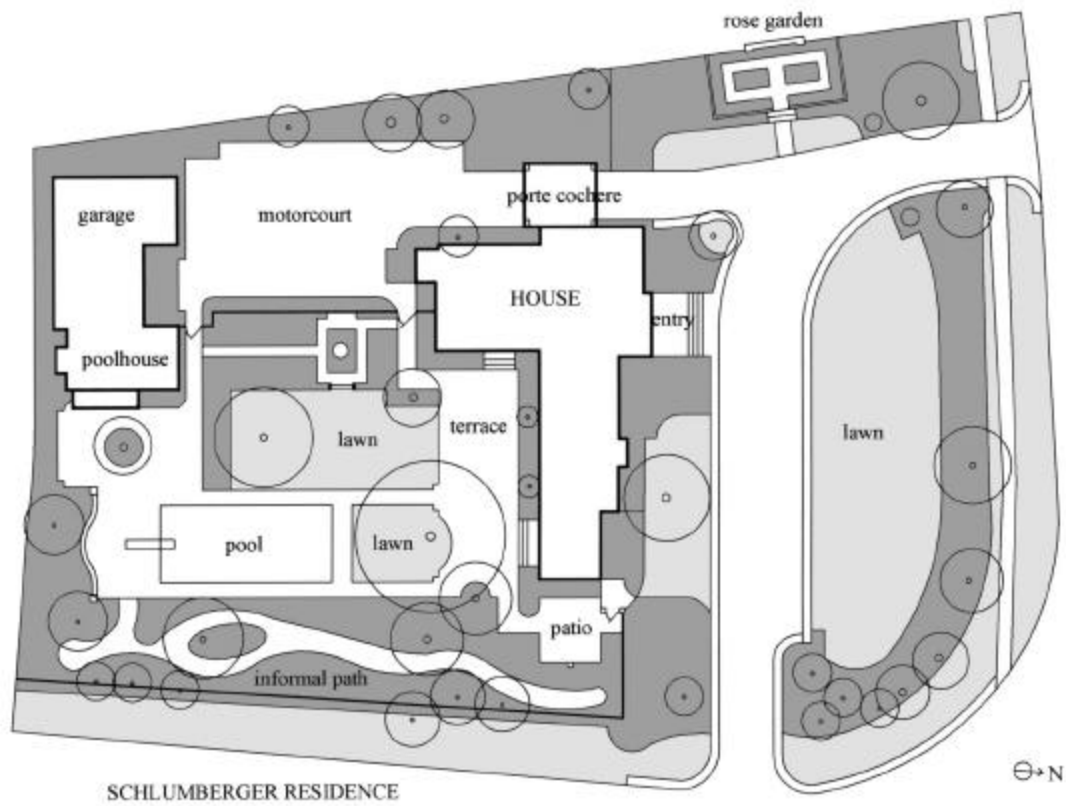


Figure 4.49 Schlumberger residence plan. Drawing by author with data from Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, C. C. Pat Fleming Collection.

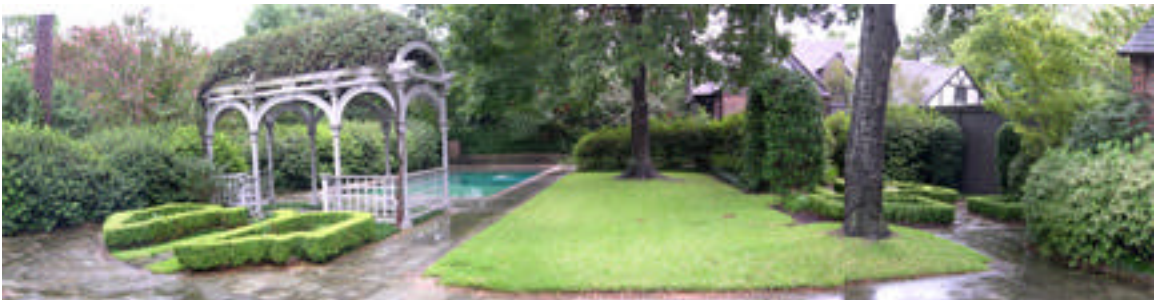


Figure 4.50 Schlumberger residence. Composite photo by author.

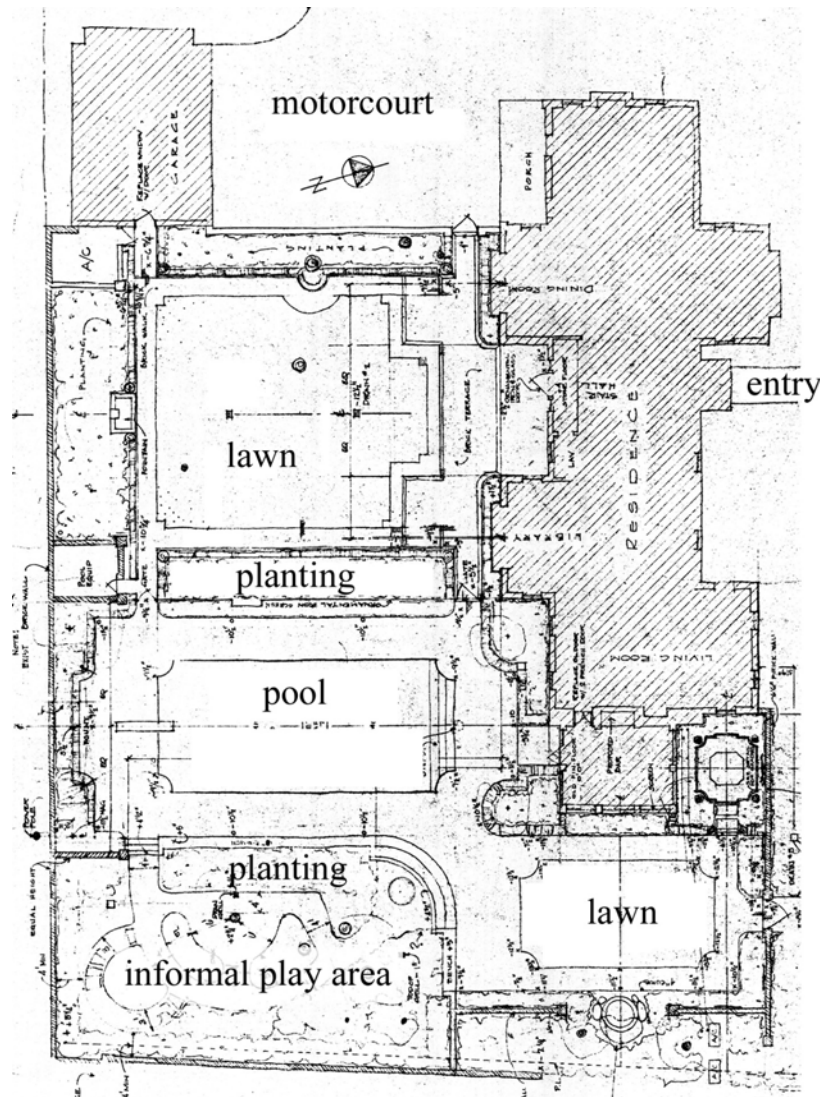


Figure 4.51 Scott residence plan.
From Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Fleming Collection.

Another example of such an approach in Fleming's later work presents itself in the garden plan for Leslie Elkins in 1988 (fig. 4.52). There, a similar overlapping of edges occurs in the panels of lawn and paving at the northwest corner of the house. One also sees typical axial references to the house's doors and fenestration.

These examples represent an evolution of Fleming's sensibility within the framework of a commission for a home with a traditional (or semi-traditional, in the case of the Elkins residence) architectural type. As has been discussed earlier, Fleming did several fully modern commissions in which the building's architecture was modern. Fleming states that he always believed that a garden was in a sense subservient to the house. It would only make sense that a modern home receive a modern garden, and we see that Fleming often remained very faithful to the nature of the home's architecture. We have witnessed a "tentatively modern" garden that reflects the tentative modernism of the house itself in the Straus residence. There, Fleming takes the cue from Staub by minimizing ornamentation without utilizing other modern features such as overlapping space.

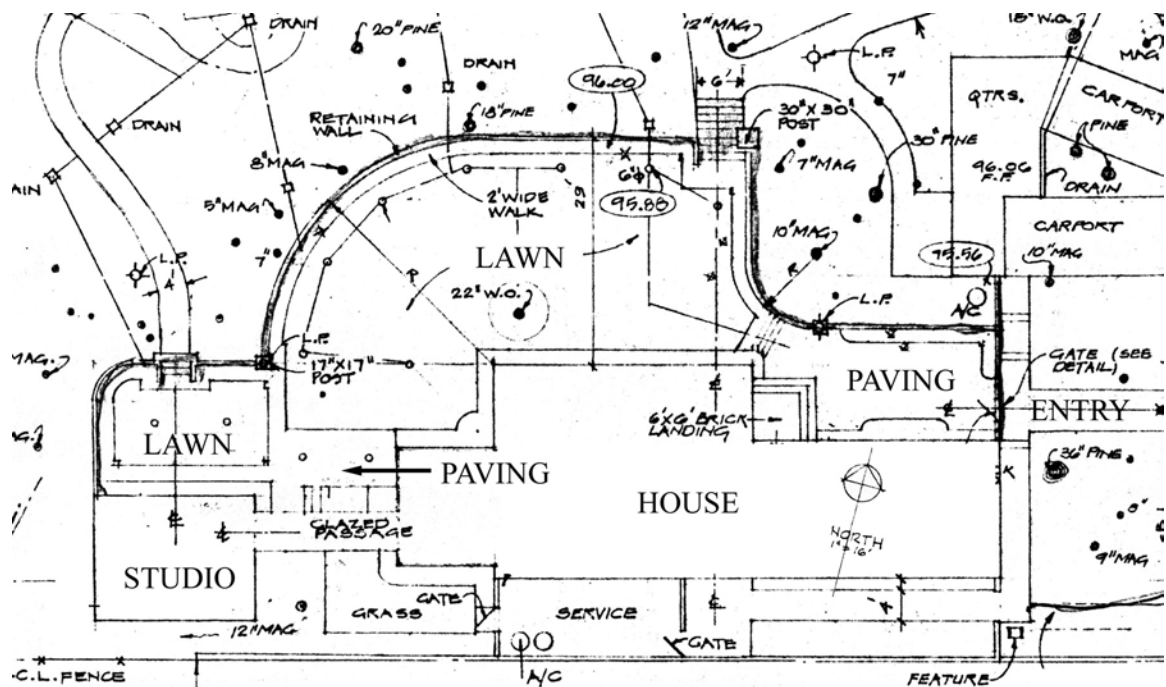


Figure 4.52 Leslie Elkins residence plan.
From Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Fleming Collection.

END NOTES

- 1 Griswold, 241-242.
- 2 Bohnn et. al., 35. David Warren, Director of Bayou Bend, places this in question. There is some evidence to believe that the general layout of the Diana garden, including the idea to remove trees, was instigated by Ellen Shipman, whom Miss Hogg paid for consultation work at Bayou Bend; David Warren, interview by author, conversation, Houston, Texas, October 2003.
- 3 Griswold, 241.
- 4 Griswold, 242.
- 5 Newton, 376.
- 6 Ibid., 377
- 7 Derro Evans, "Dogwoods in Bloom," *Texas Homes*, February 1984, 63.
- 8 "Elsong Garden and Conservatory" brochure, Emy-Lou Biedenharn Foundation, Monroe, Louisiana.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.

- 11 Rogers, 397.
- 12 Tom Leonard, "Texas Has Taste," *House and Garden*, circa 1950.
- 13 Kenneth McMinn, 3 December 2001.
- 14 Howard Barnstone, *The Architecture of John F. Staub* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 217.
- 15 Kenneth McMinn, 3 December 2001.
- 16 C. C. Pat Fleming, "Memo: Life History," [after 1984], A Private Collection.
- 17 Bohnn et. al., 33.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

FLEMING'S DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

In examining Fleming's work, it is important to investigate how Fleming approached a project. An examination of his process provides insights into how his designs took form. Surveying Fleming's own articulation of his design beliefs and process provide an *additional* perspective from which to evaluate his designs.

Fleming's Method

Fleming likened landscape planning to the planning of a house. Master planning was vitally important to him, and he believed no space was too large or small to be comprehensively planned. Fleming thought a master plan "should provide an arrival area, service and storage areas and, very probably, several intimate garden areas."¹ He advocated the division of a property into related use areas, which he thought of as rooms. This philosophy of the layout of a garden also reflected the way that Fleming himself lived. For example, Fleming liked to entertain guests in a particular way. He liked to receive them in a foyer, show them through a hallway into a parlor, dine with them in a formal dining room, and then retire with them to a drawing room.

This divisional formality and structured sequence of an evening involving different rooms and experiences parallels Fleming's conception of the experience of a designed landscape. A designed landscape was to have different experiences that came from its formal (or sometimes informal) division into various rooms. Fleming also addressed transition in a similar way, especially in his formal designs. Just as Fleming might receive guests in his home through a foyer before entering a parlor, Fleming might utilize a garden space as an ante-room or foyer that was to precede a major outdoor room. Such an example exists in the Entrance Court of ELSong Garden which was to precede the main Wagnerian Water Garden. This ante-room concept was employed as a transitional element to accept visitors gracefully. In Fleming's more modern designs, this transitional effect was blurred and therefore somewhat prolonged as spaces flowed more freely into one another.

Fleming's concern for transition was a way of achieving a comfortable elegance in his designs. He believed that landscapes were to be welcoming, not jarring. The use of transition was a way of preparing people for different experiences. One can also observe the use of transition in the line forms that Fleming used. He was very fond of addressing corners with the use of one of two devices: notching or scalloping. If a brick path were to make a ninety-degree turn, Fleming might notch or scallop the inner corner—and sometimes the outer corner as well. The device served several functions. It allowed enrichment of the design by adding another level of detail. That detail was also placed at a point where one might be more likely to appreciate it; for at a corner, one must necessarily slow one's pace in order to alter direction gracefully. One can appreciate details better when the scenery is not "speeding by." The notch or scallop also allows for a natural instinct of humans to "cut the corner" when changing direction. It allows for a slightly more rounded path through the corner.²

Fleming also compared the different *elements* of an outdoor room to those of the indoors: shrubs assumed a similar massing to that of furnishings; pools and lawns were the rugs; an espalier was a wall hanging; and trees or sky were the ceiling. However, he recognized that

important differences existed between the indoors and outdoors. He asserted that the volumes of space dealt with outdoors are generally larger than those of the indoors; therefore, a designer is obliged to enlarge the scale of outdoor elements proportionally.

Light and shade were always important aspects of a Fleming garden, and he was keenly aware of the effects they produced. Outdoors, he says, “the light is stronger[,] and this makes outside elements seem somewhat smaller or weaker.”³ This intense lighting condition of the outdoors necessitated the use of more emphasis and “appropriate contrasts” outdoors. For instance, if two adjacent plants are receiving strong light, the differences in color between the two plants is washed out and reduced. Therefore, the two plants must be chosen with special attention to having contrasting colors, forms, or textures to highlight their differences. Otherwise, the planting may read as only a formless vegetative mass.⁴ He goes further to state that shade is necessary for “bring[ing] out details...the edges of a leaf, the shape of a twig.”⁵ He also asserted that shadows were important for achieving perspective, making this aside: “Late afternoon, from 3 to 5 p.m., is the best time of the day for shade and shadows.”⁶ Seeing linear shadows cast upon planiform surfaces, such as lawn or paving, gives subtle information about the size and height of garden elements.

According to Fleming, his planning process always began inside the house and flowed outward, with particular attention to the views afforded by windows and doors onto the property. Conversely, Fleming advocated treating windows and doors as focal points of interest when viewed from outdoors. Of course, having windows and doors “open to pleasant views” is a common notion. Important sight lines should not focus on unpleasant views. However, the deeper belief at work here is the notion that landscape should be an ordered extension of the house. As Fleming describes, “There should be a sensitive continuity expressed inside and outside the house.”⁷ Reinforcing Fleming’s deference to architecture, he states, “You see, I start out assuming the house is the most important part of the garden and that everything in the garden should focus attention back to the house.”⁸ Vistas away from the house, however, were important to Fleming as well. He believed that any deep “vistas within or beyond the property’s confines...should be taken advantage of.” At the same time, Fleming realized the value of mystery in concealing some views: “to be able to see all of an area at a glance is very wrong and portrays a lack of imagination and understanding of good design relations.”⁹

Fleming’s design philosophies were not only visual. He was very practical in his approach to a site. He always accommodated functional areas for service, storage, and maintenance. It was important to Fleming to have “a good balance between beauty and convenience.”¹⁰ He was very careful to ask how the garden owner would provide for maintenance. Fleming wanted to know who was to maintain it: hired labor or the actual owner? How *often* was the client willing to maintain: once a week or once a month?¹¹ He notes, “If a person is not at all interested in talking about gardening, they tend to like lawns.”¹² Fleming even claims to have turned away clients who were not interested in working in their garden.

As to the overall form that a design took, Fleming pointed to two determining factors: the owner’s personality and the character of the land. As the Fleming Planning Associates brochure says, “Fleming Planning Associates works closely with its clients, taking the time to understand thoroughly the ideas and tastes of each individual. This requires conferences, guidance and understanding; but above all a unique insight into the individual who is expressing himself in forms structural and natural...” The brochure also mentions making the “best use of natural features” and “a thoughtful blending of the man-made and the natural.” The company

logo speaks to this also. It consists of a large Japanese-styled oak growing in front of a classical column with a Greek key motif below.¹³

In observing client personality, Fleming says, “I trained myself to become aware of how my clients lived their lives. I listened to how they talked to their children, how they carried on phone conversations and friendships. And I’d begin to get a feeling about their lives. I simply created in their image.”¹⁴ Fleming saw various components of the garden such as sculpture, fountains, and certain plantings as opportunities to give “important character or personality expressions to the landscape.”¹⁵ Fleming said that he could tell a lot about a person from the way the home is furnished and what artwork is there. Raequel Roberts elaborates on Fleming’s belief that outdoor spaces must relate to indoors as well: “...colors must flow smoothly, and textures must harmonize. A home furnished in chintz and tassels, for example, calls for a garden filled with delicate, lacy plants, such as spiraea. A home with lacquered furniture and black-and-white tile floors demands a garden with sharper contrasts and plants with cleaner lines”¹⁶

Pat Fleming’s design philosophies may not sound unique; as many of his ideas and themes are commonplace today. However, Griswold counters, “Today, broadleaf evergreen gardens in a woodland setting seem uninventive, but in the twenties and thirties they were something new in Texas.”¹⁷ It is important to note that Fleming began designing works of landscape architecture around 1930. At this point in time, there were few landscape architects in the nation, much less in Houston, Texas. Whereas the basic principles that drove his philosophy may not be unique, the way in which he expressed those ideas was distinctive.

Classification

Fleming’s most recognizable signature is his formal, architectonic spaces that have strong links to the architecture of the house. If one were to compare his formal designs to any particular style of landscape architecture, they would most closely resemble the Italianate. Italianate designs form a harmonious bond with Beaux Arts principles. However, to classify Fleming as a formalist would be a gross oversimplification, for his work varied immensely. In fact, Fleming divided his work (and all landscape work) into three classifications: formal, informal, and naturalistic. He expounds on these classifications in a short article written for *River Oaks Magazine* in 1939. According to Fleming, a “formal” design has its components “arranged in geometrical relations, usually with reference to a main axis or central line,” and would have an architectonic quality.¹⁸ A “naturalistic” design, on the other hand, gives “the impression of some fixed instance in the continuous evolutionary changes of nature.”¹⁹ It seeks to imitate nature, and Fleming acknowledges the artifice inherent in such a recreation of nature. An “informal” garden, however, is one that cannot be classified as formal or naturalistic, involving what Fleming calls “a more subtle kind of harmony” or balance, achieved through compositional effects “rather than actual symmetry.”²⁰

In this article written with the homeowner in mind, there are revealing insights into Fleming’s thinking. Fleming’s attempt to classify designed landscapes into the three categories shows his struggle to come to terms with new and sometimes disparate ideas in landscape architecture. The order in which Fleming introduces the three classifications is telling. He first describes the “formal” landscape. This idea is very simple to grasp and was the prevailing idea at work behind the Beaux-Arts classical model under which Fleming was educated. Fleming then goes to the opposite end of the spectrum with the “naturalistic” model. Here, once again, it is easy to grasp the idea of a purely aesthetic reproduction of a natural scene.

However, what is particularly telling is his mention of the last category, “informal,” and how it is described. Fleming’s first definition of informal is simply something that is neither formal nor naturalistic. He places informal somewhere in the gap left between formal and naturalistic, defining it by what it is not. Fleming struggles to define this category, using more abstruse language to describe it, such as “a more subtle type of balance and harmony” or a “play of illusions.”²¹ It is in this category that Fleming struggles with and seeks to come to terms with the ideas of modernism. One might argue that the picturesque or Victorian schools of landscape might fit into this “informal” category. However, upon examination of Fleming’s informal landscapes, one could not classify them as picturesque or Victorian. Clearly, even in his informal mode, his landscapes contain a more orderly system of function and composition that expressed the ideas of modernism.

Fleming’s struggle is emblematic of the times and environment from which he came as well as his personality. Fleming was educated in a Beaux-Arts mode during his architectural education at The University of Texas. The classical models in Europe (and particularly in Italy) stimulated his interest in landscape. Fleming also projected an “old guard” conservative image, although an artistically-inclined one. Although Fleming did explore new ideas in his work, he was not always quick to embrace them. Fleming betrays his ambivalent attitude towards contemporary art in a typed lecture dated 1970 in which he states, “We are going to make a rather wide distinction between arts—a separation of the arts: [t]he fine arts, or proven arts, and the contemporary arts, or unproven arts. Contemporary art is often quite psychic, and sometimes very pleasant. However, it is often quite ugly, quite shocking, and it remains to be seen how long man will accept or revere or respect or protect these expressions of so-called art.”²² One can see Fleming’s reticence to embrace contemporary art, or even acknowledge it beyond a passing fad. This skepticism may have carried over into his ideas about modern landscape architecture as well. However, Fleming was not actually at odds with the ideas or principles behind modern landscape architecture, for they appear in his later work; he may have simply required time to envision these new ideas as relevant to his designs and commissions.

According to McMinn, Fleming did not identify strongly on a personal level with very modern expressions in the arts.²³ Therefore, he adopted a vocabulary that he was comfortable with to describe his works that leaned more toward modernism, calling them “informal” instead. Fleming did learn to adapt to newer trends in landscape design. Fleming describes the evolution of his attitude toward swimming pools: “I used to really resent swimming pools. But I began to accept them because they’re architectural and, like rugs, part of a larger pattern. And they can reflect light in the most interesting ways.”²⁴

The same sequential order in which Fleming articulates his three classifications can be found in three temporally-sequential treatments of properties along Buffalo Bayou in River Oaks: the Bayou Bend Diana garden (1937-39), the Dogwoods (1938-39), and gardens for Leslie Elkins (1988-89). The Diana garden at Bayou Bend was a formal, axial garden that terminated at the statue of Diana before reaching the bayou. The second garden, the Dogwoods (next door to Bayou Bend), was a naturalistic garden set into a ravine that led to the bayou. The third garden (for Leslie Elkins) can be classified in Fleming’s vocabulary as informal. Its lines are not formally symmetrical, nor does it seek to be a reproduction of nature itself. These three treatments of bayou sites testify to the design development of Fleming and his experiments with different styles. The opposite ends of the spectrum (“formal” and “naturalistic”) meet in the middle, forming a dialogue which Fleming called “informal.”

SUMMATION

Colonial Revivalism has proved to be a subject that eludes concrete physical description. Its heavy reference to history and “appropriateness” to geographic location ground it to the site, but form takes a back seat to perception. Colonial Revivalism is not intended to be a stylistic “appliqué,” although it has often become so in its baser forms. In terms of physical features, Colonial Revival gardens seem to be somewhat less hardscape intensive than an Italianate garden. This less intensive state may stem from the fact many Italian villa gardens were built on hillsides, which forced them to utilize man-made elements such as retaining walls. Another reason for less hardscapes may be that colonial gardens were simply not as extensive and sophisticated. Early settlers of this country may not have been concerned with extensive structures for financial as well as practical reasons. In fact, Griswold and Weller refer only to the use of straight lines, boxwood borders, and perennials as defining physical characteristics. Therefore, Colonial Revivalism may be considered more of a psychological construct that deals with identity and tradition rather than a particular style.

Fleming designed gardens for primarily traditional homes, many of which were Colonial Revival. Bayou Bend has been described as “Latin Colonial.”²⁵ Griswold and Weller write, “Although Bayou Bend was certainly not the first of its kind, it consecrated and popularized the formula for hundreds of later gardens.”²⁶ Fleming’s designs reflected the restrained lines and studied proportions of these homes. He did so while evoking a “southern” feel, utilizing hallmark plants of the southern garden, attuned to the need for shade and breezes. Griswold and Weller write, “Just like white columns, camellias and azaleas stood for Southern conservatism, for the antebellum Southern tradition revived and revised to fit the large suburban estate lot.”²⁷ Fleming was accustomed to the “art” of southern living, and he took cues from his affluent upbringing in creating that feel for his clients.

Fleming created a large variety of work within his lifetime, spanning formal and informal, modern and traditional lines. Fleming’s formal designs were an artful interpretation of classical European gardening traditions, modified to suit Houston’s southern setting. Many of his designs can be traced to Beaux-Arts and Italianate principles. His early training in architecture in the Beaux-Arts mode gave him a keen sensitivity of scale, proportion, and detail. Coming from an architectural background may have influenced his fundamental opinion that the house or building is the most important object in a landscape. As we see in nearly all projects of his, the landscape reflected the character of the architecture. Of course, the landscape also reflected the character of the owner and the surrounding land.

Coming from a traditional Beaux-Arts background, Fleming did not cringe, however, at the whole of modernism. He was able to embrace it because he was so committed to the practicality of some of its principles, such as the primacy of functionality. Fleming always kept in mind practical considerations about how people lived. He thought about an owner’s capability and inclination toward maintenance. He amply provided for service areas and recreation areas if they fit the way a client lived. Fleming was able to employ modernist designs when the house’s architecture merited it. Similarly, he did not gratuitously engage in modern design, as if following the latest trend. For instance, he would not propose a landscape with limited ornamental detailing if the house’s architecture was a traditionally ornamented Georgian style.

Although Fleming did engage in modern design, he held to certain Beaux-Arts principles throughout most of his work, regardless of the overall style. He almost always related focal points and axes to doors or windows of a house, although *symmetry* about an axis did not always

necessarily follow. Very few examples exist (such as Southwestern Saving and Loan and the pool garden of the Neuhaus residence) where little or no axes are present. Fleming practiced modern principles and created modern designs before he called them by that name. His reference to “informal” designs was really a reference to modernism before it became overtly apparent in some of his designs. This word usage may have reflected an unwillingness to identify himself with modern design before it gained a broader base of acceptance in the country and, more importantly, in his clientele. Fleming’s gardens were not, however, mere emulations of a particular style. Some of the strongest attributes of a Fleming garden were its mastery of scale and intuitively appropriate layout, regardless of the form it took. As Newton notes, “...the power of simple geometry is independent of ‘historic styles.’”²⁸ Many of Fleming’s gardens fit easily into either a formal Beaux-Arts style or into a modernist aesthetic; however, certain works seem to incorporate characteristics of both. It is important to realize that purity of style was not always a goal for a Fleming garden. Certain situations, for whatever reasons, merited a varied approach. Fleming was able to combine and reinterpret modern and classical ideas to create original hybrids.

Fleming was one of the founding members of the profession of landscape architecture in Texas. Without formal landscape architectural education and only a limited architectural one, he proceeded to undertake extensive and varied projects. At a time when Houston was going through its “Boomtown” growth, Fleming’s standards of excellence aided in placing Houston on the map. His activities in city planning and in residential gardens beautified the city, helping to establish its reputation as a city of culture as opposed to an unrefined backwater. As Bohnn et. al. write, Fleming’s career can be evaluated as “a personal crusade, waged over 50 years, to combat the pervasive rawness of Houston and demonstrate with what grace and ease this city lends itself to becoming a livable landscape”²⁹

Although Fleming’s ideas in his designs may not have been the first of their kind, he did bring many ideas to Houston (and Texas) that did not have a long history here. He was able to assemble landscape concepts used elsewhere in the country and adapt them for Houston. There were few examples of residential landscape efforts of a high quality and sophistication when Fleming began his practice. His associations with certain people early in his career helped to round his somewhat incomplete education and make him a better landscape architect. Albert Sheppard brought architectural training and technical knowledge that informed the execution of Fleming’s designs. John Staub demonstrated a style attuned to the tastes of wealthy Houstonians that Fleming complemented well.

To attest to his prestige and recognition, the ownership of a Pat Fleming garden ranks just as highly in garden circles as having a John Staub home. His name is still recognized and valued. Fleming strove to give each garden an individuality that was inspired by its setting and its owner’s personality. Fleming’s own personality was in no small part responsible for his success. He portrayed the air of a southern gentleman, as indeed he was. His personality evoked a link to the southern heritage that many wished for in their gardens. His ability to interact with and relate to his clients often enabled the establishment of an emotional rapport that opened their personalities to him as inspiration for his designs. Let us hope that Fleming’s legacy will endure as inspiration for future generations.

END NOTES

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- 5 Raequel Roberts, "Gardens for All Ages," *Southern Accents*, June 1990, 96H.
- 6 Ibid.
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- 11 Lesley Schlumberger, interview with author, phone conversation, 2000.
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- 18 C. C. Pat Fleming, "Historic Styles in Landscape Architecture," *River Oaks Magazine*, May 1939, 20-21.
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