

Ladew Topiary Gardens in Monkton, Maryland



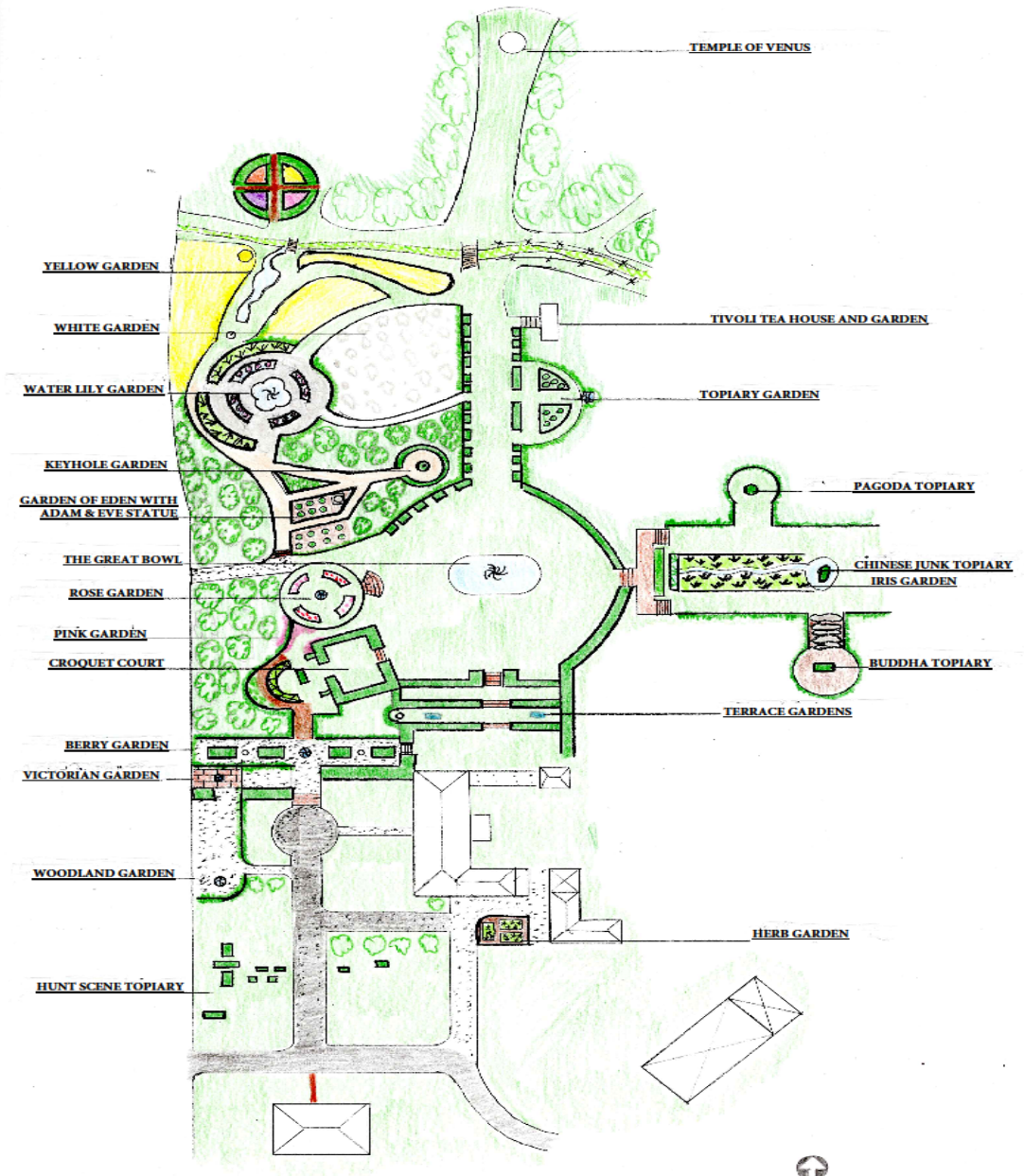
History of the Designed Landscape Project by Ashley Van Pelt, September 3, 2024

Garden Plan View

Harvey Ladew was a wealthy, well-traveled socialite who loved foxhunting. While traveling, Ladew had access to the gardens of the elite which he studied and photographed. He toured Italian and French Renaissance-era gardens, the Medici gardens, English Parks, gardens in Asia and the Middle East. A topiary of a fox hunt scene in England inspired Ladew to create his own hunt scene topiary, which he installed at Pleasant Valley, his 200-acre farm in Monkton, Maryland.

Ladew began his garden plans early in the 1930's, just as The Great Depression ended the American Country Place era of landscape architecture which Frederic Olmsted and Beatrix Farrand used. This style was characterized by formal gardens near the house which were created with terraces, water features, hedges as dividers, and plantings that created thematic "rooms". The rooms then transitioned into a recreational area. Farthest away from the house was the naturalized garden. Symmetry and geometry were used to layout the gardens. Ladew, who was friends with some of Olmsted's and Farrand's clients, seems to have designed his gardens in the American Country Place style, and then included elements from other periods and places that he liked.

Ladew's garden is laid out on a north/south axis that begins at the main house and ends at the Temple of Venus, the focal point at the far end. An east/west axis intersects it in the center. The axial layout was used in multiple historical styles including the Baroque, the Renaissance and the American Country Place. The use of perspective with a focal point was used in the designs from the English Pastoral period.



LADREW TOPIARY GARDENS SITE PLAN RENDERING
Adapted by A Van Pelt
from *Perfectly Delightful* by Christopher Weeks

Topiary

Topiary, a formal garden element used repeatedly throughout history, is the main feature of the gardens. Historically topiary was used in the Roman Empire, reappeared during the Renaissance and the Victorian era gardens. It was also used in colonial Williamsburg. At Ladew, it is used for decorative focal points and dividers between the gardens. The first topiary Ladew created, the hunt scene, is located along the front drive. Set on the broad entrance lawn within a park-like setting, this topiary captivates viewers when they see the two horses with riders, 6 hounds and a fox portraying movement across the lawn.

(Left: Horse and Rider, Center: The Pagoda Topiary, Right: The Hunt Scene Topiary)



Themed Garden Rooms

Themes were a characteristic of the American Country Place gardens. At Ladew, thematic gardens begin at the front of the house and flow parallel to the central axis. Each theme is based on the vegetation of the space, such as flower color, or plant type. For example, the Garden of Eden is planted with fruit trees, the Pink Garden is filled with plants that flower in pink and the Sculpture Garden features large topiary. Each space is defined by a hedge, topiary wall, or dense vegetation which is consistent with the American Country Place style. Some entries have arches with gates. The rose garden is the only space defined by a brick wall covered in latticed fruit trees, like the hortus conclusus from Medieval designs.

(Left: The Sculpture Garden, Middle: The Yellow Garden, Right: Exterior of The Rose Garden)



The Terrace Gardens



The Terrace Gardens begin at the rear of the house. It consists of three wide lawns which are connected by brick steps. Each terrace is surrounded by topiary walls adorned with decorative topiary swags and windows. The middle terrace has a goldfish pond at each end. This garden is a transitional space between the house and the recreational area which consists of the swimming pool named The Great Bowl, wide lawns, and a Croquet Court. This layout is a characteristic of American Country Place design.

(Left: The Middle Terrace, Right: View of The Terrace Gardens from the south end)

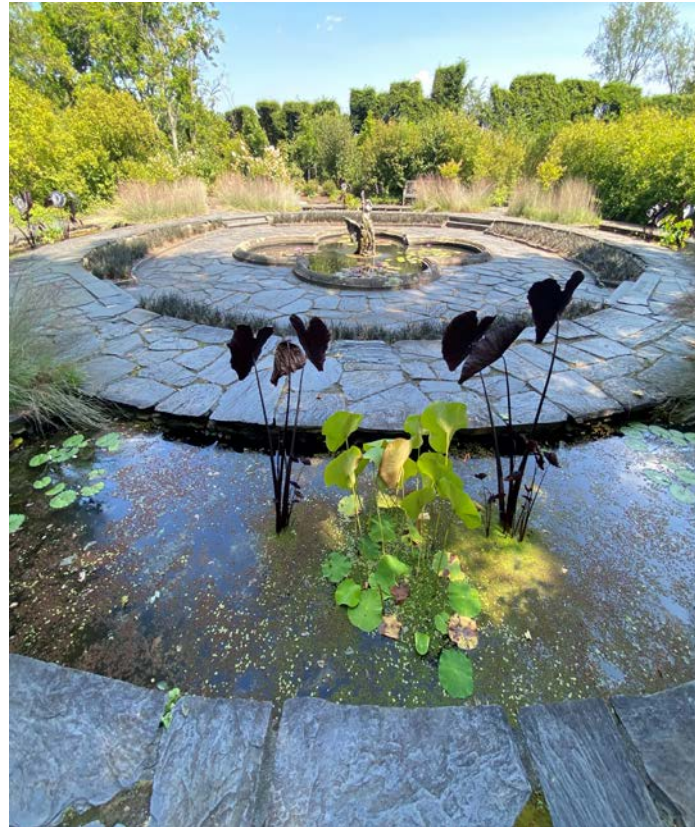


Statuary and Water Features

Statuary is another element of the American Country Place era. It was used to add formality to the gardens. Ladew also used statues for esthetics such as the Adam and Eve statue in the Garden of Eden, a statue of himself with a shovel in the allée and a cherub beside the south entrance to The Berry Garden. Practical statuary includes a set of concrete tables and chairs in the Victorian Garden.

Water features are found in every garden room most often as a central feature. However, the Iris Garden and the Yellow Garden each have a fountain that flows into a stream. The Water Lily Garden features a flagstone surface surrounding a pond. At the outside edge of the flagstone is a ground-level planting bed with perennial grasses. If the pond overflows, the water will run across to the vegetation. The water features, while used in American Country Place design, were also a central feature used in Italian Renaissance designs.

(Top: Adam & Eve through the Keyhole, Bottom Left: The Water Lily Garden, Bottom Right: Entrance to The Berry Garden)

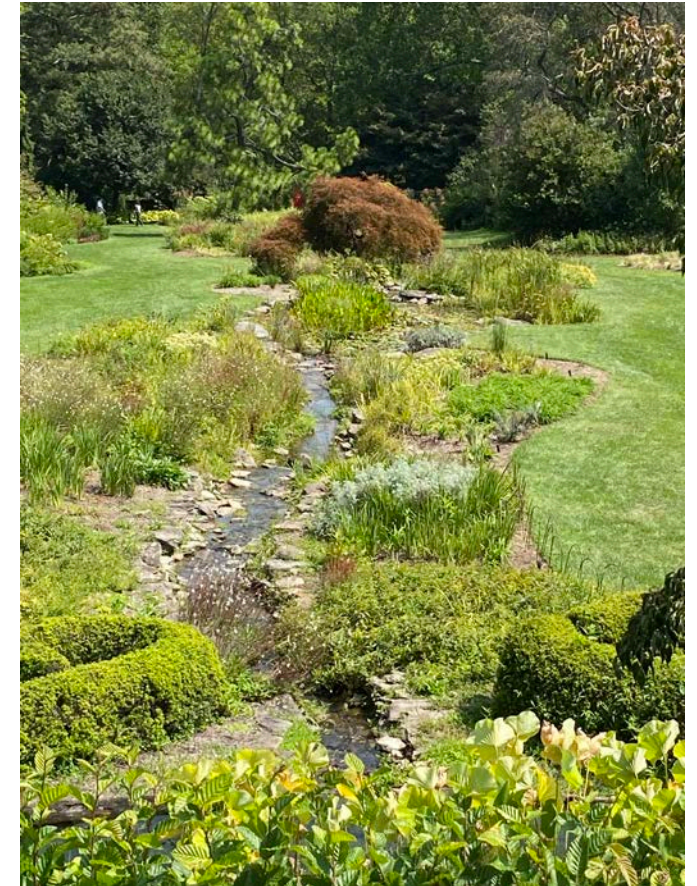


The Iris Garden

The Iris Garden is comprised of multiple landscape styles. The entrance is flanked by a hedge of topiary swans leading to a flight of symmetrical stairs, like those found in the Renaissance period. The garden begins with a pond that flows into a long stream that runs the length of the garden and is flanked by varieties of iris. This feature alludes to the water gardens of the Italian Renaissance as well as provides the perspective from English Pastoral style. At the end of the stream, the historical influence shifts to an Asian garden influence. The stream ends into a koi pond which has a topiary of a Chinese Junk on an island. There is also a large pagoda topiary to one side and on the other side are large stone steps that lead up to a topiary Buddha seated beneath branches shaped into arches.

In his estate, Ladew incorporated Pleasant Valley as a non-profit and re-named it Ladew Topiary Gardens. He did not intend to create a legacy garden containing one of the best topiary displays in the United States, but that is exactly what Ladew Topiary Gardens is.

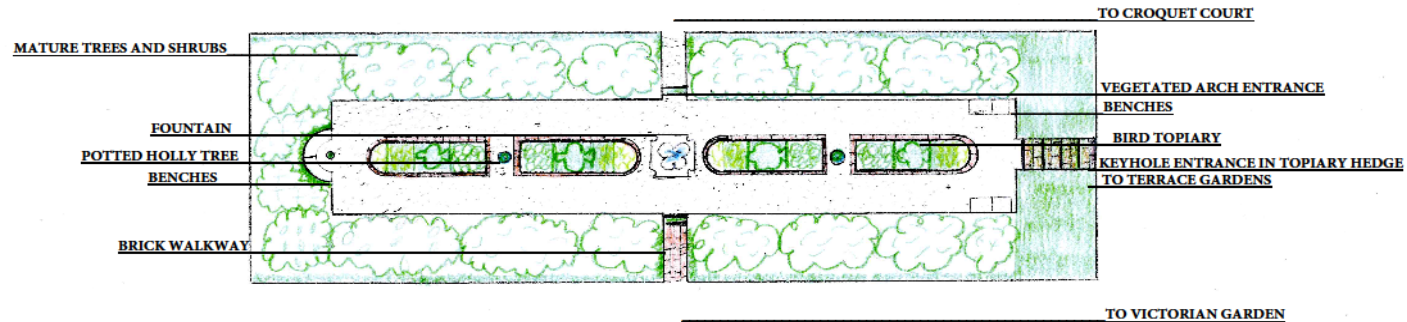
(Top: The Iris Garden Entrance, Right: Stream through the Iris Garden, Bottom: Chinese Junk Topiary, Middle Left: Buddha Topiary)



Enlarged Area Plan

The Berry Garden encompasses most elements found in the 22-acre garden in a single garden. Entering through arches on the north/south axis a visitor sees a central fountain with topiary beds on both the east and west sides. Native plants that produce berries, which will feed birds in the winter months, fill the beds around the outside edges. The entrance at the east end is cut through a hedge leading to the Terrace Garden.

(Left: The Berry Garden north entrance, Center: Enlarged Plan of The Berry Garden, Right: The Berry Garden looking east)



Bibliography

Weeks, Christopher. Perfectly Delightful: The Life & Gardens of Harvey Ladew. 1999, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ladew Topiary Gardens. www.ladewgardens.com

(Top: The Hunt Scene in Winter, Bottom Left: Harvey Ladew posing by a statue, Bottom Right: Window in the Terrace Garden. Photos this page from Perfectly Delightful and Ladew Gardens)

