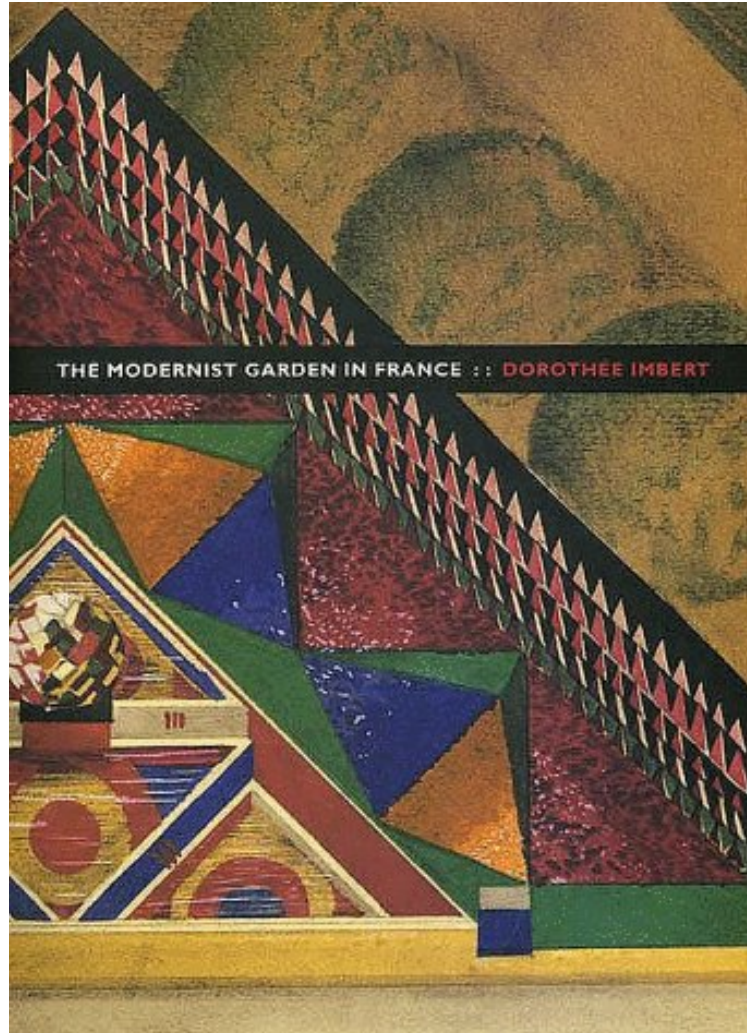


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The Modernist Garden in France

Dorothee Imbert

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Dorothee Imbert : The Modernist Garden in France before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Modernist Garden in France:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Many Pleasures Behind Severe Title By I. Martinez-Ybor Designed landscapes are usually and broadly described as being either English or French gardens. The English sort seeks to group trees, foliage and flowering plants as if growing randomly without a perceived design, usually favoring twists and turns in the landscape, avoiding large vistas, favoring more intimate perspectives, rejoicing in cul-de-sacs, easily adaptable to any surroundings. Of course, it is all neatly crafted, art to conceal art. A French garden, rejoices in design, favors focus and symmetry, celebrates the subjugation of nature to the landscaper's master plan, opens up, indeed enhances vistas, expands the horizon. It is also dynamically related to the structure with which it is associated (unless

it is a stand-alone park, of course). Such close interdependence is absent in English gardens, hence the latter's pliability and popularity. French celebration of design in gardening could not have remained immune to the revolution in plastic arts centered in Paris until the start of World War II. Thus Ms. Imbert's marvelous book which analyzes through renderings, photographs and text the impact of cubism in particular but modern art in general in French garden design during the first part of the twentieth century through the thirties. The works of Gabriel Guevrekian, Le Corbusier, Andr Lurat, Pierre-Emile Legrain among others are analyzed in great detail, establishing the profound links between garden design, the structure it supported, and the "outside" aesthetic which nurtured both architecture and landscaping. Thus it is instructive to notice in the excellent illustrations, among other things, how, when the perspective is high, garden paths, flower beds, etc. mimic observable planes in, for example, cubist painting. That it worked so well is one of the miracles of modern art; that it has remained so unheralded outside France was one of the casualties of WWII as well as America's marked preference for English gardens and general distaste for the architecturally adventuresome. Of course, to influence architecture and landscaping, art must be identifiably formal. When it comes to gardening, Abstract Expressionism brings to mind weeds. The book excels in bringing all strands together in meticulous order and clear detail. The photographs, given their vintage almost exclusively black and white, are well reproduced, make their respective points, and provide much pleasure in viewing. Color helps create texture, so history has denied us full appreciation of the beauties discussed. However, there's a short section of color plates at the end, of either designs, watercolors or current photographs of some of the items discussed. Pity there is not more color material available. Dorothe Imbert's work is palpably a labor of love even if it also started as a graduate thesis for UC at Berkeley. It is thoroughly annotated, and not at all pedantic.

The modernist garden, which flourished in France between the 1910s and the 1930s, vividly mirrored the geometries and cubist aesthetics familiar to the fine and decorative arts of the period. Created by architects and artists from Andre and Paul Vera to Le Corbusier, such gardens boldly questioned traditional garden design and theory, representing the landscape instead as a once-removed vision of nature. This illustrated book presents a study of these arresting architectonic gardens. Drawing on archives and photo collections in several countries, the author shows how designers used new materials and vocabulary to challenge gravity, traditional notions of time and movement, and a preconceived notion of nature and garden as a symbiotic system. She discusses the innovative and highly formal garden designs at the 1925 Exposition of Decorative and Industrial Arts: Robert Mallet-Stevens' four sunken lawn beds with perfectly identical trees whose foliage consisted only of articulated concrete planes; Gabriel Guevrekian's triangular garden where time and motion were expressed by the revolution of a large crystal sphere, water jets, and the optical vibration of complementary colour planes; and the garden of interior designer and bookbinder Pierre Legrain, where lawn resembled Moroccan leather and flower beds the gilding of a book cover. In addition to analyzing numerous examples of garden art's response to modernist strategies, Imbert provides insights to Le Corbusier's landscape design by situating it within the prevailing cultural and design trends.