



# Landscape Symphonies

## The Divine Nature of the English Garden



The English garden presented an idealized view of nature. They were often inspired by paintings of landscapes, such as those done by Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin. Through the then-recent contact of European travelers with the East, the classical Chinese gardens became a great source for inspiration. England has long been remarkable in history for its capacity for a broad and wide vision. Looking well past the border of this island nation and deep into the unknown beyond, the English value space and exploration, discovery and including.

This need for adventuring out from the familiar is deeply reflected in the how they constructed residential landscapes. Stemming from these values came a garden as a wide and vast expanse of land, quite unlike what many of us now encounter in our backyards. Their landscapes attempted to include all the aspects of nature in their region: large bodies of water, such as lakes and ponds, sweeps of gently rolling lawns emulating hills, great groves of trees, both fruit bearing and flowering, presented as thickets and small forests. Local and foreign fauna were introduced into the gardens to create staged hunting scenes. They would even go so far as to include recreations of Classical Grecian temples, Gothic ruins, bridges, and other picturesque architecture, designed to recreate an idyllic pastoral landscape.

The English garden of this size also had a major influence on the form of the public parks and gardens which appeared around the world in the 19th century. These social expanses, such as Central Park in New York, were expressions of this same attempt to include the unknown within the known, to bring the joy of travel and wildness into the most complexly functioning urban environments.

In addition to the great parks of landscape, there are the more commonly imitated English gardens of flora and plants. Here, again we see the unknown wilderness expressing itself this time in the sense of randomness in the arrangement. The sense of a space well overgrown gives the impression of nature doing her own work, again hiding the hand of the individual gardener. Through continuously hiding the individual, either in the expanse of the park or the intentional disarray of the home garden, the English view of the individual within an order comes to light. We see the humility of needing to be small compared to the greatness of nature. We see the role of the individual in discovering and participating with nature as it is, without interference or re-ordering. From one angle, this is the English expression of a re-touching of Paradise lost and regained, a pursuit deeply felt throughout English history.

Martin Carrion van Rijn (530) 632-3263  
[martin@landscapesymphonies.com](mailto:martin@landscapesymphonies.com)