

The Roots of the American Garden



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Between 1900 and 1930, a sophisticated and thriving garden culture evolved in the U.S. Landscape architects completed significant public and private commissions, and magazines and newspapers promoted garden design and horticulture to a growing audience. Since the fields were tied to domestic life, landscape architecture and gardening offered diverse opportunities to women who entered the workforce during this period.



“Groundbreakers: Great American Gardens & The Women Who Designed Them” exhibit, Photo: The New York Botanical Garden

To celebrate the achievements of some of the most prominent women in early 20th-century landscape design, the New York Botanical Garden featured a garden-wide exhibit in 2014 called: “Groundbreakers: Great American Gardens & The Women Who Designed Them.”



Photo: The New York Botanical Garden

The experience starts with an exquisite evocation of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden, which is being displayed in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory. The original Maine garden was designed by Beatrix Farrand in 1926 for the Eyrie, the summer home of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr. The space combines a traditional summer garden palette of annuals, perennials and bulbs with Asian architecture and sculptural elements, including the iconic Moon Gate wall, which is part of the horticultural exhibit. Farrand was the only female founding member of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899, and

one of two professional advisers at the first meeting of The Garden Club of America in 1913.



Photo: The New York Botanical Garden

Since many of the great gardens designed in the early 20th century no longer exist, photography is the only way to look at the work from this period. This includes the Beacon Hill House's Blue Garden in Newport, Rhode Island, photographed in 1914 by Frances Benjamin Johnston, a pioneer of garden photography with a 60-year career. A reflection pool and its surrounding plantings at the White House were also captured in a vintage photograph on display at the exhibit.



Photo: The New York Botanical Garden

While plants grow and landscapes age, these photographs are the records that showcase the roots of the modern American garden.

All images from the New York Botanical Garden, "Groundbreakers: Great American Gardens & The Women Who Designed Them" exhibit.