

# Vulnerable scenery: shifting dynamics of the natural aesthetic in Australian postwar gardens

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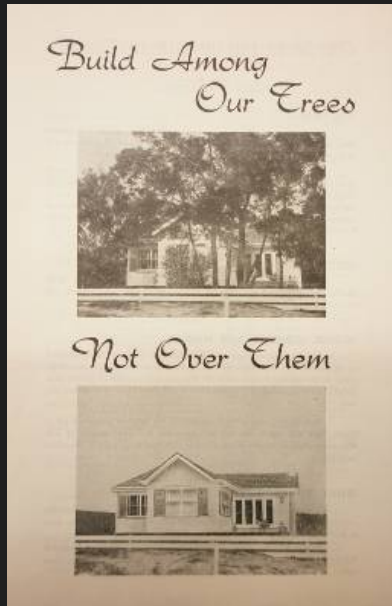
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(Un)loved Modern

Wednesday, 8 July 2009

## Vulnerable scenery: shifting dynamics of the natural aesthetic in Australian postwar gardens

- background
- confounding loved/unloved qualities
- conservation challenges
- concluding thoughts: issues of professional practice



Pamphlet distributed to new land owners in the Eltham area, Eltham Tree Preservation Society (Peter Glass papers, State Library of Victoria, Manuscripts Collection, PA 99/87, no date [c.1960s])



Füllung, the Gordon and Gwen Ford garden, Eltham, Victoria, from 1948 [2008]



Pettit+Sevitt Lowline B3136  
([www.pettitandsevitt.com.au](http://www.pettitandsevitt.com.au))

*natural aesthetic:*

...gardens comprising predominantly Australian plants and intended to simulate the effects of 'natural' bushland - itself an imaginative and cultural construct.

## bush garden, and other descriptors

- Australian garden (*The Australasian*, 1909; Mackennal, H.G. 1917)
- native plant movement (Freeland, J.M. 1968)
- artless naturalism (Goad, Philip 2002)
- artful and imaginative landscape interpretations (Bull, Catherin 2002)
- idealised bush (Ford, Gordon 1999)
- native landscaping (Ramsay, Juliet 1991)
- a native garden aesthetic (Cerwonka, Allaine 2004)
- the natural garden (Latreille, Anne 1990)
- the 'natural' style of gardening (Cuffley, Peter 1993)
- the natural Australian garden (Ford, Gordon 1999)
- Australian Native design style (National Heritage List, 2003)
- the 'Bush School' (Saniga, Andrew 2004)

# Popular publications – magazines, pamphlets, book and chapter-length works

Title page for *Australian Plants for the Garden* (1953) by Thistle Harris



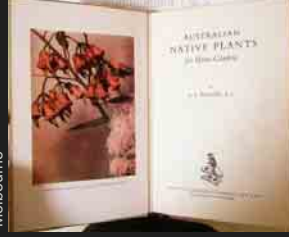
*Your Garden*, January 1954



First issue of *Australian Plants*, the journal of the Society for Growing Australian Plants



*Australian Native Plants for Home Gardens* (1959) by A. E. Brooks, Lothian Publishing Company Pty Ltd, Sydney and Melbourne



Cover, *Designing Bush Gardens* (1966), Betty Maloney and Jean Walker [third printing 1967]



Planting Guide for *Australian Native Trees and Shrubs in Cultivation*, by EMM & ER Boddy, (1967 edn)



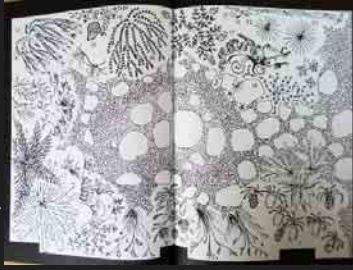
Cover, *More About Bush Gardens* (1967), Betty Maloney and Jean Walker



Cover, *Growing Native Plants* (1971), John Wrigley for Canberra Botanic Gardens



Garden plan from *All About Bush Gardens* (1973), Betty Maloney and Jean Walker



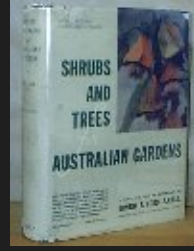
Cover, *Australian Garden Design* (1975), Ellis Stones



Cover, *Landscaping with Australian Plants* (1975), Glen Wilson



Ernest Lord, *Shrubs and Trees for Australian Gardens* (1948) [1964 fourth edn]



Neirne Chisholm, *Native Plants* chapter (1949)



1970s

1960s

1950s

1940s

‘[while]...small, almost esoteric in its wholehearted form,’ [...] in a diluted form it affected a wide section of the populace who unexpectedly found the despised gum trees had primeval beauty. *They* planted them’. [own emphasis]

(J.M. Freeland, *Architecture in Australia* 1968)





Gordon and Gwen Ford's garden Füllung, in Eltham (from 1948)



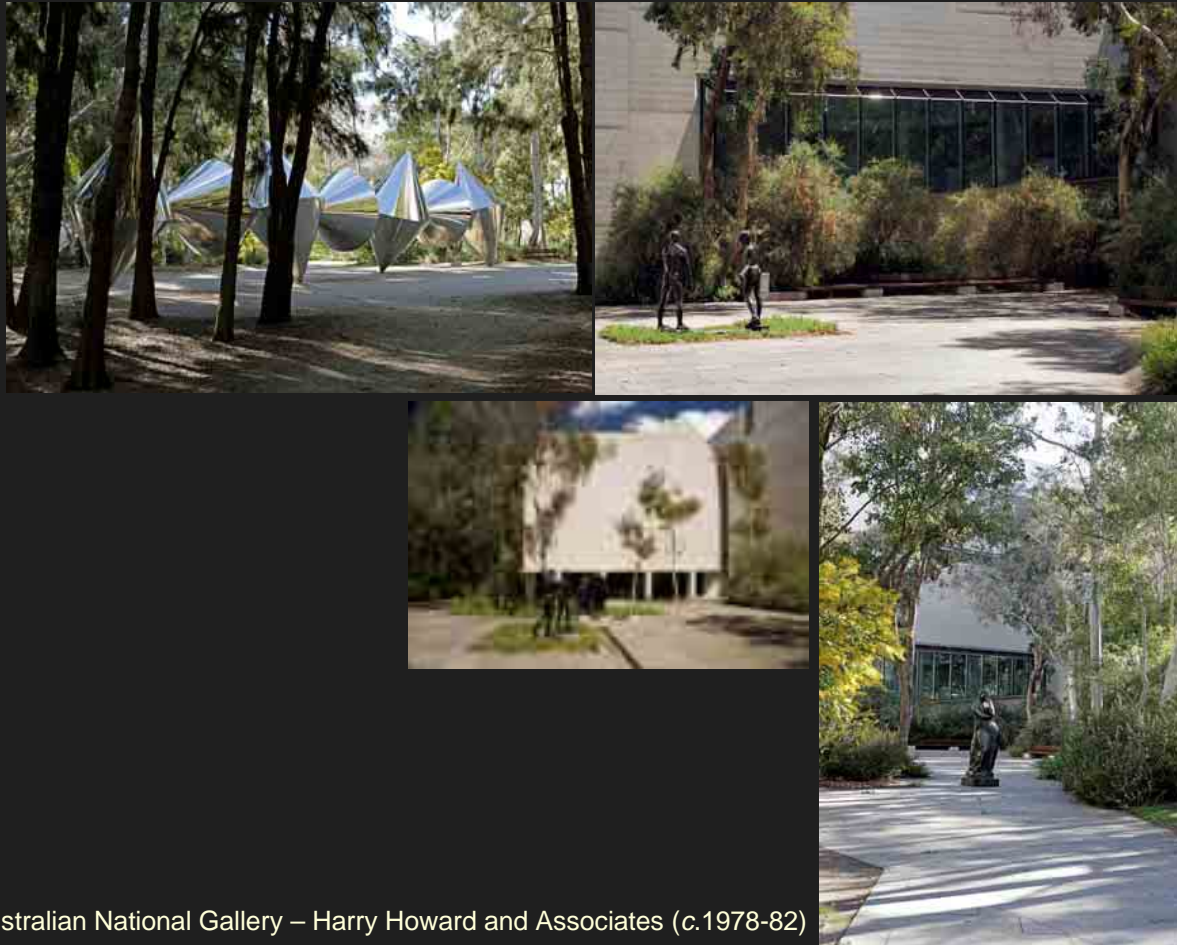
Australian National Botanic Gardens  
([www.anbg.gov.au](http://www.anbg.gov.au))



Mallee Garden, Adelaide Botanic Gardens (1953, under directorship of Noel Lothian)







Sculpture garden, Australian National Gallery – Harry Howard and Associates (c.1978-82)

Down in the garden  
some patriotism stirs

By STEPHEN BOAHER

WHOEVER said the natives were useless hasn't seen Melbourne's gardens.

But what? They were downright believers. They have believed in. And it is just as well that the Greenies, Malcontents and Nihilists of this world do not

The green dumplings of Victoria — and, accordingly, the rest of America — have been embraced by our endemic taste and should, commonly known as "dumplings" with the name "dumplings" and mixed dumplings.

A decade ago two purple-crowned  
squirrels appeared in the yard.  
They might have had a Gophertown  
nest cradling away in some far  
corner of the backyard and  
a few promising bluffs of 1980  
nesting birds in the air.

Suddenly business widened prof-  
it in the early 1980s — when  
building boomed and the concept  
of construction solved the en-  
vironmental problems in a land  
hag.

[illegible]

used to be, six years ago, "almost overnight," 24 business weeks of which the vine of a climbing Hamamelis life is guarded about squares and would not give me any. "Naples" are very big money, very, and abundant.

People took the professions by storm the year, says Mr. Robinson. Many of his customers in the early 1960s were doctors, accountants, lawyers and teachers. They were moving to the city

They could have put it (shady  
darkness, by day). Bill Meyer

"People began to seek an alternative," he says. "I was involved in the non-revenue over saving the Lika Dunes, and words like 'sustainable', 'the environment' and 'pollution' suddenly became part of the vocabulary."

reilian identity and an interest in their own flora. They took forays to other parts of the country and saw native plants in different habitats. There was just talk about conservation and the preservation of endemic species.

He adds "In 1966 we were en-

## The Age, Thurs



4428 J. Neurosci., September 24, 2008 • 28(39):4422–4430

and 100 different species of plants, all of them succulents." All *Adiantum* members are

about two million mature plants are sold in Victoria each year at an average price of \$0.50 — a total turnover of about \$5 million. Most nurseries stock some "barrow" and grow 100,000 to 200,000 seedlings.

Grasses are the most popular plants and an unimproved creeping groundcover variety with a lavender-colored pom-pom flower, *Orelox gentianoides*, is the biggest seller.

There is no correlation between the labor room and the

popularity of domestic fairs, says  
Mr. Wadsworth. And, he insists, it  
was 1848 "nearly 15 years ago" that  
"modern" gardens. People from a  
broad spectrum of occupations —  
"doctors to a grocer's son" —  
are now contributing ideas.

But are native shrubs and trees beautiful?

Cathy Barry, an Elder's regular member at Assumption, responds. She and her husband bought a bush black in the 1980s.

ay October 11

twine up her foot is required.  
"Oh, they were so vulgar in the  
back."

"But look out there," he says, gesturing to a patch of scrub on

There is color — reds in rubies and pinks. There is variety in the sizes and texture of the stones and in the shades of green. There are low and high places. Almost any time, you can

a handy cushion than a group of traditional pews could. And if you bothered to happen there, the church, the flowers and lawn would be evidence of strange and painful enigmas.

the rugged scenery of the mountainous, the sea, across a succession of crabs and lobsters, is a picture of one of the oldest villages of the world, reflecting the spirit of 18th-century France.

The plovers hit increased the hatch as they sat & now says Dr. Milneau. They laid (about 3 with open, with w/ natural, straight-growing

1979, p. 9

books. "It's that thick," and I  
holds up a loaf of paper.

...and the young ones are called  
scalloped — the fourth is  
Strong Australian Plants and  
Cactuses all around — and  
he said to have played a very  
part in sustaining interest in  
live plants.

Our other Museum Gardens

A Mr. J. M. Watson bought 100 acres (2.5 acres) of the old plantation for a horse stable.

The council opened the gates to the park in 1921. Since then, its development has been gradual and about 1980, when

But Cambridge is not the only municipally clean city in existence in the ever-expanding United States.

There is, nonetheless, a school completely at odds in the "nature" issue. For gardeners, the

before it was destroyed by the  
 second atomic bombing in  
 1945. It was destroyed.

## Trendy gardens:

## BRINGING THE HOUSE DOWN

Householders are warned that if they have a preference for fast growing, native bush gardens, they might be getting more than they bargained for.



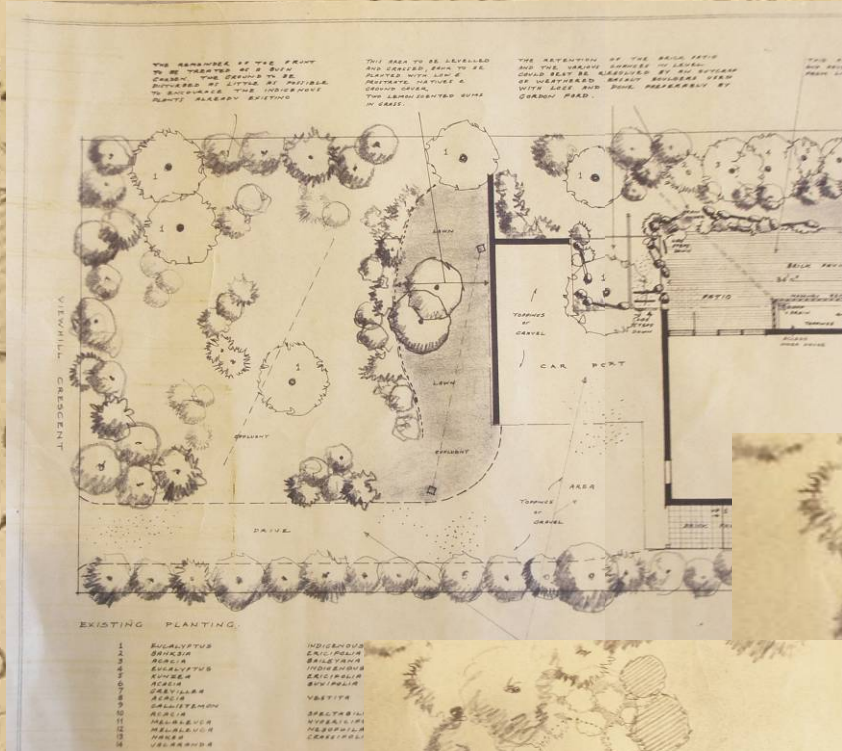
Recent investigations carried out by the Swinburne Institute of Technology and Melbourne's Architects Inspection Service have revealed that some native trees are causing considerable damage to older style houses in Victoria.

The worst offenders appear to be the fast growing varieties such as gums, elms and willows, planted as instant gardens.

Executive Director of the



## Plans prepared by Peter Glass (FAILA) for Gordon Ford



Entrance  
to garden  
& house

Walk  
here through  
effect of  
thick bush

Areas marked 'H' & 'I' continue the screen planting, and add to the impression of arriving at the house through a feeling of bush.

New planting shown in all the areas in front of the house consists of prostrate - semi prostrate & mat plants which should be allowed to encroach informally into this area.

Prostrate &  
mat plants

## conservation challenges – change and continuity

‘...we can’t actually retain them as they were. Gardens, unlike architecture, are constantly changing...there are a certain limited number of gardens that can be retained exactly as they were designed but in almost all cases gardens depend very much on the gardener. The...person who created them...shaped the plants...combined the colours...did the weeding...made the changes. And people’s interest...wasn’t in establishing a single unity that’s unchanging, their interest...was in change and if we stop change then we stop the real essence of a lot of gardens. We’ve got to accept change...to realise that garden history isn’t about preservation solely in the sense of keeping them as documents.’

(Richard Clough, interview with Roslyn Burge, 2009)



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(Richard Clough, interview with Roslyn Burge, 2009)

‘...it is axiomatic that a garden must be grown over time rather than constructed in a moment like architecture.’

(Peter Walker in Charles A Birnbaum (ed.) *Preserving Modern Landscape Architecture*, Papers from the Wave Hill – National Park Service Conference 1999, Landmark Series 10, Spacemaker Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2004)



Füllung, Gwen Ford's and the late Gordon Ford's garden, Eltham (from 1948)





Ellis Stones rockery (1962), Burnley gardens, Melbourne





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- Could the place be / have been part of a larger whole ?
- If either building or garden setting has been lost, what implications does this have on traditional notions of authenticity and integrity?
- Is there a wider context, beyond physical fabric, that gives the place meaning?

- Are there ways of appreciating the place's wider significance beyond or in addition to conservation of physical fabric?

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  - How could the significance of the whole be maintained and enhanced while also accommodating *change*?
  - How else could these places be better protected?
-







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