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

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(Un)loved Modern
Wednesday, 8 July 2009
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- 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])

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

Pettit+Sevitt Lowline B3136
(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** *(Latrelle, 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

- **1940s 1950s**
  - Title page for *Australian Plants for the Garden* (1953) by Thistle Harris
  - Nerine Chisholm, *Native Plants chapter* (1949)
  - Cover, *Designing Bush Gardens* (1966), Betty Maloney and Jean Walker
  - Third printing 1967
  - Cover, *Growing Native Plants* (1971), John Wrigley for Canberra Botanic Gardens
  - Garden plan from *All About Bush Gardens* (1973), Betty Maloney
  - Cover, *Australian Garden Design* (1975), Ellis Stones
  - First issue of *Australian Plants*, the journal of the Society for Growing Australian Plants
  - *Your Garden*, January 1954

- **1960s**
  - Cover, *Designing Bush Gardens* (1966, Betty Maloney)
  - [third printing 1967]
  - *Growing Native Plants* (1971), John Wrigley for Canberra Botanic Gardens
  - *Australian Garden Design* (1975), Ellis Stones
  - Ernest Lord, *Shrubs and Trees for Australian Gardens* (1948) [fourth edn]
  - *Australian Native Plants for the Garden* (1953) by Thistle Harris
  - *Nerine Chisholm, Native Plants chapter* (1949)
  - *Designing Bush Gardens* (1966), Betty Maloney and Jean Walker
  - *Growing Native Plants* (1971), John Wrigley for Canberra Botanic Gardens
  - *More About Bush Gardens* (1967), Betty Maloney and Jean Walker
  - Garden plan from *All About Bush Gardens* (1973), Betty Maloney
  - Cover, *Australian Garden Design* (1975), Ellis Stones
  - First issue of *Australian Plants*, the journal of the Society for Growing Australian Plants
  - *Your Garden*, January 1954

- **1970s**
  - Cover, *Australian Garden Design* (1975), Ellis Stones
  - *Landscaping with Australian Plants* (1975), Glen Wilson
  - Cover, *Landscaping with Australian Plants* (1975), Glen Wilson
  - *Landscaping with Australian Plants* (1975), Glen Wilson
  - *Landscaping with Australian Plants* (1975), Glen Wilson
  - *Your Garden*, January 1954
‘[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 Fülling, in Eltham (from 1948)

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

Australian National Botanic Gardens (www.anbg.gov.au)

Photographs: Christina Dyson, April 2008 to May 2009
Sculpture garden, Australian National Gallery – Harry Howard and Associates (c.1978-82)

Source: Australian Heritage Database, National Heritage List, listing for High Court – National Gallery Precinct (Place Id: 106745)
Plans prepared by Peter Glass (FAILA) for Gordon Ford

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

Fülling, Gwen Ford’s and the late Gordon Ford’s garden, Eltham (from 1948)
issues for professional practice...
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• What features characterise the garden?
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• Can the hand of a designer be discerned?
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• What external sources or related places could be used to develop an understanding of the place’s significance?
• 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?
• What features characterise the garden?
• Can the hand of a designer be discerned?
• What external sources or related places could be used to develop an understanding of the place's significance?
• 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?
• Are there ways of appreciating the place’s wider significance beyond or in addition to conservation of physical fabric?
• How could the significance of the whole be maintained and enhanced while also accommodating change?
• How else could these places be better protected?


Bull, Catherin (2002). *New Conversations with an Old Landscape—landscape architecture in contemporary Australia*, Images Publishing Group, Victoria


Lees, Stella, and Steynard, June (1987). *The 1950s...how Australia became a modern society, and everyone got a house and car*, Hyland House, South Yarra, Melbourne

Maloney and Walker (1966), *Designing Australian bush gardens*, Horwitz, London, Melbourne


Saniga, Andrew (2004). An uneasy profession: defining the landscape architect in Australia 1912-1972, Thesis (PhD) University of Melbourne, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning

Walling, Edna (1952). *The Australian Roadside*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne