

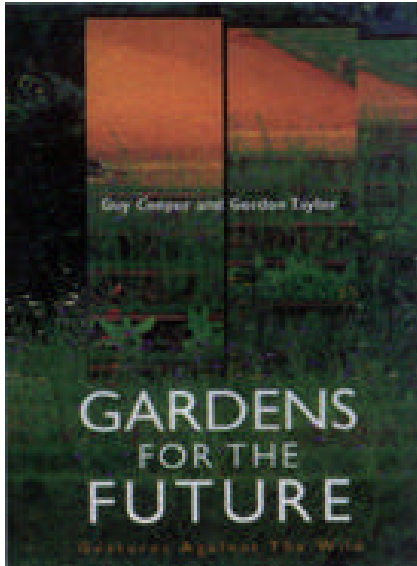
Gardens for the Future: Gestures Against the Wild, by Gary Cooper and Gordon Taylor; New York: The Monacelli Press, 2000; 224 pages, \$50.

REVIEWED BY DEAN CARDASIS, FASLA

In their introduction, Guy Cooper and Gordon Taylor explain that *Gardens for the Future* represents what they hope is a “journey toward some definition of private gardens and public spaces at the end of the twentieth century.” No small task! Their admittedly personal and unrelentingly enthusiastic survey presents the reader with some of the most imaginative details, innovative uses of materials, and clever ideas from a broad selection of private gardens and public landscapes created in Europe and America in the last twenty years.

Gardens for the Future is organized in two major parts. The first presents the authors’ inventory of what they consider to be the major influences upon recent public and private landscape design, as well as their view of the underlying aesthetic principles and constituent material elements of some recent work. As diverse examples suggest, in the past twenty years many designers have scanned contemporary culture and the arts for new strategies to respond to sites. However, in its uncritical and poorly substantiated analysis, the book misses the opportunity to seriously engage the design of gardens in depth. Too often gushing praise,

hasty generalizations and a confusing presentation juxtaposing text on one subject with images of another mar the first half of the book, making it unconvincing to experienced landscape architects and scholars and misleading to students.



The second and more successful part is a more detailed description of twenty projects selected by the authors. While many of these will be familiar to readers of this magazine, several interesting projects (like Fernando Caruncho’s “Wheat Parterre”) are less well known. Here the descriptive writing is good, and the selection of quotations by the designers themselves is often revealing. Plans and relevant photographs help the reader understand the gardens, although sometimes the photos are selected more on their merits as photographs than for how well they suggest the experience that has been designed. Larger, more legible plans keyed to the photographs and a selection of photographs arranged in an innovative way to allow us to imagine how we enter, move through, come to rest or gather in, and finally exit the designs would improve this section even more.

Throughout the book we are presented with mostly well-known landscape projects created not only by landscape architects, but also by painters, sculptors, writers, philosophers, conceptual artists, building architects, musicians, textile and fabric designers, dirt gardeners and more. The pages are filled with examples of strategies derived from these perspectives and applied to the problem of making landscapes. The resultant vitality is undeniable.

Yet, as we consider what “gardens for the future” might be like, most of this work is not fully satisfying; it reflects an inability to integrate contemporary perspectives fully with the nature of the art of making landscapes. The preoccupation with literary devices and the uses of clever, but ultimately insignificant ideas too often trump the development of a richer experience of landscape space, distracting from, rather than contributing to the evolution of landscape design.

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