



Australia Fair

Planting the Nation
 edited by Georgina
 Whitehead

**Australian Garden History
 Society, Melbourne.**
196 pages. A\$37.40
ISBN 1-876473-4-4.

*The Oxford Companion
 to Australian Gardens*
 edited by Richard Aitken
 & Michael Looker

**Oxford University Press,
 South Melbourne.**
697 pages. A\$120.00.
ISBN 0-19-553644-4.

The first of these books deals with Australian gardening from 1890-1914. At the beginning of the period, professionals had been trained at Kew or Edinburgh, and their debates paralleled the 'formal' versus 'natural' controversies back in England. The two were eventually reconciled in the work of Edna Walling, and designers and horticulturalists gradually came to see their country in its own terms. More recently, they have found their inspiration in tropical countries, such as Bali.

Given almost unlimited space and virgin territory, there has been a sad amount of urban sprawl, but town planning came early, as did a perception of the need for public

parks in cities. Interestingly, what we think of as modern problems, such as vandalism and inadequate budgets, plagued park superintendants a century ago.

Amateur gardening is wonderfully brought to life. The chapter by Suzanne Hunt on state school gardens in Victoria is particularly interesting. Children were encouraged (with handsome money prizes) to "transform their rugged environment into something beautiful and useful".

Editor Georgina Whitehead's Afterword sums up a splendid book; and it is a further compliment to the depth and quality of Australian gardening that the country is the first to be accorded its own 'Oxford Comp'.

Contributions by over 200 experts range from 'Abbott, Francis', who ran the Botanic Garden in Hobart in the 19th century, to 'Zwar, John', who helped set up the Arid Lands Botanic Garden in 1981. Dipping in or specific looking up – all is of interest.

Kerry Yates

Across the Channel

René Pechère, born in a Brussels suburb in 1908, is quite unjustifiably neglected outside his own country, the Wirtzes currently being the 'famous Belgians' in a garden design context. Perhaps Laurent Grisel's book will correct this injustice.

Its text is valuable in explaining Pechère's methods of working as well as describing his major commissions – just 24 out of over 900 gardens, large and small, public and private, which he designed or reworked. Critics can find much that is derivative – steps out of Lutyens, box parterres that could be by Russell Page – but the photographs by Sylvie Desauw, particularly those taken in winter, make clear how elegant Pechère's designs were.

Pechère is seen as one of the pioneers who made landscape architecture accepted as a profession, and certainly, by donating his own book collection (which had been enriched by gifts from Count Ernest de

*Les jardins
 de René Pechère*
 by Laurent Grisel

AAM, Brussels.
290 pages. €75.00.
ISBN 2-87143-114-0.

*20th Century Garden
 and Landscape
 Architecture in the
 Netherlands by
 Gerritjan Deunk*

NAI, Rotterdam.
176 pages. \$40.00.
ISBN 90-5662-243-9.

Ganay and the Vicomte de Noailles and by purchases at sales such as that of Achille Duchêne's books) to the library which now bears his name, he did much to help those following in his footsteps.

Gerritjan Deunk's book takes a decade by decade approach to his subject. The plodding translation into English is no pleasure to read, and seems to reflect the content, which manages to render even the extraordinary work of Daniel Libeskind as flat as Dutch scenery itself.

In a country where almost all the landscape is man-made, distinctions between suburban garden, public park, great estate, motorway landscaping and 'wild' wood are quite arbitrary. Reflections on this, together with the chapter on the Second World War and its aftermath, produce the most interesting pages. And some of the early gardens look worth researching in themselves.

Gillian Mawrey