

**AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY
NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
TASMANIAN BRANCH**



Photographer: Rhonda Hamilton June 2022

Interviewee:	LINDSAY CAMPBELL
Interviewer:	Jean Elder
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[JE] This is an interview with Lindsay Campbell recorded for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection. I'll be speaking about his life as a gardener, a teacher of horticulture and a garden landscape designer. The interview is taking place on Monday the 20th of June 2020 [2022] at Gardeners Bay, Tasmania. The interviewer is Jean Elder and our recorder is Rhonda Hamilton.

So Lindsay, can you please tell me your full name and date of birth?

[LC] Lindsay Ronald Campbell. 22nd of November 1953.

And you grew up in Sydney? Can you tell us about those early years: whereabouts in Sydney and did you have gardens, forest around you?

I grew up in North Ryde until I was 12. I was born in Ryde and my mother bought coffee shops, built them up and sold them one at a time. From that age on – she was a very intelligent and business-like woman and my father worked as an engineer in a factory. So she bought businesses, built them up and wherever they were, that's where we moved. So for the next five or six years we moved all over Sydney. First of all Chatswood, Parramatta, Rydalmere, lots of different areas and I went to school at Fort Street in Petersham, which was a boys' school, which was a bit of a problem for me [laughs], I have to say. I definitely now would far prefer to have gone to what I'd call an ordinary school – a co-ed school.

At that stage I was playing a lot of music and I was also doing a lot of bushwalking. So I was actually playing in, by the time I was 16, 17, I was playing in folk clubs around Sydney. I was then playing at the Sydney Moratorium marches. So I was fairly political: playing in anti-Vietnam marches, doing a lot of bushwalking again and I was coming to the age where I was supposed to register for conscription and I was part of a movement that opposed conscription. A lot of my friends were doing the same thing. I met my wife: I actually met my wife when we were 13 but we married when we were 19. We'd always had the plan to – well, for a while we'd had the plan to go overseas to avoid having to register for the draft [laughs], as well as go overseas. And just after we went overseas Gough Whitlam got in, so we were saved anyway and the world was saved that ignominy, I have to say.

3:23 When you went overseas, so you were around 19, 20? And where did you go?

Ah yes, we were both 19. We went straight to England. We worked in England picking fruit on a – Tiptree Jams: Wilkin & Sons Jams it was. It had a really feudal farm, I have to say [laughs]. And we bought an old London taxi and we drove around England, Scotland, Wales on our time off. But while I was there I actually got to work on the Manor House because the gardener wasn't there. So I was mowing the croquet lawns and going in through the back door and getting a hot lunch, and I was still very young and I thought 'mmm, I could actually do this for a career.'

So that was your first taste of gardening?

Of real gardening.

Horticulture?

Yeah, exactly. And we spent the next eight months or so (we were away for about 14 months altogether), travelling through Europe, Morocco, Turkey, experiencing the world. And it really shaped our view of the world. In particular, how people that don't have very much at all can be quite pure and incredibly generous, especially in Morocco and Turkey. And it's always affected our lives I have to say.

So while I was in England I wrote to Ryde School of Horticulture and to Willoughby Council. And when we returned to Sydney I studied horticulture: a three-year course, specialising in garden design. And I worked at Willoughby Council for a while in the rose garden next to Chatswood Station.

So this was the late '70s?

This was 1974. '75 I probably started horticulture. I worked at Willoughby Council for a while then I changed to a nursery out at Dural. Then I worked for myself trying to do landscaping, but it was quite hard to get work and I finished up taking on the job in charge of the gardens at the Scottish Hospital in Paddington. And it had just been landscaped to the Sydney rainforest bush. It had some beautiful big *Ficus* and *Elaeocarpus* and some lovely trees there and they'd supported that: built a new building into the grounds and then supported that and continued the landscaping of the beautiful gardens that they already had, and I was in charge of that. I worked there for two years. In the grounds there they had some beautiful old trees. Really historic, because it's just below Paddington.

What varieties?

A stunning old Kauri tree, *Agathis*. But it had, when I looked at the history, it had the first planted camellia in Australia in it, planted by Lady Macquarie I believe, who brought in camellias. So, I think that's right – Lady Macquarie – am I getting that right? Anyway, it was rather overgrown the old garden, but it had some beautiful trees in it. It was interesting for me to combine the new native garden style with the history of the Scottish Hospital. As I said before I've been – I've always bushwalked – I did a lot of walking in the Blue Mountains from when I was quite young, and I was always interested in Australia's native flora. So that certainly played a part as well in what I've done since then I suppose.

My wife and I had travelled to Tasmania and to Adelaide. I'd realised quite early that Sydney was just far too hot for me – really quite a severe climate. I just couldn't work there for big periods of the year. And we went to Adelaide and decided it was too hot as well, and came to Tasmania and thought Tasmania would be perfect for us. My wife trained as early childhood learning and I'd studied horticulture so we thought we

could be equipped and possibly come and buy some bush not far from Hobart. We really liked Hobart as a centre then. So I wrote to the Botanic Gardens and I was given a job immediately by the then Superintendent who was Tony May. Tony May had been the Head Propagator at Swane's Nursery, so he was a bit Sydney-centric which possibly suited me but wasn't the best thing for the Botanic Gardens [laughs], I think, in a way. Anyway, so I worked at the Botanic Gardens for fifteen months.

The day, or a couple of days after my daughter was born, my wife was in hospital with our new baby and I turned up at the hospital unannounced to her. 'I've just bought an old Valiant ute and I've left the Gardens and about to start my own business [laughs].'

9:36 That was brave.

It was brave and it's one of the best decisions I ever made.

What prompted that? You'd had eighteen, or fifteen, months at the Gardens.

Yeah, the Gardens was a beautiful place to work in. Politically probably not the best place. It certainly had a lot of gardeners. I think it had more gardeners per square metre than any Gardens in Australia at the time. But it was being treated as, what I call, a public park, rather than a scientific botanic gardens. And all of the funding, I think, something like 40% of the funding went to begonias [laughs], as a display, which were beautiful but I wanted something more challenging and more scientific maybe. And I also had always been really interested in design. Actually both my wife and I are really into design. She has an Arts degree and paints and I'd always done some painting and played music, so design was fairly important to me. I always wanted to express that in my work.

10:58 Where did you get the first, after you set up your design company, where did the first jobs come from?

The first job I got was as a landscaper, rather than a designer. It was designed, it was through the Housing Department. A friend of mine that had been employed as, I think, Assistant Superintendent at the Botanic Gardens had transferred to Housing Department, and he gave me a job. I think it was probably the Gagebrook School that I planted and laid something like 450 square metres of lawn.

So it was a really big change and then I tried to take on small – advertise, put around a pamphlet, just totally on my own. I was also doing just garden maintenance. I actually, I think one of the noblest positions in our whole field is as a gardener and I think it's incredibly underrated: the skill level that's required to be a gardener.

I had done a lot of work just doing garden maintenance and I was happy to take on garden maintenance while I was trying to build a construction and design business. It took – the early days were difficult, and Christine will tell you one job we had, that I had, I had some sleepers and I was somewhere laying these sleepers. And it was weather like this, it was winter – cold, wet. She came out and she was oiling the railway sleepers

for me to put in place and the lady came out of the house because we had our new daughter with us as a baby, in the car while we were working, right next to her. And she brought out some blankets because she obviously felt [laughs] we were doing it hard. But everything we did, we did by choice.

And when Laura came home for example, in this house, there was the outside skin and no internal walls and just the floor. It was snowing. As a baby, I always remember, she was playing with the steam that was coming out of her mouth [laughs]. And our children remember those days with a lot of fondness, I have to say, and so do we. We were, what you might call, poor but incredibly rich at the same time. We were poor by choice, I think – working our way through it.

14:03 So you lived here during those – here in Gardeners Bay?

Yes. First of all we rented and then we bought this land incredibly cheaply because trees and land weren't valued. In fact, trying to get a loan, the Bank Manager told us 'No buy a small block in Kingston and we'll fund you but we won't fund 100 acres.' So more fool him [laughs] I have to say. These days it is one of the pleasures that society now values the trees, and it's a total flip from when we first came. What we saw in this land and in the culture we appreciate is now – gets far more value than it ever did.

So yes, we were living here. We'd built the house by the time Laura came home. We were in this house and I was working for myself, driving up and back to town and trying to build just bits and pieces. Which steadily grew – I started employing one other worker. That happened for – I gradually built – to another couple. Then I was asked to landscape – design and landscape – this is probably four or five years down the track – the Redwood Village, retirement village, which was a large project and I had 12 people by that stage, working for me.

It became far too unwieldy and a lot of stress trying to keep the workers going and covering the business. I found I wasn't, in the end, I was more a manager than I was a designer.

And then the 1899 [1989] Stock Exchange collapse happened. A large project I was working on went bankrupt. I was able to pay out all my people but I took a loss. And I was out bushwalking, up to Pindars Peak with a friend of mine, Mark Fountain, who was the Assistant Head of the Botanic Gardens for quite a while, another friend, Laurie Miller, who was the Head of Hobart TAFE Horticulture at the time. We were up at Pindars Peak and we were talking about landscaping and I was telling them how hard it had become with the Stock Exchange collapse and Laurie said just give him a phone call and I'd get a job as a teacher [laughs].

Basically, I woke up the next morning after I'd come back. I'd got a phone call from one of my clients – 6 o'clock in the morning – this lady said 'I've decided I don't like yellow' and I thought, I'm going to ring Laurie [laughs]. I rang him and I was working for TAFE within the week and I'd settled up my business things and I went and did a teaching

diploma through University of Tasmania, which was a two-year course, and from then on I was a teacher for ten years.

17:44 And you had responsibility for quite a range of subjects, I see: landscape design and construction, plant classification as well as teaching botany and other subjects. A very broad remit.

It was really broad and my main discipline, I have to say, is identification. I'm really, really strict about the technical correctness, if you like, of identifying plants. I've always hated the thought of common names. If I say, if somebody says to me, I'd like you to plant a dogwood, I can name ten plants – from trees from Canada to small ground covers from England to plants from on my road. So I love the Linnaean system of every plant having only one identifier and that not being able to be confused. I've always been strong on my horticultural Latin and people still talk to me about common names and I struggle with that. So I felt that that was really important to pass on in education: that we created something strict to students, so that they had that same sort of, understood that horticulture is a science and not a hobby.

So identification really important. Of course, garden design is my passion and with the study I've done and the study I had the chance to do during my teaching – garden design – I have a really strong sense of what I think is good in garden design and what I think isn't.

I'm incredibly interested in history: what history's taught us, through from early Chinese, early Middle Eastern, through Islamic gardens, the incredible value of the Alhambra Gardens in Granada. The lessons they have for us today: Capability Brown; Palace of Versailles; about power; how we place ourself in nature, which totally informs not only how we design but how we maintain gardens, through to the First World War – the effect that had on building, what we might call, suburbs or urban areas that were unheard of before then.

The California School is really prominent after the Second World War. For me, Thomas Church, Garrett Eckbo in California and North America, where gardens included everything: included things like incinerators and clothes lines that were self-contained. Certainly at that stage they might have had servants to do some of the work for them but they were still the first suburbs, and really the start of what we call landscape design. And how that informs lifestyle. Garrett Eckbo wrote a book *Landscape is for Living* (I think that's what it's called) and for me that encapsulates totally what my design practice is about. It's about optimising and improving people's lifestyles. It's not specifically about putting in plants that I like, it's about the organism of optimising, as I said, and improving people's lifestyles.

21:52 So a key design principle for you?

Yes, yes. The design principles – the basic design principles that go through all design not just gardens – are absolutely critical and the thing that I think controls everything is spatial. If I'm asked to give a talk on gardens I generally talk about the effect of space on garden. The effect

of space on humans. With architecture we have walls, windows, doors that control the space. If it's good architecture it feels really comfortable and the space flows in and around the building.

The great architects that have also really influenced my garden design work include people like Le Corbusier, Mies van de Rohe. But my favourite is possibly a Mexican called Luis Barrágan who is very minimal, very simple but worked with the incredible landscape of Mexico. Roberto Burle Marx is another one. People that are actually architects, but they dealt with the whole organism of the home. Luis Barrágan said, 'If the house is the heart of the home then the garden is the soul.' So for me to try and make homes, our living spaces flow in and out and around the garden so that it becomes one living organism is what I'm aiming at.

It's to allow people to feel comfortable within a space and in particular, in their living space because I feel our living space should be a haven, it should be a sanctuary and to do that we need to let people be comfortable. And that's a sub-conscious thing. The conscious decision to design a garden, I'm always telling my students that, as a designer, we have to be incredibly analytical. We have to analyse all of the relevant issues. I always say to my clients 'Before we get through this process I'm going to ask you at least a thousand questions and the answers will give me, or give us, the final landscape.' Certainly, we need to prioritise those questions and if I get the thousandth one wrong and they've been prioritised properly maybe it won't matter so much. But if I get the fourth one wrong then it's a major issue. Five years down the track, if you think 'Oh I didn't put that drain in there,' that's a decision that hasn't been made at the design stage. That's either the designer's error or it could be the client's error, but it is usually probably the designer's error.

25:16 How do you deal with some of your clients, like the one you mentioned earlier – 'I think I've decided I really [don't] like yellow.' What happens in those sorts of situations?

I'd like to think that I'm a very diplomatic person and I am always looking for the win/win solution, if you like. If at the same time, having said that, I also would say to you that I take it as an absolute responsibility. The people are spending money on thoughts that are in my head and if they're doing that and they're spending money to use my design skills, it's my responsibility to make sure they use them. I'm not going to listen to an idea – sorry, I'll listen to it – but I'm not necessarily going to implement an idea *holus-bolus* from somebody that has built one garden and maybe got a photo out of a magazine, that's a really two-dimensional image.

It's my responsibility to explain the real situation and also to be firm and strong about the design options. Obviously there isn't one design option and I'm certain we can find something that suits us all. In the end – I learnt this a long time ago – the garden won't be successful unless I leave the client's personality in the garden. It's not my personality that needs to be there – I can't help but leave some of that – it has to be my client's personality.

So probably, I'll go back. My main design skill, I'd say, is communication. I think communication is probably the most important thing. I need to listen, I need to decipher and then I need to guide, and the landscapers – I have so many people that say to me 'I just don't understand how you got them to do that.' And I've always had that knack of being able to tap into and listen to what people are saying to me and coming up with something that achieves quality, from my point of view and from their point of view.

28:03 An extraordinary skill really, yes, and one that's totally underrated I think.

I agree. I'm not necessarily saying that I have that extraordinary skill [laughs] but I think it is one that's really underrated. I know some excellent architects and I also know some architects that just want to do what they want to do. And a lot of people will say 'I love that architect's house. I want that one,' and I can't work like that. I have to make sure that there are so many factors that come into play: most of all my client's personality. It's not only their personality it's how they're going to use the garden, how much time they've got to maintain it. And of course before that, it goes without saying, it has to be appropriate for the site. It has to be appropriate for the weather conditions and, unless I'm told otherwise, it has to be very efficient in the use of materials. And, in fact, efficient – I always say efficiency is the most important thing. I want it to be efficient in the use of my time, of their time, of the materials at hand, of the Earth's resources, of my client's money, of space – it has to be efficient in space. Making sure that we get it right. We get it right for them so that when they're living with it somewhere down the track it's like a glove, that it fits them, not me.

29.52 Wonderful. Now Lindsay you've spoken about the design principles and the importance of those in your garden design, and many of these have been influenced by your travels and visiting gardens in Japan, Spain and Patagonia. You mentioned some of the famous gardens, but I'm particularly interested in talking about perhaps the gardens in Japan and Patagonia.

Yeah, okay. I will extend that slightly, I have to say – it is the way I am I suppose.

I'll start with Patagonia, though I'll leave it and come back to it, because we actually went – I went to a talk by Steve Smith. Steve Smith used to be, for a while he was the Head of our National Parks in Tasmania. He got a Churchill Fellowship to travel from Tierra del Fuego, from the very south of South America to the very north of Alaska, visiting every national park for six months. And I went to a slide show of his brilliant photos and was particularly taken by Patagonia, through the Andes.

We'd looked at travelling there for a fair while but it's such a hard area, then – we're talking about the '90s – it was a really hard area to get to and to travel around. You had to take flights between different areas and really expensive and we would have had to go for six months or so.

So eventually we actually got on to a budget tour company, if you like. There were ten people in a truck/bus and we travelled from Tierra del Fuego up to Machu Picchu looking at things all the way. I'd always wanted to do that because Tasmania was connected to Patagonia in Gondwanaland, sorry, in Gondwana, and even later than New Zealand. So our flora is even closer to Patagonia. They have six *Nothofagus* I think, and so I wanted to go and see the connection between our flora and their flora.

In the meantime, we went to Japan for a trip, just to look at gardens. Now when I used to give talks at garden clubs, I used to say that Tarn Shelf at Mount Field always reminded me of a beautiful thousand-year-old Japanese garden. And I'd always wanted to go and see the Japanese gardens and in particular in Kyoto, because they had a really strong garden culture and history and yet in a naturalistic way. They contrived natural-style gardens.

When I went to Japan I realised that I was really doing Mount Field a disservice because nobody could ever create anything like Tarn Shelf. And it is like a garden, it's pruned by the wind, the snow, the ice and it's taken millions of years to achieve that with the lakes. I've seen native gardeners in Australia say I'm going to plant a no-maintenance garden and just leave it and when you walk into the garden there's no leaves for the first five metres [laughs]. So as soon as we stick a spade in the ground we're gardening as far as I'm concerned. And we need to contrive, if we want to get the beauty of nature anywhere near, we have to contrive it.

So that was the plan to go to Japan and look at these gardens. We were only going for a week and at the same time, we saw a Gecko I think it was, trip to Yunnan in China doing a three-day walk in Tiger Leaping Gorge, which is the deepest gorge in the world. So we did that first and then went to Japan. I'll come back to China.

We must have looked at five or six gardens a day in Kyoto and they were stunning, really beautiful. Kyoto is very tight, as a lot of the Japanese cities are. It has stunning quality in a house and then next door there's a plastic house and you'll tap on it and, I think, the main statue in the middle of the square in Kyoto is Astroboy [laughs]. So it has these strange...

35:13 Contradictions?

Contradictions, definitely. But the gardens were beautiful. But nearly all of the gardens, you had to go in behind doors. Most of them you paid for. You certainly had to get on the list to go and visit the Imperial Gardens, but you needed to book four or five days ahead and then you were in a small group of 20 people that walked around the gardens.

It definitely emphasised a lot of the things that I'd thought about my garden philosophy, but being in China everything there was public. It was a really different thing to see and we found an incredible affinity I suppose, with the Chinese environment: stunning natural landscapes,

landscaping, incredible communal, community landscaping. And we thought we want to dig further into that, so we've been back to China a few times, all over China. Amazing public gardens and the quality of the horticulture is just mind-blowing. Nature strips right throughout the cities, with really highly manicured gardens – naturalistic again – in the Asian style. In fact, the Japanese gardens had come from there in the 6th century, 7th century. And also we wanted to go to some of the sacred mountains. We decided after a while, because most of the Japanese scrolls and paintings are largely based on sacred mountains from China, in particular Huangshan, which is the Yellow Mountain.

As I said, we've been back. I'm always amazed with the quality and the breadth of the landscaping in China and how it's used, which is again what I'm after. I can only measure my designs by use. The parks are just full of thousands of people doing Tai Chi, singing, playing Mah-jong, choirs. So it is a real eye-opener how inclusive the landscape is in China, that it's so communal, everybody uses it and it's a real community base.

So China gave us that. I relate that to, let's say, Mediterranean gardens: Spain with the squares everybody out, it's about families; South America's the same. As opposed to our history of, let's say, of the US and maybe Australia that has gone more that way. We're less inclined to have the infrastructure to suit humans. We're far more inclined to have infrastructure that suits cars and I'm all about redressing that balance, I have to say [laughs].

As I said, we've spent a fair bit of time looking at gardens in Spain, in China and in Japan and then we've also been to Patagonia a few times. I learnt Spanish so I can speak to people there. And we go there for the natural environment and the walking, but it totally informs Tasmanian landscaping I think. It is amazing how many of the plants in Western horticultural history come from either Patagonia or China, or that Asian region.

A lot of the plants I use here, I hadn't realised they were Patagonian until I was there: luma as the hedge that a lot of people use. Things like fuchsias and berberis – lots and lots of plants. But also lots of Tasmanian species such as *Eucryphia*, our leatherwood, or *Nothofagus*. Apparently, or not apparently, it definitely is the case, that Tasmania was half covered with *Fitzroya* but during one of the ice-ages it retreated from Tasmania and is still now found in Patagonia. There's a few rare ones there. A lot of the buildings and the old churches are made of *Fitzroya*. It's protected now but it looks just like King Billy Pine, so really closely allied to *Athrotaxis* and it is that temperate, cool rainforest that's really similar to Tasmania that I really like. It's on steroids of course, with all the volcanoes covered in snow and the beautiful Andes but it is really closely allied.

40:43 So these travels you did and incorporated in your work then back when you started consulting again, after the ten-year stint of TAFE. So when you did re-establish your garden design business again – you've created hundreds of private gardens and worked on big public projects as well,

in Tasmania - what are the key ones that stand out for you, both public and private?

Look, the key ones for me that are private, I have to tell you, are the ones that are just, let's say it's an ordinary – the clients might have been an ordinary couple, both people working, just bought a little house and I have the opportunity through efficiency to put it within their price bracket, to complete the whole organism and give them a complete home, if you like. For me, that appeals to me more than anything. I've done a lot of large projects – this is domestic, if you like, for people where they're probably cutting-edge, modern architecture, really inventive and I love the designs and everything. But it's not what really gets me going the most [laughs]. I really like the small, just being able to provide things for people like myself. Just ordinary people.

Creating the soul?

Yeah, absolutely. Because most landscapers will be asked to – 'could you come in and build this wall for me?' or 'can you do this paving?' and I won't do that. For me it has to be the whole organism. I'd rather say 'This is what the whole organism will cost with sandstone paving. If you can't afford that let's do it with gravel paving.' Because I want to achieve the whole organism and get those plants growing.

So when I was teaching, I used to ask the landscape architects – because I'm trained in landscape design rather than landscape architecture – I used to ask the landscape architects to come and talk to my students, my design students and say 'Can you show the students what you're doing? You know, what a landscape architect's role is.' And generally, their role would be to do public open space studies or subdivisions: or nothing to do with gardening. In fact, most landscape architecture courses don't include horticulture or plant identification and the ones that are good at it have studied further, afterwards.

The other end are landscapers. The great majority of landscapers think that they can do all the design. They think it's just something that they do, but they're not trained in it. And a good landscaper is somebody that knows what their skills are and just works with those. So I see it as a real role for somebody in between landscape architects and landscapers, that works with domestic gardens in particular.

Having said that, early on I was contacted by Tony Baldwin, who owns Vaocluse – owned Vaocluse. Tony was a lovely man. He also started the nursing home industry in Sydney, if you like, in Chatswood. He took me up to Sydney to rework three of his homes up there as well, because we had a real affinity. So I came into Vaocluse, maybe about a year after it started. I didn't do the very entrance way but I've done the next five blocks there, working with Tony. Tony never asked about budget. He said 'If I'm spending millions of dollars on the buildings why would I care if I spend \$200,000 on landscaping a bit of the gardens?' We used more advanced trees. I'd worked right along the Rivulet, so I planted hundreds of advanced trees down the Hobart Rivulet which again, gives me the ability to affect community, which is what I'm most interested in. And I get

told that gets used as a standard: Vaucluse. I'm also told by lots of people that the reason people buy into Vaucluse is because of the gardens, as much as anything. So, there is that soul, if you like, that people are buying into, so that makes me really proud.

Vaucluse was a big one for me. Since then I've probably worked on another 30 retirement villages or nursing homes, including dementia gardens. But another major one for me was Queenborough Rise. Some of those, we'd be working on them for three years with the architects to develop the whole scene. Again, as I said, working with the organism, so I have the incredible luck of being able to work with the architects that were designing the inside spaces how they related to the outside, and listening to me at the same time.

So you get a very integrated outcome?

Totally integrated. Like I said, Luis Barrágan or Le Corbusier designed the whole thing, so I see it that we retrofit. I can join with an architect to create that thing that was being created by those important architects, from my point of view.

46:39 And you were invited to help with the Government House Quarry Pond reconstruction?

Really interesting. Somebody that I'd worked with a lot was the Manager there: the Grounds Manager, Ben Essex. And he invited me to – he had some fantastic skills I have to say, landscaping skills especially with stone. He invited me to do a report on and a way forward for the Quarry Pond. When I was at the Botanic Gardens in 1980, I used to sneak into the Botanic Gardens to the Quarry Pond and sit there and have my lunch [laughs].

I might interrupt, just for those who are not familiar with Hobart, the Royal Botanic Gardens and Government House are adjacent and there is one private entrance on the boundary wall.

Yep, I used to sneak through the hedge and sit there. And so when I was asked in to that I thought well this is such an important – Government House obviously is so important for Australia, not just for Tasmania. Such an important garden and it had always – the chap that I mentioned before, Brian Lumb, he was in charge of it for a while, in the '80s as well. He tried to do some things there, but Government House had always been short of funds to do some of those areas, so it was really overgrown, quite a bit of weed in it, lots of Wandering Jew, but still the essence of it was there and unkempt.

When I started to investigate to do the report and look into how it came about, obviously the quarry face and the pond was created by quarrying the stone for Government House but Governor Weld, in 1875, decided that, well this is a really nice walk and lots of things seem to grow down in this quarry area, let's turn it into a garden. It comes not long after, let's say, Stourhead, Henry Hoare in England, just before that Humphry Repton and then before that obviously Capability Brown, who had been

incredibly influenced – Brown in particular – really influenced by Eastern naturalistic styles as well as Pope, the writers of the moment about Naturalism and European art that had gone very naturalistic – as a response to the formality of, let's say, Versailles and those sorts of gardens that seemed to be largely about power.

The gardens in the quarry had that feel and certainly exhibited the Romantic style, if you like, from the time of Henry Hoare. And Stourhead, just after it. Where it was wilderness – I remember even in Stourhead they had, I think, he employed a hermit to live [laughs], to live in the garden. It would have follies, but very naturalistic and Garden of Eden kind of style, unkempt.

So the chance to re-establish this was major for me and I'm incredibly grateful to Ben and to Government House to have given me the chance to do a full report and draw up plans. I'm looking forward to, in the future, that things will get implemented. Of course, understanding their budget.

50:38 Mmm. It's taken some time but that has started. Tasmanian tree ferns are being planted there and there's more to go, I know.

Fantastic.

Finally we really need to talk, of course, about your garden here – The Sorn, here in southern Tasmania. The garden's first 20 years were well documented in the book *The Open Garden* by Louise Earwaker and Neil Robertson, but can you tell us about your journey with the garden, particularly in the last 20 years or so – it's now 45 years is it?

Close to, yes.

Have there been many changes in approach and new challenges in this garden environment?

Yes, certainly. Certainly, there have been changes, I mean there has to be doesn't there? The gardens are everchanging and if you try and keep a piece of history not changing then it's the wrong thing to do with a garden.

The climate's changed, obviously. I originally had a lot more let's say, dry sclerophyll East Coast plants in the garden, but they've struggled a lot more as time goes by and I'm replacing them. And also, they're not as long-lived.

Lack of water? How's the climate change?

It's really hard to say with water because I don't actually water. I rarely water. You know, when we came here it was supposed to be something like 1200mm rainfall a year, which is almost double Hobart. Because we're at the same level as the base of the mountain – so we're about 385 metres. I'd say we're probably somewhere around 800-850mm, so it has definitely reduced. Having said that, I remember Peter Valder talking about – in Mosman, where he grew up I think – that they got a metre of rainfall a year. And he said 'Just imagine that, a metre of rainfall. And here we are talking about trying to grow gardens for dry conditions. And

you've got a metre of water [laughs], above your garden.' He said 'You're doing something wrong if you can't use a metre of water.'

This is one of the efficiency things that goes back to all of the other gardens that I've done and, in particular, La Alhambra, those Moorish gardens that worked on an incredible use of water, because it's desert. In Granada is desert. The Sierra Nevada is really, really low rainfall and yet it's incredibly lush gardens. They dammed a little river up the top but it flows through something like 350 water features as it comes down the hill, waters the garden, then joins back in to the river down the bottom.

I remember when we were there somebody built a golf course. The English built a golf course there and they plugged in to a local village's water source in the ground and what this village had had for a thousand years for water they emptied in one day.

So for me, the main thing of efficiency is to make your systems suit your environment: the soils you work with. I try not to bring in soils. I'd always try and work with the local soils so that it has an affinity with the sub-soil. I'd always try and put in plantings that are going to be water-conserving, but that doesn't mean they're desert plants.

You know, *Buxus sempervirens* comes from that area in Granada. It's a plant that loves it really dry. Or Judas tree. They don't have to be local plants, they have to be appropriate for the conditions you're in. So this garden is very appropriate for the conditions it's in. We live in a beautiful *Eucalyptus obliqua* forest – Stringy Bark forest – but that's too large a scale for humans to live in, we think.

I initially assessed what would suit these conditions and I went for the Midlands or the Highlands, if you like, and the dry sclerophyll. So I based it on small eucalypts like Snow Gums and that style of planting. Still contrived ornamental, but like the Chinese and the Japanese, but particularly the Chinese, I mass-plant. So if I want the look of one plant it might contain 15 plants.

I remember looking at one amazing group of plants in China (they were *Loropetalum*), and they were placed at 200mm centres. So to create one plant they might have had a thousand plants and pruned across the top. I do that here. I plant in groups and I prune them to try and mimic my image of what I really respond to in nature: like I said, Tarn Shelf at Mount Field. And try and get that naturalistic sort of look. Having said that, I accept that it's contrived so I don't mind having some strong forms in it. I've got a few bald, Asian-style, native plants in my garden, but I want it to be overwhelmingly naturalistic.

And the trees have changed substantially over the year. I've discovered that – I have a plant *Nematolepis squameus*, var. *retusus*, that grows on the East Coast that I've used as one of my staples, and the possums in the last three years have decided they really like it so I'm gradually replacing them. These are how you get informed I suppose. We were at Corinna last year and I noticed all the little hedges, formal hedges around the cabins, were *Nothofagus* which is the myrtle tree, pruned,

and because it's slow growing it makes a perfect hedge. So I'm actually rebuilding – because I know the possums don't eat it – I've replaced the *Nematolepis* with two plants: with the *Nothofagus* and also with *Eucryphia milliganii*, which is a dwarf leatherwood. So it'll take a couple of years, but I'll have it rebuilt into that.

In the meantime, you look in behind the leaves and I notice that, all of a sudden, my King Billy Pine is nearly 300mm girth through the bark and the other trees have become really substantial. Rainforest on the southern side of the house is real rainforest. And I've got a large pandani there and, you know, the joy of being in the one place since 1979 [laughs], is it really shows how you can do lots of things within your garden but because the main structure has grown really well that it can be really forgiving.

58.34 Have you documented, or do we need to have some writers come and help you document the last 24 years of your garden?

I've documented it in my head [laughter]. That's about it.

I think we need to have somebody come and write it up again, Lindsay.

Now you've contributed so much to gardens and to garden design in Tasmania and Australia, but you've also been deeply involved with the Open Garden Scheme? Tell us a little about that, both as a host and in other ways.

Yes, most certainly. Again, I think it was the second year that it ran that I was asked to be involved and it was really, really interesting. I mean, again, I love the Open Garden Scheme not because it can tell you what to do with your own garden, but because it gives you a look into what other people do I think. Look, I essentially see that what I do as a designer and what the Open Garden Scheme is about are possibly opposites.

I almost never get asked to design a garden for a keen horticulturist. They want to express their own use of plants, which is really interesting. So most of the people that I'm working for are people that want to live in a really nice garden but don't have those skills or that knowledge. And I think I bring much more of a design base rather than – and this was something that Garrett Eckbo again said about the Victorian period – the gardens had become something that people just went to look at plants, not to live in [laughs].

I do get a sense of that, that sometimes some of our gardens that we look at and we think this has an immense amount of work in it, it's got this beautiful group of plants there, you know, that really look fantastic. Is it about lifestyle though? Is it, and I really need to separate out between what I call demonstration gardens which I love to go and look at but the average person will never achieve, even if they think they might like to, they will never achieve it. And something that's totally within their grasp, but also does more than that because it's far more about the architecture of the plants and the spatial control, like I said.

So yes, I was involved in that because the Selector, who I knew at the time, said it would be seen as something really quite different and give them something different than people going to look at cottage gardens or, you know, magnolias or those sorts of gardens. And it was really interesting because we got mixed responses. Generally positive responses, but we did get a couple of people just drive in and have a look at the plants around the house and stick their head out the window and say 'Where's the garden?' [laughs]. And which, I freely admit, I probably wouldn't call it a garden either. You know, it's an environment really.

So, through the years – it kind of appealed to a small group of people let's say. I'd like to think people that were interested in something a bit different. We also were able to get quite a lot of people from overseas visit because of it. Because it's interesting that the English garden contains plants from all around the world and they don't say 'We're going to have plants in our garden from every country in the world except from Australia.' And it does happen in Australia [laughs].

I was going to ask you about that question. Is there an Australian garden style – but yes, you're answering it.

I've had people – quite a few, let's say, photographers that have had literature in England, in England especially, let's say that, and I was asked to write an article for *Horticulture*, the magazine. I got a really interesting response because they asked me to, say, name some plants that would suit, that can grow in England – some Tasmanian plants. And one of the ones, I gave them five and one of the ones I mentioned was *Brachyglottis brunonenis* [brunonis], which is a tree senecio that's rare, it only grows on Mount Wellington and one other mountain. And I got this letter from someone in the Australian Plant Society of England, sent it from England, saying 'Oh, thank you for your article. I'm not sure that you should be recommending that because Lord Talbot de Malahide collected it in the 1950s [1960s]. He was here and he went to Melaleuca [laughs], as well. A real plant person, took it back to Ireland, grew some seeds on and they said 'and there's only one they know of that still exists and it's in Kew Gardens.' So I thought 'What a fantastic response, to get that response about this plant.'

So yes, the thought of people coming to the garden. The other person that came that was really, really interesting was Christopher Lloyd. (Christopher Lloyd isn't right? Yes, it is Christopher Lloyd isn't it, I think? The famous Great Dixster garden). Really eccentric. He took an hour just to walk around a small group of plants and asking me about it – there's one I've got that's really hard to grow. I don't know anybody else that has grown it and I've still only got a small plant left, that's called *Orites acicularis*. It's a yellow bush that occurs up in our alpine area and he said 'I want to go there. I want to go there now.' And Michael [McCoy], that he was with, said 'I'm sorry, we've got to be on the plane this afternoon.' [laughs] So he didn't get to go and see it. He said 'I've got a dwarf eucalypt' for example. 'I have a dwarf eucalypt, *Eucalyptus vernicosa* in my garden.' He said 'I planted that in the garden in Ayrshire. I planted it

in a garden in Ireland.' And I thought I only know three people in Tasmania at the time, that had planted that plant.

I think it's really important that we treat – we have a stunning group of plants in Tasmania that are really suited to a lot of gardens that we can use and we don't have to think of them as native gardens. Because they are so suited to – you can pick a plant that suits a particular environment. For example, we might say rhododendrons really suit Fern Tree because they're that montane, Himalayan sort of feel. So does a plant that goes perfect with that is *Anopterus*, our native laurel. So, our native laurel, and they blend in beautifully. There's no concept that it has to be in a native garden, and there are so many themes that we can go with.

My personal thing – I like native gardens, but I love native plants, but I'd never subject that on my clients unless I'm asked. Tasmanian plants are really different to mainland Australia – dry sclerophyll plants – so it gives us the opportunity to have something really quite different. And akin to some of those Patagonian plants that we use a lot as well.

Well it's been wonderful to talk to you Lindsay. Are there other – I think we're coming to the end – are there any other thoughts you would like to add? You've made such a contribution to garden design in Tasmania and elsewhere, obviously, from your wealth of knowledge. Any final thoughts?

The only thing I'd like to say is that – I feel really strongly about this – I don't think we plant enough trees. And if there's anything I'm proud about, it's about planting trees.

Travelling around the world, I don't think we realise how much damage we've done to the Earth through clearing trees. I know we talk about coal and other pollutants that are definitely the case, but personally I think if we hadn't cleared so many trees since our industrialisation, and Australia in particular, just has so much land that we cleared for agriculture that is unfarmable. So my big thing is let's just plant trees. I worked for a number of, I do subdivisions with public open space and my whole aim is just to get trees in there. That would be my main thing – let's plant trees, save what we've got, plant more trees.

A perfect note to end on. Plant more trees.

1.08.20

Recording ends.

Interview ends.