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Tidal Garden: Eastern Shore of Virginia [Transforming the American Garden: 12 New Landscape Designs-Exhibitor]

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“Gardens always mean something else . . .”
Robert Hardison in
Eccentric Spaces

This garden is about edges and opposites. It draws its origins from a particular region—the Eastern Shore of Virginia—and from basic, powerful elements of past and present landscapes: the mount, the Garden of Eden, the bosque, the theater, the clearing, the maze.

Gardens are impossible things, really, never certain, always changing. Gardens are about the opposition of forces: a desire to manage, to control, to impose our own order in the midst of a much grander, overwhelming one. In attempting to define a “new landscape,” we cannot avoid striving for the ideal, the rational, despite the circumstances that confront us.

This garden is about striving and perhaps never reconciling . . . it’s about being poised forever on the edge. It is nearly unimaginable now to have a garden so confined that it rules out the world: a pure and private retreat. Yet we still seek these quiet comforting places. Places walled, concave, covered, canopied, human. But they can only be a part of experi-

ence, a memory, really: they must let you go, to look down, up, out, beyond. There is in a garden perhaps a beginning, but no real end.

The mount is about aspiration and reaching out. It is the remnant dune upon the shore. We always seek high ground. It is exalting, safe yet uncertain.

There are four pools, like wells seemingly bottomless. Tidal. Dark. There is a memory, too, of a more certain, paradisiacal world. The suggestion of four rivers crossing. An inversion, now a path. Steps down as if you might find a base.

The theater is the start of the journey. It is also rest and pretense.

The maze is a tidal maze. Saltmarsh grass inundated at high tide, channels revealed only at low tide. Seen only from the mount.

There is in this landscape the suggestion of cove, harbor, peninsula, island. The water is drawn inward: a canal along the north boundary. The land projects outward: a pergola links the garden to the mount along the southern boundary. Paths are by land and water. They compel you to engage the edge, the

perimeter, alternately exposing and protecting you. They also seek places: intersections that nudge you outward, seaward. The landscape is about connecting. Land to sea, water to sky.

The garden rooms, walled and textured, pay homage to agriculture: the cultivated landscape, the herbal, the *hortus*, a place of seasonal and momentary delight and sadness. There is the suggestion here of a smaller world, a microcosm.

The Eastern Shore is a stunning, fragrant place. The horizon line. Sky and water intersections. The land’s relentless, minute, vertical punctuation and rhythm. It is a place of old mysteries and injustices. Fertility and despair. Where bonded, migrant humanity persists. Old gardens were special, smelling of rose and wisteria. Hanging like the old south in the air. There must be that memory here, but for all a garden’s necessary privacy this must be a public place. Like the sea.

There is the relic earth, boatlike. Trees in cemetery pose. A once and future place. Walled yet inviting. It is truly in between. Neither

docked nor adrift. Searching. Old trees like sentinels, gravestones worn by wind. The wind is soft and charging.

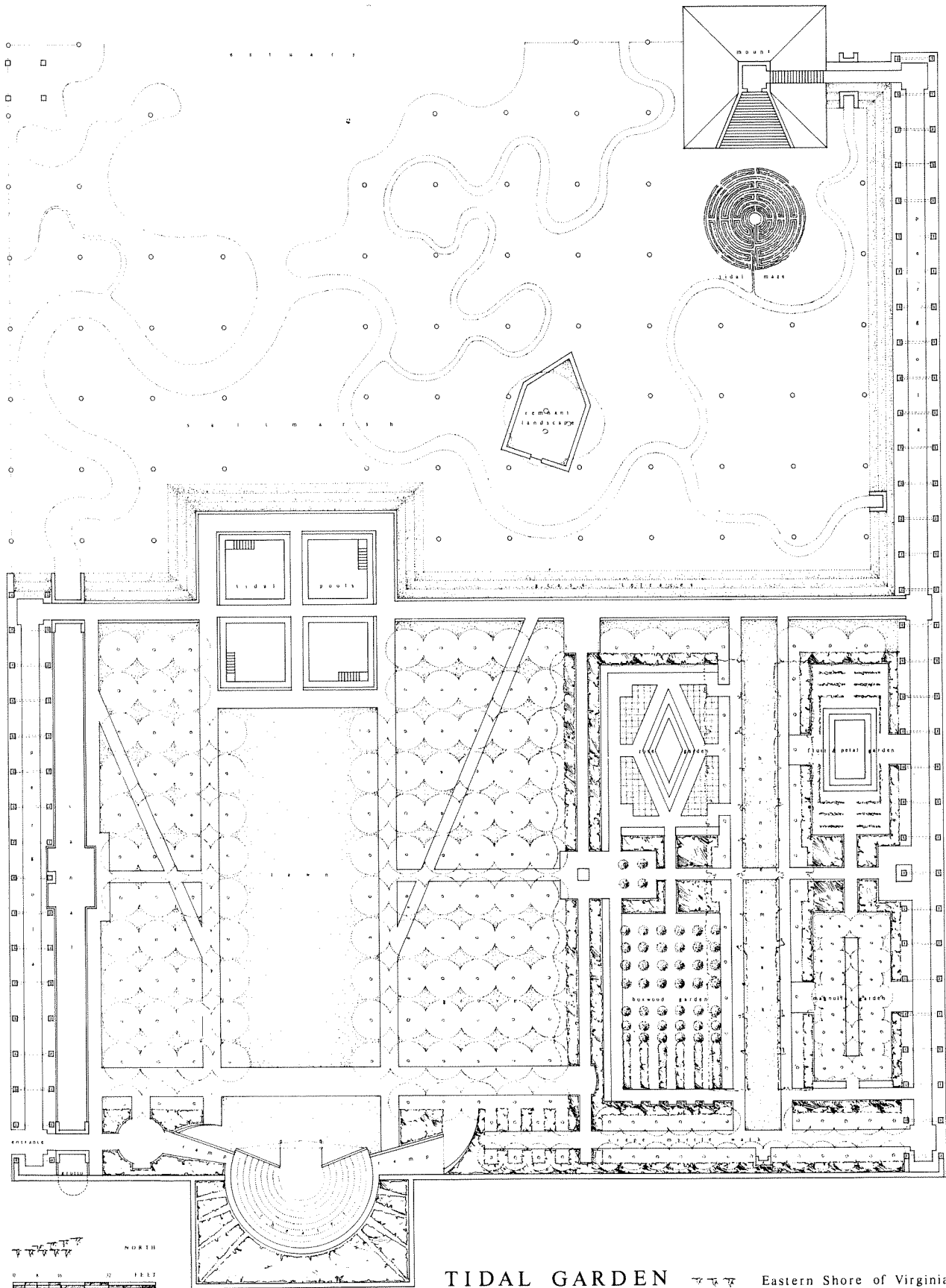
This could be a most telling place, really. A garden park donated to the community by NASA officials from Wallops Island. Near Chincoteague. Those who will see this in infrared are still uncertain. Boundaries. Elements. There would be a telescope on the mount.

There are places and prospects here, but perhaps no rest.

The garden begins with symmetry: nine squares aligned. It grows and splits and migrates. Fixed positions that come and go.

Erosion, nature, reflection.

Old places and memories.



TIDAL GARDEN Eastern Shore of Virginia

