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Ceres Farm

Jury Comments

The contemporary private garden is most often conceived primarily as a realm of repose and peace, a haven from the constraints and pressures of the world of work. It is frequently an autobiographical statement of reveries and hopes—a space subject to constant tinkering and major modification emblematic of the maturation and ever-changing interests of its owner. For instance, Garrett Eckbo's private garden in the Berkeley Hills is a series of intricate patio spaces interlocked with the rooms of his house, which has dramatic views of San Francisco Bay. Eckbo's studio looks down on the patio garden, which is subject to constant rearrangement as he adds sculpture and designs with new plant material.

The perennial materials of the garden have been stone, water and plants. Some contemporary garden designers are experimenting with new industrial materials and lighting technology to explore the relationship between past design traditions and contemporary expression in a manner reminiscent of the work of Gabriel Guvrekian and Christopher Tunnard earlier in this century. Yet most of them use nontraditional materials for traditional ends—to create serene spaces for quiet, con-



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templation, and renewal. Tori Thomas's Glass and Gravel Garden is an attempt to integrate "formal elements of classical Italian and French gardens into the twentieth-century garden vocabulary." This is done in part through the use of new materials.

Tori Thomas's courtyard is a personal exercise in the transformation of a traditional farm place into the locus for ephemeral urbanized insight. The clear boundaries of the space and

the framed view of the surrounding meadow and trees set up tense referrals between the "just now," the "has been" and the (with luck) "will be."

A Ceres Farm

B Ceres Farm
"Agricola"

Architect's Statement

The Glass and Gravel Garden

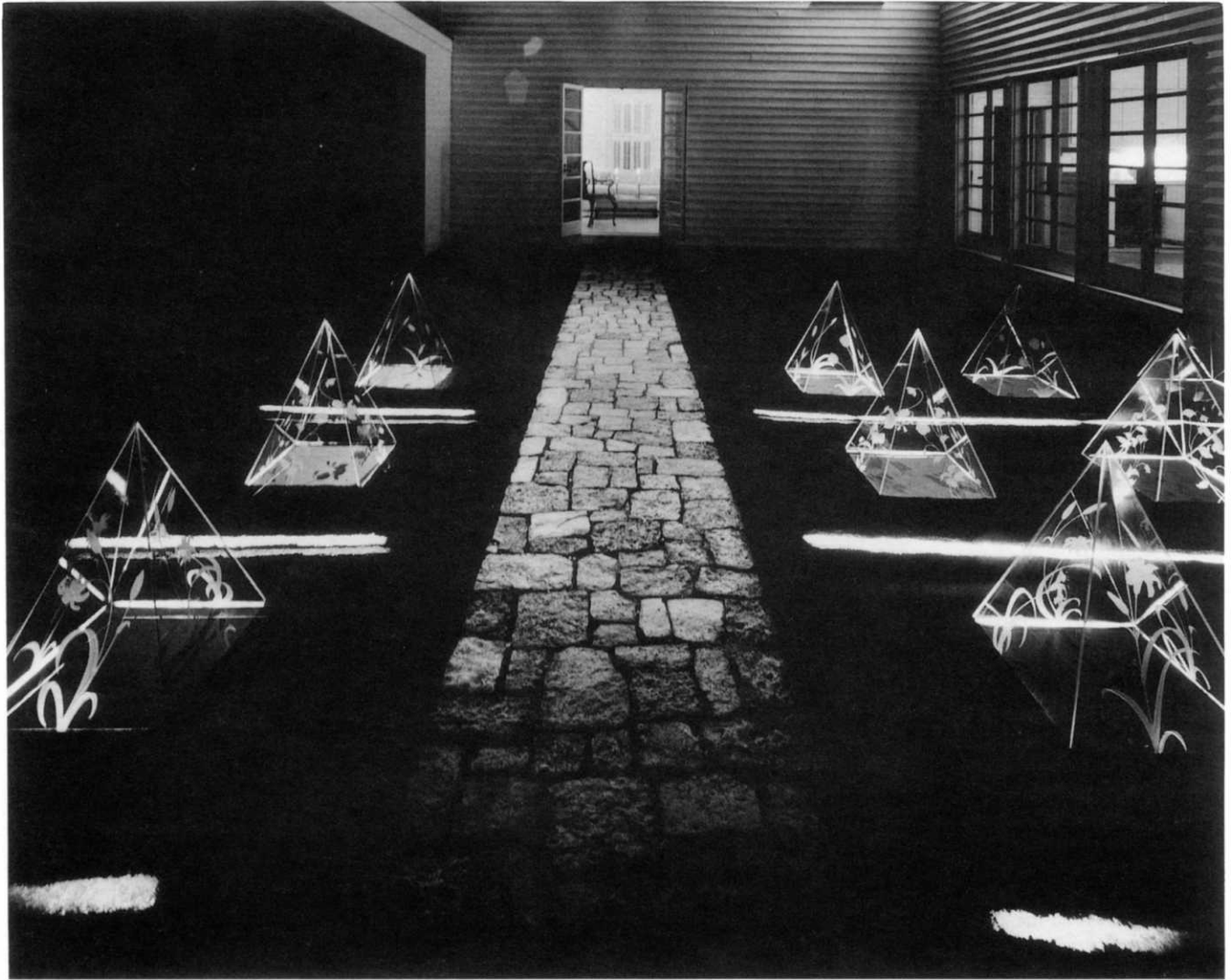
The Glass and Gravel Garden is the second in a series of three walled garden themes examining the history and the future for landscape design. Located in the Virginia countryside, the garden is about an hour drive from Washington, D.C. It derives from a consideration of the Post-Modern garden. Springing from a deep interest in the historical precedents from which modern landscape architecture springs, my interest lies in integrating formal elements of classical Italian and French gardens into the twentieth-century garden vocabulary.

For this project, I have designed a walled courtyard 40 feet long by 30 feet wide. The walls are 10 feet high with sliding panels that allow for a diversity of views. The garden can be entirely open to the surrounding landscape or entirely walled off from it, thus acting as an atrium or peristyle. Like shoji screens, an infinite variety of views between the two extremes can be arranged.

The enclosed garden fits into the L of a nineteenth-century frame millhouse creating an additional room for living. The walled garden is raised 4½ feet above the surrounding natural grade



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C Glass and gravel
Photographs by Christopher
Casler, copyright Christopher
Casler, 1986

enhancing the perspective of the views out. The garden is reached by slate steps from the outside and opens directly off both the living room and the kitchen from the inside.

A path of hand hewn limestone, outcroppings of which are evident across the meadow, provides a private approach to the house.

The design of the Glass and Gravel Garden is based primarily on the concept of a simple flower garden, wherein geometric rows of different flowers are linked by an axial path. The same elements combine in this garden—transformed by contemporary materials. In addition, the analog is expanded by the shape of the pyramids and their construction from glass.

The pyramidal shape derives from the boxwood topiaries used by the master garden designer Le Nôtre at Versailles and at Vaux-le-Vicomte. The glass refers to the glass cloches or bells that, historically, were placed over fragile or tender plants in order to provide additional shelter from extremes of temperature.

In this garden, I have included three rows of flowers: the tulip, the poppy and the lily. As in the natural garden, each flower is shown in four stages of development from the bud to the faded and decomposing bloom. In this case, however, the flowers are etched on the glass pyramids. Fallow rows awaiting new growth lie between the mature rows. Emphasizing the geometry, these rows are made of stark white gravel.

At night, the garden assumes the color usually evident in the natural garden in the day. Working with Gordon Anson, Lighting Designer for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., I have designed a system of colored fluorescent tubes to light both the pyramids and the furrows.

This space cut from a meadow, is a consideration of the question, "What comprises a garden?" While employing three rows of flowers, a garden path, an antique garden gate and tilled furrows, there is no plant material. Yet it serves to create tranquility—that place apart—that is the heart and magic of a garden.

Agricola

Agricola is the third in a series of gardens at Ceres Farm, wherein classical garden motifs are redefined in contemporary landscape vocabulary.

Agricola expands on the most primitive form of landscape design: the simple plowed field.

I have designed three basic variations upon this theme. In the first variation, stark earthen furrows are enclosed in a formal courtyard addressing the earliest relationship of agriculture to the home, the farmhouse and the field. Snow falls, and the furrow assumes another character entirely.

The second variation incorporates irrigation. The sculptural nature of the linear water element is the most contemporary manifestation of the irrigation theme. The agricultural analog is further expanded by showing the same garden planted first with hydroponic lettuce and then with stainless steel rods.

In the third variation, the water element is expanded to form abstract canals—a

modern twentieth-century interpretation of these two primitive elements.

At night, lasers are introduced as another level of sculptural landscape design. Introducing sophisticated lighting techniques to a field that continues to rely on lamps resembling mushrooms is an area of great interest to me. As in earlier projects, the lighting for *Agricola* was done in collaboration with Gordon Anson, Lighting Director for the National Gallery of Art.

Agricola comprises the final exploration of garden themes at Ceres Farm. Through the design of the courtyard, whose walls move to reveal or exclude the landscape beyond, I am looking at the relationship of landscape design as it links architecture with the natural environment. These gardens examine the antecedents of landscape architecture and seek to bring the field into a stronger alignment with modern architecture.