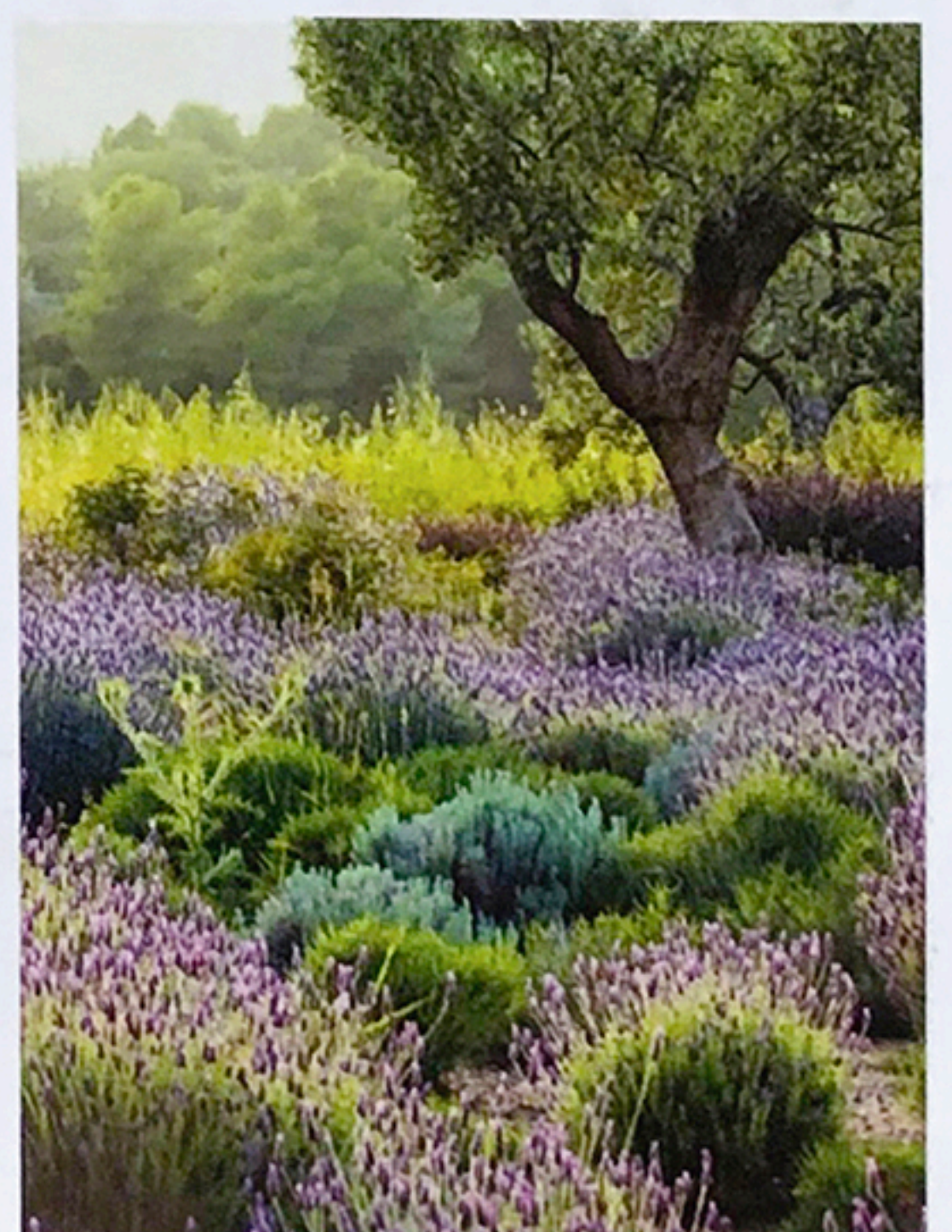
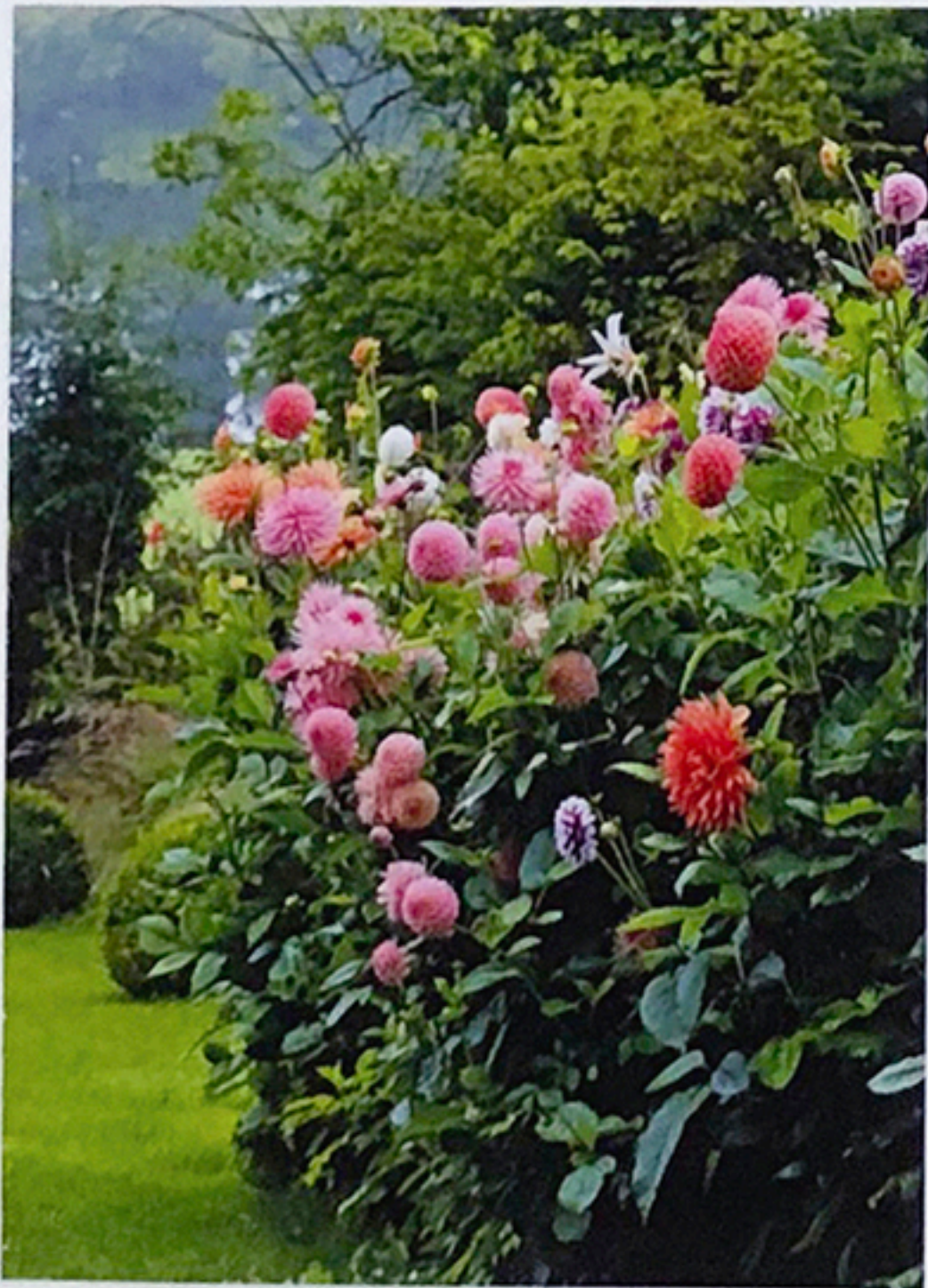


# GARDEN DESIGN MASTER CLASS

100 LESSONS FROM THE WORLD'S FINEST DESIGNERS ON THE ART OF THE GARDEN



Edited by CARL DELLATORE



RIZZOLI  
NEW YORK

# Angle of Repose



BILLIE COHEN

When all of the elements and spaces in a garden, whether wild or formal, attain balance and equilibrium through design, they have reached what I call the angle of repose. The term is defined as the way in which given particles, when poured from a funnel onto a horizontal surface, come to rest. I hold this concept in mind every time I begin a design. Plans for a garden or landscape are complete when all the elements and spaces around them reach this equilibrium.

Understanding how a site is to be used and how it will be seen is necessary to compose a plan that integrates topography, light, shadow, habitat, function, circulation, colors, textures, time, and seasons into a landscape. It should appear unstudied, emanating a sense of timelessness—all is as it should be without being imposed, conveying a sense of natural harmony to the viewer.

My studies began in fine-art school, where I spent hours drawing and painting. This meditative practice encouraged both intuitive design and composition through observation. I was taught that every time a line is put to paper or a brushstroke put to canvas, the areas around them are referred to as negative space. I keep this in mind when composing a garden plan.

One August, while at an artists' residency, I began to paint the landscape, which was full of dramatic shadows and textures. The two-dimensional world suddenly felt limiting, and it quickly became clear: I wanted to create landscapes where visitors could feel an emotional, all-encompassing connection to, and appreciation of, nature and place.

I later learned that another artist, British designer Gertrude Jekyll, had turned to garden design to develop her ideas about color and pattern. Jekyll partnered with architect Sir Edwin Lutyens to create more than 300 beautiful gardens, and her work was integral to the architectural master plans.

The morning fog serves to frame a single arching branch of a majestic oak tree, creating a cathedral-like space; it's a perfect place to set two chairs that overlook a tidal pond of Long Island Sound just below.

**FOLLOWING SPREAD:** A view from the window of the main house on this Southampton, New York, property shows the formal magnolia allée, which invites one to enter, transforming the perspective and immersing the visitor in the beauty of the trees' petals, textures, patterns, and shadows.





My strongest influence and inspiration, however, are the design principles of Frederick Law Olmsted, best known for his design of New York City's Central Park. Olmsted's interpretation of a line from an Alexander Pope poem, "Consult the genius of the place in all," became one of the linchpins of Olmsted's design philosophy. He strongly believed in the restorative power of nature and its importance for ordinary people. His plans carefully orchestrated movement through space, leading the visitor through a landscape without feeling controlled, allowing each one the fullest sensory and psychological experience possible. This remains especially relevant in today's stressful urban environments.

Two modernist places act as endless sources of inspiration for me and brilliantly integrate nature and architecture. First is the Brion Cemetery, near Venice, Italy, designed by Carlo Scarpa between 1968 and 1978. When visiting, I was surprised to find it surrounded by cornfields. Encompassing the mausoleum was a tilted wall the exact height of the corn at its splendid maturity, carrying the garden space to the end of the horizon. What a moment!

Second is Adalberto Libera's Casa Malaparte, on the Isle of Capri, which is nothing short of miraculous. Its exterior inverted pyramidal stairs lead to the roof and appear to connect the house to the sky, extending the perspective to the heavens.

Composing a landscape or garden means designing for all eventualities, from the seasons to the passing of time. While planning, the designer needs to be aware of all the views that will be experienced, configuring the sight lines as the visitor passes through a space. From any given perspective, the goal is to maintain the viewer's visual connection to the landscape.

Fully and thoughtfully integrating the myriad elements that compose an entire landscape, yet leaving space for happy surprises and allowances for nature's inherent growth and change, visitors leave with a sense of having merged with nature and possessing a greater awareness and appreciation of its many wonders. Both garden and guest have reached their angle of repose.

# Angle of Repose

by Billie Cohen

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