



NATIONAL TRUST MAGAZINE (NSW)

amazing stories, every moment

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WINTER

- Annual Review of the Trust
- National Trust Gardens
- Old Government House and Domain listed as World Heritage



National Trust Gardens

by **Angela le Sueur**

Image Caption: Everglades House and Garden, Leura. (Photo: Christopher Shain)

With spring well underway, National Trust gardens throughout New South Wales are blooming. A number of them have benefitted from special attention during the year, as a result of funding from grants, fundraising and the dedicated work of volunteers.

Everglades House and Gardens

Funding of \$1,497,000 under the Australian Government's Jobs Fund initiative has allowed the Trust to carry out many essential refurbishments at Everglades Gardens, Leura, and work started in September on the construction of a new, much needed Visitor Centre.

Everglades house and gardens were built during the 1930s as a weekend retreat for the wealthy Belgian businessman, Henri Van de Velde. He commissioned the Danish landscape designer and horticulturalist, Paul Sorensen, to help realise his vision. Together they created one of Australia's best loved gardens, and one of our most significant cold climate gardens and arboreta, listed by the Australian Heritage Commission, on the NSW National Trust Register and the NSW State Heritage Register.

Visited by tens of thousands of tourists each year and much loved by the local community, the 13 acre gardens are reaching their 75th year since the massive construction and planting required for their creation. Continuous and intensive maintenance is required to offset the impact of many thousands of human feet on slopes and terraces, while a high level of expertise is required to present the upper terraces of the gardens so that they provide the colour and form which were signatures of Sorensen's work.

Sustainability is vital too. Adjacent to the pristine bushland now listed as World Heritage and with some 75 percent of its lower slopes planted with native species, Everglades Gardens is an important buffer between residential areas and the ravines and mountains which lie beyond. From the 1930s until the listing in 2000, Everglades drew water from the Gordon Falls via a stream which had been dammed. An electric pump moved water to underground tanks near the main gate from which it was circulated to the gardens. No longer considered to be sustainable for a pristine natural environment, an alternative method was found and a bore was sunk in 2004, now supplemented by rainwater stored in tanks installed in 2008.

Everglades Gardens: a grand scheme and its challenges

The creation of Everglades was as much a feat of engineering as a triumph of planting. There was no heavy machinery available, but men out of work in the Great Depression were glad of the opportunity for work. Steep slopes were levelled to create a series of flat terraces. Planting beds were hand dug to a depth of 600 to 900mm and filled with soil transported from elsewhere on site, enriched with humus. The Grotto Pool, which looks entirely natural, was created by the excavation of rocks to create a semi-circular wall for the waterfall.

Massive drystone walls, a signature of Sorensen's designs, were built to shore up and frame upper terraces. The Studio Terrace with its rectilinear planes has been cited as one of the most significant pieces of Australian Modernist garden designs. Its 'hard landscaping' creates a terrace suitable for multiple uses, leading through to the Garden Theatre with its classical arch rescued from the demolished London Chartered Bank of Australia on Sydney's George Street. The Squash Racquet Court building on the terrace is cubist in form and retains its original timber floorboards.

The epitome of modern design

Everglades House when first built in the mid 1930s was thought to epitomise a modern lifestyle, combining functionalism with Mediterranean influences in its exterior, while its interior design is largely Art Deco. Located halfway down the site, it was designed to surprise visitors as they rounded the upper driveway. In this way, it reflected a key design concept of Sorensen's gardens, where trees and shrubs were used to create outdoor 'rooms', opening onto surprise vistas.

The Trust acquired the property in the 1960s and embarked on a major programme to restore the gardens, enlisting the help of Sorensen himself in the early years. (...continues on page 2...)

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moved out of the main house so that it can be presented as it was, and should be. In the gardens, the funding is making a major difference to the ongoing pressures of maintaining safety, helping to regrade pathways and lighting, and improving signage while also funding large-scale gardening projects to ensure that the property is at its best this summer.

Lindesay

The romantic gardens at Lindesay, the National Trust's Darling Point property, provide a gracious setting for the 1834 house, cleverly shielding it from the visual intrusions of surrounding properties and channelling views across its manicured lawn, straight to the harbour. It is a vista which is seemingly little changed from the days when the Colony's ambitious young Treasurer, Campbell Drummond Riddell, built the property and laid out the gardens for his new wife, Caroline. In reality, the gardens that today are a highlight of Lindesay for the brides, grooms and others who choose the property as venue for their most special events, were carefully created almost from scratch by a team of skilled and committed volunteers, many of whom continue to guide maintenance of the gardens today.

Lindesay was donated to the Trust in 1963 by Walter Pye. It was a wonderful acquisition for the Trust, but also an enormous challenge. After many subdivisions, what had once been approximately 16 acres of land with stables and a garden which swept down to the edge of the Harbour was, by the 1960s, flanked by development which an ugly brown fence did nothing to hide. Miraculously, a vista from the house to the Harbour had survived, despite the fact that the garden boundary now stopped far short of the foreshore. The vista was the garden's main asset, and enhancing it was a main focus of the designs of the National Trust Garden Committee, formed by members of the Women's Committee in the early 1960s to tackle the challenge.

Led by Diana Pockley with special support over the years by Rosemary Fairburn and Peggy Muntz (Peggy is still very much involved today), the women created a setting evocative of the nineteenth century. Dense trees and shrubs were planted along the boundaries to hide neighbouring development, telegraph poles were removed and two large cast iron urns were moved to the edge of the garden to frame the view to the Harbour.

Plants remembered from home

To research the type of plants Caroline Riddell might have chosen, the women spent many hours in the Mitchell Library, scouring the writings and plant sources used by William Macarthur and the other leading light in the horticultural history of the Colony, Thomas Shepherd. The main source of information however, was correspondence between young wives who had moved to Sydney in the early half of the century, and the families they had left behind in Britain. The women wanted to recreate the gardens they remembered from home, and the invention of the Wardian Case in the 1840s, which allowed living plants to survive the long journey across the sea, helped to make this possible.

One of the first plants to be introduced to Lindesay was an English oak, planted as a symbol of home to Caroline Riddell. The next was a Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*), a species thought to be fascinating at the time, which featured in many colonial gardens. Early nineteenth century gardens were strongly influenced by the 'controlled nature' designs of Capability Brown, a style echoed at Lindesay by grass, trees, water and stone, assembled in an idyllic way. The changing colours of the dense boscage which edges the lawn ensure that the garden remains attractive at all times of the year, highlighted by small splashes of colour from plants such as Agapanthus, Salvia and Canna. South African plants were popular at the time as they could be collected en route to Australia, and survived well in the similar climate.

National Trust Gardens (continued from cover)

The high cost of maintaining such a property has been a challenge for the Trust as a charity and, until recently, almost all available resources have been consumed by the garden. The house, while kept in a stable condition, was unable to reach its potential as a centrepiece of the grand design.

In 2007, an Australian Government AusIndustry grant, matched by funding from the National Trust Women's Committee and donations from members enabled the Trust to commission paint conservator, Julie Whittlam, to recreate the original Art Deco colour scheme in parts of the house. The recent funding under the Australian Government Jobs Fund initiative will allow further painting and carpeting and, on completion of the new Visitors Centre, daily functions will be



Everglades House and Gardens (Photo: Christopher Shain)



Lindesay (Photo: Christopher Shain)

To the side of the house, large French windows open from the formal dining room onto an elegant parterre garden, edged by dense hedge 'walls' whose niches are graced by four Italian statues representing the Four Seasons. These originally adorned the gardens of an Italian mansion. The creation of this garden too represented a total transformation, and provides an elegant background to gracious events in the dining room.

Gardens revitalised

Fifty years on, although Lindesay's gardens are tended meticulously each week by Peggy Muntz and a dedicated group of volunteers, it was time to refurbish. Designed by landscaper Christopher Nicholas, work started from the ground upwards, with reconditioning of the soil and removal of tired flowers and shrubs. Trees were pruned to re-shape those starting to encroach on the all-important vista, and new plants, chosen to provide soft accents of colour all year round, were introduced.

The result was declared a great success at a party held at the property to celebrate the completion of works in April 2010. The refurbishment will ensure that Lindesay continues to delight all who visit for many decades to come.

Harpers Mansion, Berrima by Ann Beaumont

The fine two-storey Georgian-styled house which took its name from James Harper, first licensee of the Surveyor General, was built in 1834. James and his wife Mary occupied the house for ten years, and their kitchen and ornamental gardens would have been vital to them in many ways. But what forms did their gardens take? An 1850 advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald for the sale of the house following the death of James in 1845 includes the words:

Fronting the house about an acre of land is handsomely laid out as a flower garden, with carriage road from the principal entrance to the dwelling house. In the rear is a large Kitchen Garden, well stocked with choice fruit trees, and a dwelling house for the Gardener. Close to the kitchen is a never-failing well of water. To the east of the dwelling is a small horse paddock, cleared and fenced, containing upwards of four acres.

This supports information in an 1844 survey made as part of mortgage arrangements for William Hutchinson who lent James Harper 200 pounds when Harper got into financial difficulties. James died in 1845. William Hutchinson died the following year. Mary was still living in the house in 1846 and remarried in 1847. The survey shows a large area of garden which extended from just above the old kitchen to the northern boundary of the stables and across to the present Old Hume Highway.

It is presumed that Hutchinson leased the property to the Roman Catholic Church which needed a presbytery following construction of their church in Berrima. The church purchased the house in 1853 and owned it for more than 120 years. In 1850, when Hutchinson's trustees tried to sell the house, it was described as having a flower garden with fruit trees, gardener's cottage, well and horse paddock.

When the National Trust acquired the property in 1978, they commissioned heritage architect Clive Lucas to carry out a Conservation Management Plan. Lucas found that, 138 years after the Harpers had left their mansion, there were, 'the remains of a squared cottage garden in front of the house with an axial path and evidence of a fence and gatepost'. We don't know the configuration of the original flower beds mentioned in the 1850 advertisement, but they are likely to have been laid out in the simple squares or rectangles typical of early colonial houses.

In the 1990s, as a way of increasing visitor appeal to the property, the Trust commissioned the development of a maze, edged with nepeta and lavender, as part of refurbishment of the garden. Trees were planted in lawns and curvilinear paths were lined with formal garden beds of shrubs and perennials.



Harpers Mansion

To recreate the individual and intrinsic character of the garden as it once was with its strong relationship to the house, it was recognised that the choice of plants and their positioning were critical. The result is an ongoing project to redevelop the gardens using pre-1850 cultivars, while extending the kitchen garden to replicate, as far as possible, the fruits and vegetables of the original.

Where existing plants need to be replaced, earlier forms are chosen. A valuable source of information on what was available in the era is the Historic Houses Trust website (www.hht.net.au). The site lists plants imported by early colonial gardeners such as the Macarthurs of Camden Park and the Macleays of Elizabeth Bay House – as well as the stock cultivated by nurserymen such as Thomas Shepherd and John Baptist.

Satisfying as it is to bring a property such as this back to life, the recreation of the gardens has other benefits. In 2008 the National Trust entered into an agreement with the Berrima Correctional Centre where selected inmates are able to work in the gardens and develop horticultural skills under the supervision of trained horticulturalist, Raymond Harrison. In exchange, Harper's Mansion provides funding for accredited educational courses for inmates to assist in their rehabilitation.

And the garden is alive, well and growing.

Riversdale, Goulburn

Led by landscape architect Michael Bligh, the re-formed Garden Committee at Riversdale has embarked on the revitalisation of the garden with its flower beds and circa 100 year old fruit trees. The garden suffered badly during the recent drought. Priorities are to recreate the grounds to reflect as far as possible the residency of the Twynam family during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, enhance the entrance and restore the productivity of the gardens to complement interpretation of the house as a family home. The work has been supported by a highly successful fund-raising campaign earlier this year. First steps have included a major assault on weeds, which has serendipitously revealed plants lost under the mass of vinca. Soon to be planted along the boundaries are 100 olive trees which will shield the property from views of Goulburn Gaol, and the installation of a new irrigation system, essential in this drought-prone region.



Riversdale

Cooma Cottage, Yass

At the request of the Cooma Cottage Garden Committee and manager, Dr Rick Williams, members of the Trust's Landscape Advocacy Committee travelled to Cooma Cottage in August. The Trust committee was much impressed by the enthusiastic dedication of local members to the property and their intentions for future works. Cooma Cottage with its formal entry courtyard, romantic verandahs, a rare picconia tree (*Picconia excelsa*) and a very old olive tree near the former orchard close to the river, closely reflects its pastoral origins in a landscape setting where little has changed. It is planned to present the property in its appropriate setting, and to use landscaping to interpret its different aspects.



Cooma Cottage