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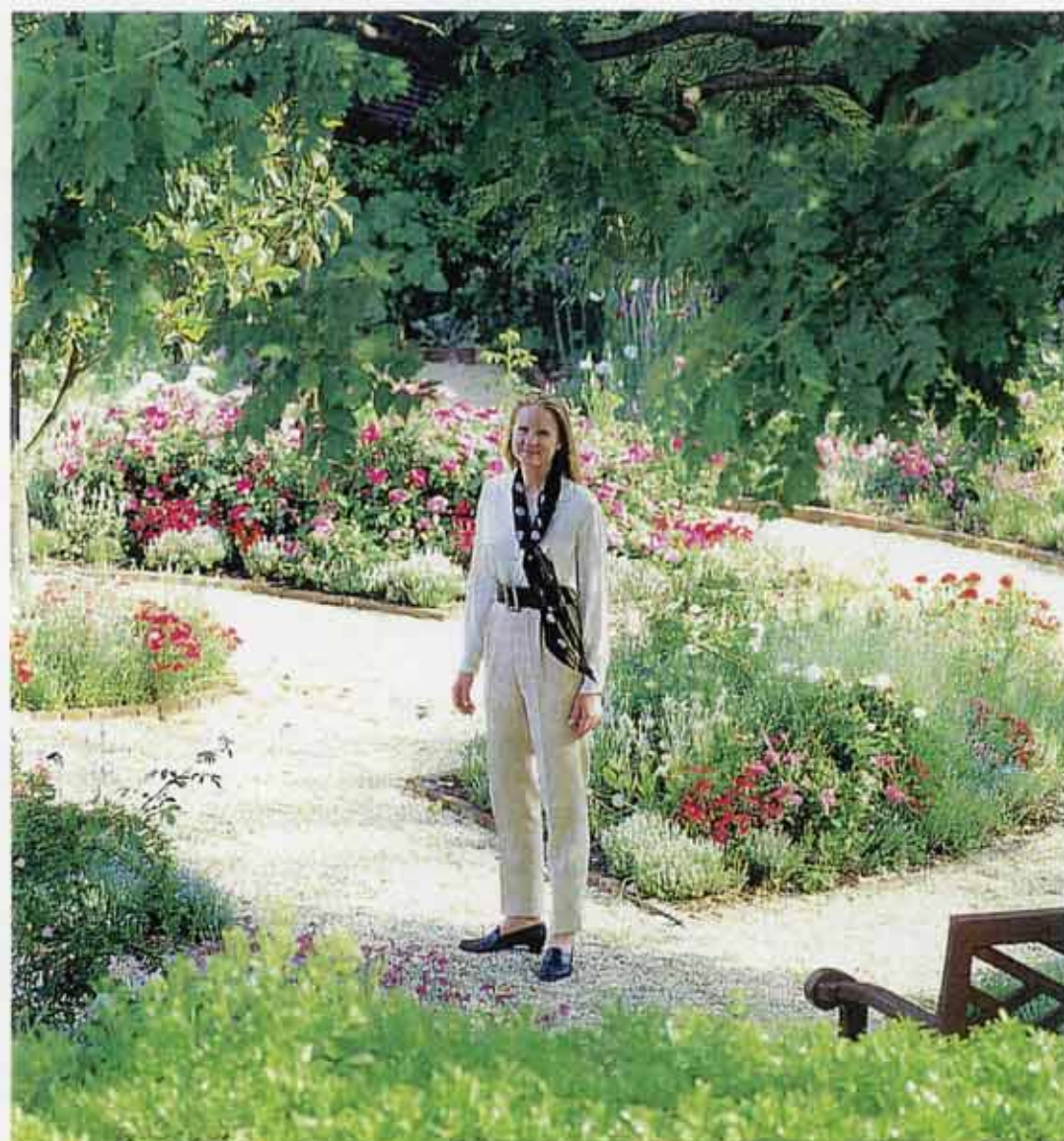


*Landscape architect Barbara Paca—
equal parts archaeologist, historian
and horticulturist—brings her
regard for 18th-century design
and aesthetics to her commissions
in New Jersey and worldwide.*

By Caroline Seeborn

GARDEN - VARIETY BEAUTY

Photographs by Violet Fraser



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER BAKER

The Garden State is always becoming more of a garden, thanks to the magical wand-waving of Barbara Paca. For 20 years, the landscape architect has been working on estates and backyards not only in New Jersey, but also all over Europe. Her expertise ranges far beyond an affinity for things floral. Paca is an archaeologist, finding traces of historic gardens beneath the earth. She is a historian, analyzing the arcane measurements used by 18th-century garden designers to make their designs. And she is a horticultural expert, understanding the growth rate and temperament of plants and flowers in differing climates and conditions. All these talents come into play when Paca takes a piece of unpromising ground and transforms it into a thing of beauty.

Barbara Paca was born to be a trustee of nature. She is the great-great-great-granddaughter of William Paca, an important colonial governor and lawyer, who had a beautiful brick house in Annapolis (still standing today). His two-acre garden, once declared the finest in the city, has been beautifully restored, with input from his young descendant. These are obviously powerful genes.

A California native, one of six children, Paca seemed to be always outdoors growing up in Arizona: "As a child, I thought I was a Native American." Her grandfather, an explorer and organic gardener, took her on nature trips and taught her to observe the growing world in a special way, and to understand the moods and whims of an ever-changing environment. At the age of 12, Paca, part of a family of readers and artists, was already working at a drafting table, honing her skills with youthful attempts at blueprints.

Her professional education inevitably reflected this passion. She took a degree in landscape architecture at the University of Oregon, then received a Master of Fine Arts and Ph.D. in the department of Art and Architecture at Princeton University. During these academic pursuits, she also spent time in England as a conservator of historic landscapes;







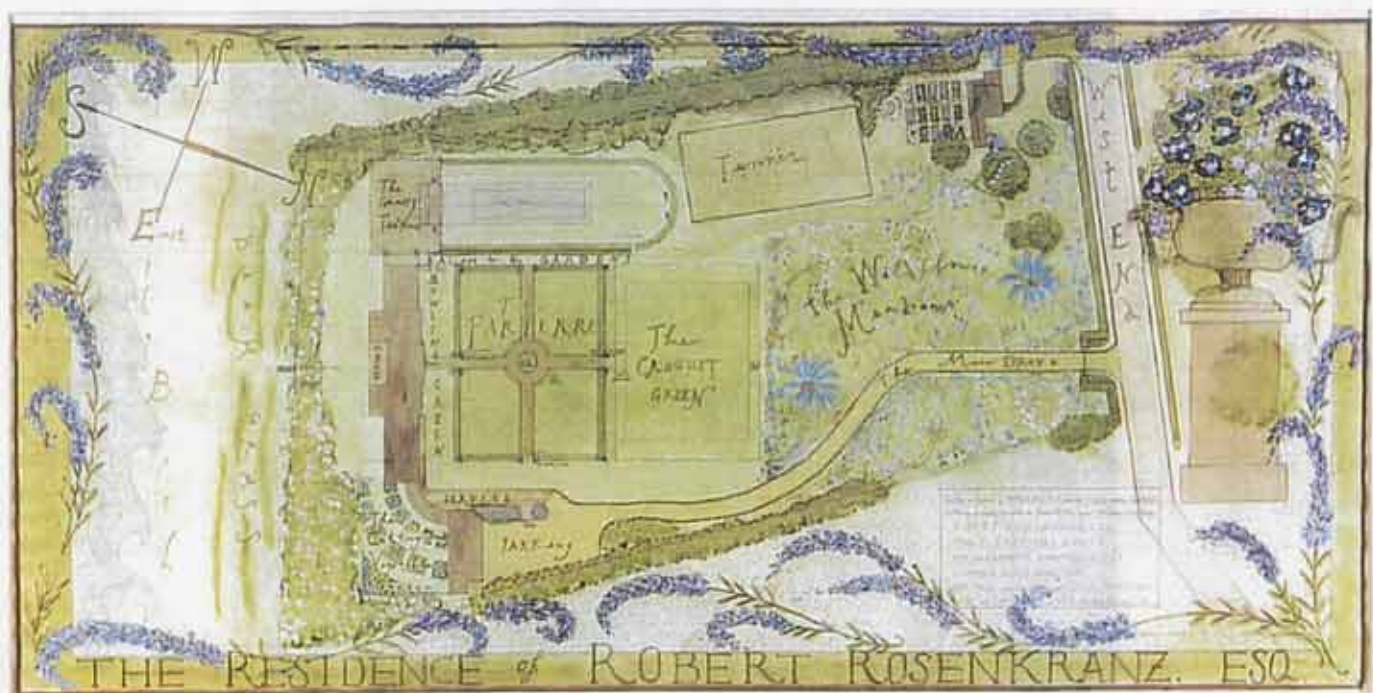
became a consultant at Morven, the 18th-century house in Princeton whose gardens are being restored to their original glory; and enhanced her European experience by spending two years studying the gardens of the Farnese Palace in Caprarola, the Villa Lante in Bagnaia and the Quirinal Place in Rome.

Armed with these impressive credentials, Paca comes to gardening with an eye and background that are unique, and her gardens reflect these qualities. "I always start with the house," she says. "I'll walk around it, outside and inside, over and over, examining its proportions, its ornament, its coloration, its light." Once she has established the story of the house, she absorbs every aspect of its relation to the surrounding landscape, and from there she begins to shape the garden. Her only rule is that she will not accept a commission if the garden does not have "good bones." Paca is committed to the geometry and proportions of the 18th century; although she can easily convert these to modern landscapes, her heart remains loyal to the golden perspective of classicism.

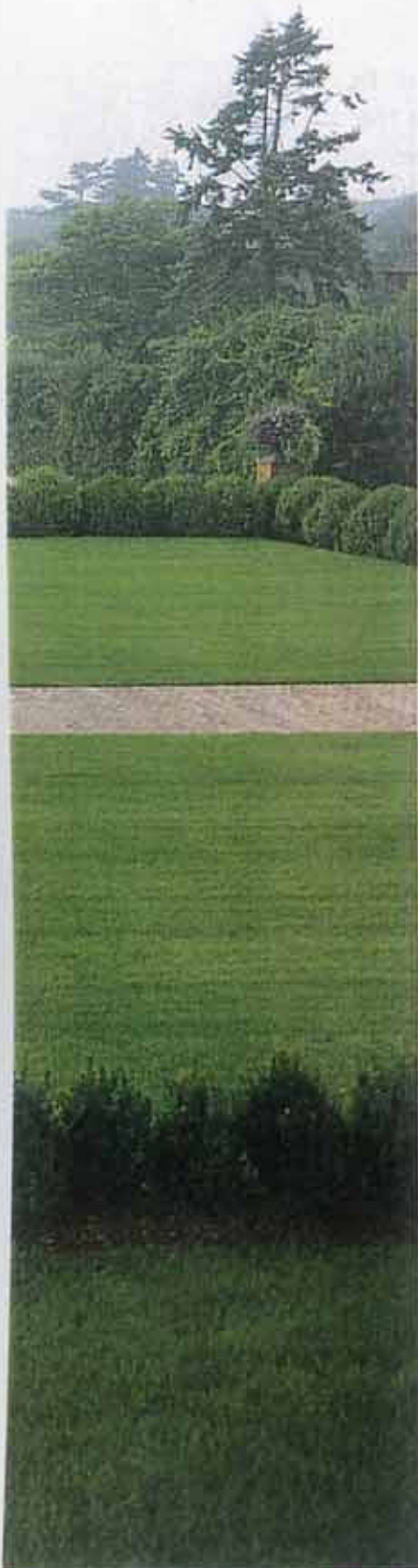
As well as being deeply conscious of the demands of the house, Barbara Paca is also mindful of the clients for whom she is working. For a pool garden in Purchase, NY, which was

going to get much use by the clients' young children and their friends, the designer decided on a series of heavily planted, extra-wide beds that would discourage their being trampled on and bring color and excitement to the pool area. "I specifically chose flowers that would be fun for the children to learn about," Paca says. "For instance, I planted turtlehead (*chelone lyonii*) and fairy candles (*cimicifuga racemosa*)—plants with names the children could remember." To please the parents, who, of course, were equally important, she chose old-fashioned favorites like peonies and lavender.

Paca's commission to design a garden for Robert Rosenkranz and Alexandra Munroe, of East Hampton, NY, developed into an engaging collaboration with the owners. As always, her first task was to study the history of the house. Built in the late 1920s by the distinguished Alabama architect Penrose Stout, it is a fine example of the neo-Palladianism fashionable at the time, enlivened by the architect's southern sensibility. The 18th-century style of the house, with its grey-and-white lightly ornamented facade and simple interior floor plan, meshed perfectly with Paca's preferred taste for formality and structure. But when the owners bought the house, it suffered from a sense of dislocation, with intrusive driveways, shapeless stretches of lawn and overgrown shrubs.



Commissioned to salvage the grounds and gardens of this New York home, landscape architect Barbara Paca inherited a piece of property with shapeless stretches of lawn and overgrown shrubs. Yet the 18th-century style of the house meshed perfectly with Paca's preferred taste for formality and structure, reflecting her commitment to the geometry and proportions characteristic of garden design of the 1700s.



"First, we had to give the house a proper base," she says. "It was situated on high ground, with the ocean on one side and four acres of land on the other, falling away quite steeply towards the road. We had to anchor the house in its landscape." To do this, Paca, refining preliminary ideas sketched by her clients, designed a series of terraces to absorb the slope and allow the eye to roam easily over each level of ground as it stretched towards the horizon. Each terrace was asked to play a different role: a bowling green, a formal brick parterre, a silky-smooth green croquet lawn and, in the distance, a charming wildflower meadow.


Her clients, asking that the work be done within a year, made hands-on contributions to this huge undertaking. Mr. Rosenkranz, a passionate admirer of Thomas Jefferson, adapted his ideas in many places, most notably the brick staircase and Chinese Chippendale woodwork in the pool area. Ms. Munroe chose most of the plantings in her preferred palette of silver, blue and white, and experimented tirelessly until she was satisfied with the drifting colors of the meadow. Combined with Paca's skills as a master of landscape architecture and proportion—"Geometry is like the muscle under the land"—the project was a remarkable collaboration.

With a long list of high-octane clients, including many who live in New Jersey, Barbara Paca remains intensely private about them. If they wish to preserve their anonymity, she never publicizes their names. Since she herself is such a charismatic figure—six-foot tall, fast-talking and exuding energy, with long red hair often pouring over her shoulders like a radiant waterfall—this professional discretion seems

an unexpected characteristic yet it's typical of her complex personality.

She travels exhaustively, not only working on gardens, but also doing flower-arranging for weddings and private parties. She works long hours in her New York City studio, producing exquisite design sketches and planting plans that clients regard as treasures and invariably wish to have framed. With her husband, architect Philip Logan, she often does joint projects that take them to many parts of the world. "I like those best," she says, "We work so well together."

But to those familiar with Barbara Paca's work, perhaps her most intriguing quality is a sense of humor. Her lively iconoclasm and impertinent imagination often produce dramatic results. Visit the campus of Princeton University, and you will be astonished to see that, guarding the entrance to the elegant new football stadium designed by Rafael Viñoly, and neighbor to Richard Serra's aggressive serpentine wall opposite Peyton Hall, there are two huge topiary tigers. They look as though they are about to leap off their bases and devour the students. These wonderful animals are the work of sculptor Ruffin Hobbs and his topiary designer, Barbara Paca. The inspiration of alumnus William M. Weaver, who wished to dramatize the entrance to the stadium, the two stainless-steel tigers are planted with ivy and have their own interior irrigation system.

"The great thing about the tigers," says Paca, ever practical in the face of such whimsy, "is that they are portable: In the summer, we can move them into the shade so the ivy won't fry." Focused on the future, as well as the present and the past, Paca thinks of everything. 

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER BAKER

