



LISTENING TO THE EARTH

The landscape architecture of Barbara Paca
By Amy Abrams. Photography by Sean Donnola.

A hot-shot garden designer to the stars, Barbara Paca creates dream landscapes and sustains historic gardens for the largest estate owners on Maryland's Eastern Shore and throughout the world.

“**B**e patient, trust your instincts and ‘listen’ to the place,” Barbara Paca advises. While these teachings are universal truths for day-to-day living, Paca offers them as key instructions to grow a garden. It might be wise to take note. Paca, a landscape architect with residences and offices in Oxford, Md., and New York City, is a preeminent scholar of landscape architecture (Ph.D. educated at Princeton and abroad), and landscape architect to some of the most bountiful landowners and biggest celebrities across the globe.

Six feet tall, blond hair pulled into a loose bun, freckles splashed across her high cheekbones from the noon-day sun, Paca always strides her clients’ gardens barefoot, her jeans rolled to her knees, “listening” to the earth. “You can feel the muscle of the land and the lines of a parterre under your feet,” she shares. “Garden archeology requires the removal of shoes.”

Although she trusts intuition to envision and design the ideal garden for each of her clients, her expertise also is founded on extensive scholarship. In addition to studies at Princeton, she worked in England as a conservator of historic landscapes and parks, became a consultant at Morven, the 18th century former residence of the governor of New Jersey, and was invited—by the Italian government—to spend summers surveying the gardens of Farnese Palace in Caprarola, the Villa Lante at Bagnaia and the Quirinal Palace in Rome. Awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and various fellowships, Paca also is a scholar of Greek mathematics and classical literature.



Reed Creek Farm near Centreville, Md.



Among gardening enthusiasts and those who own gardens of historical significance, she is highly respected and renowned. One of Paca's first historic restoration projects was on behalf of a prominent ancestor—Paca is the great, great, great, great granddaughter of William Paca, former governor of Maryland and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. William Paca's residence, a beautiful brick house (still standing today), sat on a two-acre garden reputed as the finest in Annapolis. The house had been subsumed by a large hotel and its gardens covered with asphalt for a parking lot. In 1965, the Historic Annapolis Foundation and the Maryland legislature saved the treasure from imminent demolition with specialists appointed for authentic restoration, while also deeming it a state department residence for official state visits. The following year, under the guidance of St. Clair Wright (a dedicated preservationist and landscape designer), Barbara Paca was charged with assisting in restoring original garden terraces that

included rose and boxwood parterres, a fishpond, a kitchen garden and wilderness gardens. Referencing a painting of William Paca by the famed portraitist Charles Wilson Peale depicting a portion of the house gardens (the single surviving illustration for documentation), Paca brought back her "family backyard." While Paca has literally and figuratively "dug up her roots" in Annapolis, she also explores her multi-racial heritage, which she celebrates with her husband and son on Sundays and holidays at the Waters African American Methodist Church on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Paca's childhood residence, near the wide-open plains of the Arizona desert, introduced her to flora and fauna of beauty and Native American significance. "I was always climbing up something," Paca says with a smile. Her after-school hours and summers spent in a splendid setting under a sweeping sky seemed to destine her for a career connected to the wild. "Everyone always knew I'd

do something with nature," Paca says. "The natural world gave me so much; I wanted to give back." Yet, her affinity for finding traces of gardens buried beneath the earth and her attraction to historical narratives also played a part in her career choice. Paca loves "the hunt." "I interrogated everything; I was an extremely curious child," she shares. "Members of my family responded to my incessant questions with the quip, 'You have three more questions.'"

Both historian and horticulturalist, Paca primarily directs her passions toward landscape preservation planning as the founder and director of Preservation Green of Maryland and New York, based in Oxford, Md., and downtown Manhattan. The award-winning company has taken on a wide range of landscape projects, including major historic preservation assignments, public park master plans, the restoration of small residential properties (and rooftop gardens) and large estates. While many of her designs enhance East Coast properties, she also has worked extensively throughout Europe and South America.

Paca's client list is a "Who's Who" of celebrities across the globe, yet names remain "top secret," due to security concerns and client confidentiality. Occasionally, a famed client agrees to publically showcase their home. Recently, the film director M. Night Shyamalan's residence was featured in *Architectural Digest*, highlighting Paca's landscape design for his 1937 Georgian Revival set on 125 acres outside Philadelphia. Previously, an East Coast estate built in the 1930s for *Reader's Digest* owner and publishing magnate Lila Acheson Wallace noted

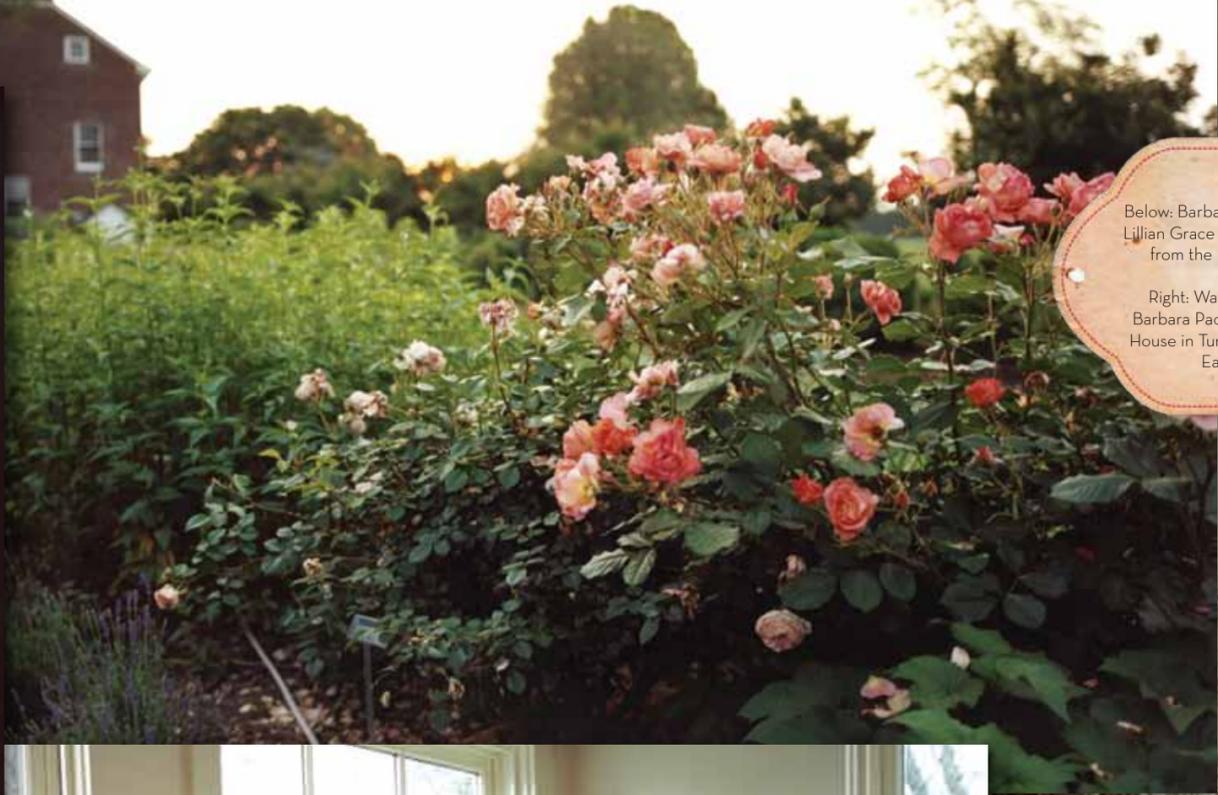
Paca's landscaping contributions. Thorton Gardens (the largest property in San Marino, Calif., after the Huntington Gardens) also was restored and enhanced by Paca. In Manhattan, in addition to managing a restoration of Grammac Park, Paca creates rooftop and townhouse gardens, providing peaceful sanctuaries amid the urban setting.

Paca's garden designs surround some of the world's finest homes and her expertise is eagerly sought for properties of major historical significance, including the largest, most historically important gardens on Maryland's Eastern Shore. One such Eastern Shore property became particularly special to her.

When Paca received a letter from Robert Simmons requesting her services for Reed Creek Farm, a 200-acre property off the Chester River in Centreville owned by he and his wife, Marcia, she cleared her calendar and drove straight down. Robert's letter shared that Marcia, thought to be in remission, had been diagnosed with a recurrence of cancer. "I wanted to make her dream garden come true," Paca recalls. "She was a master gardener infatuated with British gardens and pictured a Provencal color scheme of orange, burgundy and blue—a progressive idea. Most folks wanted pastel cottage gardens, back then." When the project was complete in 2000, Marcia dedicated her remaining six years to tending to and meditating in the garden. Today, Marcia's husband and daughters keep the legacy garden vibrant and thriving, each bloom in Marcia's memory representing the continuing cycle of life.



Old Pratt Mansion in Ruthsburg, Md.



Below: Barbara Paca's grandmother, Lillian Grace Barrington Baker Paca, from the Paca family archive.

Right: Watercolor painting by Barbara Paca for owners of Hope House in Tunis Mills on Maryland's Eastern Shore.



Above left and right: Reed Creek Farm near Centerville, Md.
Right: Barbara Paca inside her Oxford Atelier, the Maryland base of Preservation Green of Maryland & New York.



Also on the Eastern Shore, Paca has restored and designed gardens for Hope House, a Federal brick mansion with a five-part neo-Palladian plan near Tunis Mills. The elegant and bountiful estate is approached by a two-mile driveway and features a celebrated heart garden with a water fountain (as its centerpiece) and remnants of original boxwood plantings. Always “on the hunt,” Paca discovered that the daughter of former owners of the residence, Ruth Starr Rose, a largely undiscovered artist, had created the largest body of visual art to represent African American people in the early 20th century. Paca now is an avid collector and advocate of her work.

Despite her impressive resume, Paca describes her latest project as her “biggest undertaking to date.” On two adjoining properties in Oxford, Paca is creating a compound to serve as a horticulture and design research center. She and her husband, Philip Logan, a prominent “green” architect, are designing and building Platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) buildings as headquarters for a team that will research and develop American-made products to help facilitate the “green” industry. “Every component of ev-

ery product will be made in America,” Paca attests. “A primary goal of the center is to create an environmentally appropriate solution to the cut-flower industry.”

On the Eastern Shore and across the globe, Paca and Logan successfully collaborate on projects. Their cottage-style Oxford residence, just down the block from the proposed research center, was sought as a second home primarily because Paca has family in Oxford, but also because they simply cherish the Eastern Shore—a place Paca describes as “not compromised,” regarding development and industry.

From one of America’s founding families, in which glorious gardens, agriculture and botany were elemental passions, Paca continues today, integrating splendor, environmentalism and historic preservation into her landscape designs. Those who love gardens and honor efforts to beautify and protect them count their lucky stars.

For more information on Barbara Paca’s landscape architecture, visit www.preservation-greenllc.com.

Old Pratt Mansion in Ruthsburg, Md.

