

'Rescuing Eden'



The huge sea clam fountain feeds water into the abalone-shell pool at Lotusland in this picture from the book.

Lotusland in Montecito among 30 historic gardens featured in new coffee table book

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Ranging from wonderful to woebegone, from grand estates to suburban plots, 30 gardens throughout the United States are featured in "Rescuing Eden: Preserving America's Historic Gardens" (The Monicelli Press, \$50).

Among them is Lotusland in Montecito.

Others include the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Garden in St. Paul, Minn., The Gardens of Alcatraz in San Francisco, the Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden in

Bishopville, S.C., and the Historic Deepwood Estate and Gaiety Hollow in Salem, Ore.

"We considered over 40 gardens but had strict criteria: The gardens had to have been created privately — hence, no botanical gardens — they had to have been in a crisis of destruction by abandonment, neglect, development, etc., and they had to be not only rescued but opened to the public," author Caroline Seebohm told the News-Press by email. She wrote the text that accompanies the 200 lush photographs taken by Curtice Taylor for the 213-page coffee table tome.

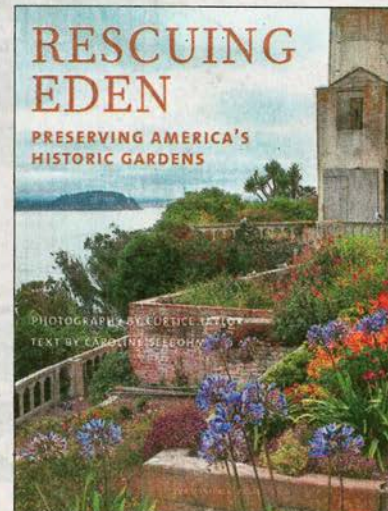
While on a cruise from Venice to

Barcelona, Ms. Seebohm wrote that "Lotusland fit these criteria — just. Shortage of funds put it under serious threat, and local support basically saved it. It was pleasing to be able to feature such an extraordinary, idiosyncratic garden in the more traditional landscapes we write about.

"Lotusland is one-of-a-kind. What a tragedy if it had been lost."

In the book, there are eight pages devoted to the garden, most of them filled with photographs of the lotus pond, "filled with the lovely eponymous flowers," the huge sea clam fountain feeding water into the "abalone-shell

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Lotusland - a precious community gem

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pool," massive spears of cacti and agaves and "a winding path leading through spectacular topiary toward the massed tropical collections arrayed under the trees."

Ms. Seebohm writes in the text that "Lotusland was created by a wildly unconventional Polish woman, who became Ganna Walska, a multiply-married opera singer, supporter of Tibetan monks, socialite and ultimately garden designer ... Lotusland is a creation as passionate and melodramatic as any of the grand operas this Polish diva failed to conquer. Walska's garden is her ultimate triumph, her performance here will never be forgotten."

Gwen Stauffer, Lotusland's executive director, said she is "thrilled to be included mostly because Lotusland is such a community gem that was almost lost and to have part of our history and garden story recognized in this book is a reminder that Lotusland is precious."

Ms. Seebohm, who lives on the Delaware River in New Jersey, was born and grew up in England — "land of garden-lovers and garden-preservers. I have spent most of my career writing about houses and gardens for magazines and books."

A graduate of Oxford University, she became involved with the book through Mr. Taylor, the

photographer, an old friend who had been working on the project for several years.

"He needed a writer to get it published. So — voila! I was thrilled to do it as it's a very, very important subject. Being English, I knew how Americans needed to step up, and as the book shows, many of them have — magnificently!" said Ms. Seebohm.

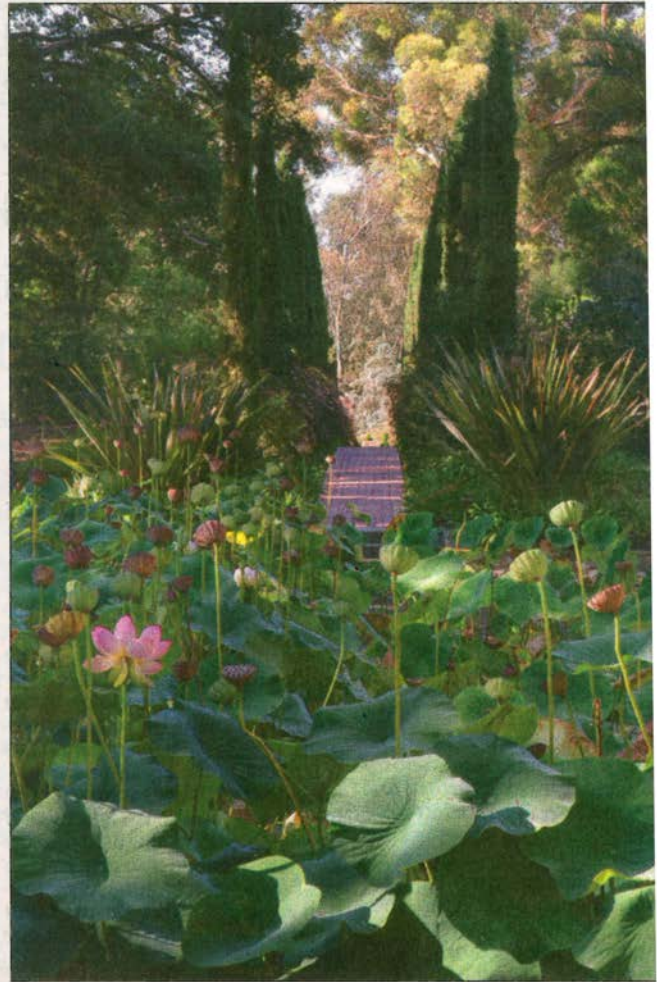
"I hope that the stories about these gardens will inspire readers to look to their landscapes with more respect. Gardens that were designed as long ago as the mid-18th century are featured in the book — gardens that, but for the heroic efforts of local garden lovers and preservationists, would have been destroyed by the wrecker's ball, neglect, abandonment, development, even the horror of a parking lot.

"And once destroyed, such magical landscapes could never be re-made. The title of the book could well have been 'Saved!'" said Ms. Seebohm.

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FYI

"Rescuing Eden: Preserving America's Historic Gardens" (The Monicelli Press, \$50) is available for purchase at the Lotusland Garden Shop and at amazon.com. For more information, call 969-9990.



COURTESY

Curtice Taylor photographed the lotus pond at Lotusland.