

Gardens and Landscapes

Prof. Anna Piusi

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4 points

Monday-Wednesday 9.00-12.00

Class lectures take place at NYU, Villa Ulivi, Room Pisa. Please keep syllabus and check all dates for field trips. My email address is: annapiussi@libero.it

1. DESCRIPTION

Gardens and plants are an integral part of Tuscan culture and paintings. The practical needs of agriculture have shaped the landscape over the course of centuries: olive groves, wheatfields and vineyards trace regular lines over the hills, and their harvest supports the region. Historically, gardens have also had many other functions: monasteries had gardens for culinary and medicinal herbs, as well as cloisters for prayer and meditation. Villa gardens nurtured the Arts, as ideal location for philosophical debate, poetry, sculpture, music and theatre. Wealthy patrons used gardens to display their power and culture, or sponsored Botanical gardens devoted to medical and botanical research.

The Renaissance gardens, a revival of Ancient Roman architecture and ideals which was codified by the architect L.B. Alberti, were self-sufficient units, surrounded by agricultural fields and woodland for hunting and fuel collection. The Medici family's rule is symbolized by their many decorative and productive Villas surrounding Florence. Baroque gardens, such as Boboli, became increasingly lavish and theatrical, and food production gave way to cultivating exotic plants.

Knowledge of plants is essential to our understanding of local art, history and society. There is a constant interplay between horticulture and culture: plants such as Citrus require their own purpose-built shelter, the "limonaia" (orangerie) which is an important feature of many gardens. Other plants are represented in art, and grown in gardens, for their symbolical value. Still other plants are used as architectural building blocks to make up avenues, vistas, and backdrops to statuary.

Many of the philosophical and aesthetic ideals which are projected onto a garden have their origins in practical considerations: the nature of the soil and the climate are crucial factors. Tuscan gardens are affected by the landscape in which they exist, yet they are distinct from both agricultural and "natural" landscape, so there is always an exciting tension between culture and horticulture in their makeup.

2. OBJECTIVES

The students will learn to identify practical factors of garden and landscape design, and will become aware of the socio/historical background to Tuscan gardens. They will acquire the tools to explore on their own a much wider landscape. A knowledge of natural science will add to their understanding of garden history, while a glimpse of historical and artistic events will complement their botanical studies. As an important facet of Italian art, gardens will add greatly to the formation of art, photography, literature and cinema students.

3. METHOD and FIELD TRIPS

The class is divided into slide lectures in class, and field trips to gardens and other sites. Field trips are an essential part of the course – on occasions there will be specialists to grant you access to areas otherwise shut to the general public. Note: the Certosa is a

religious building, so dress accordingly: no tank tops or shorts. BE sensible: NO flip-flops, wear hiking or running shoes with socks. There is no Poison Ivy but some plants are irritant, so don't provoke them with naked ankles.

VERY IMPORTANT: There are mosquitoes in woodlands, shady and damp places and pretty much anyplace. Don't give them large landing areas on your limbs! Loose and long cotton clothes are good; bring your own mosquito repellent.

Hats, sunscreen and bottle of water are also useful in large gardens.

4. EVALUATION-GRADING SYSTEM

15% Attendance

25% Mid-term exam

20% Take-home assignment 1

30% Take-home assignment 2

10% Class presentation

5. TESTS – ASSIGNMENTS – SOURCES

During the course you will be required to take one exam (Mid-term), two take-home assignment and give a final class presentation.

Mid-term:

4-5 Short answer questions, on plant and garden symbolism, history and characteristics of the gardens studied. 1 map essay and 1 long essay out of a choice. Map essay consists in marking out on a map the main features of a garden we will have visited and discussing the garden in terms of these features.

Assignemnts:

All assignments to be Arial type font size 12, double spaced, printed out. **Must include bibliography**, internet sources are acceptable but not to exceed one half of total sources consulted. A paper with no printed sources in bibliography will be automatically downgraded by one full letter grade! Further details indications on writing papers will be given in handout.

- **Take-home assignment 1**

Length: 3 pages (ca. 1200 words)

Visit "Museo di Firenze com'era" on your own. Write a report on Uten's lunettes. Main issues: what is the architectural development of the Medici Villas as shown in the lunettes? What was the purpose of the lunettes in their original location? How do they relate to the rest of the Museum's collection?

- **Take-home assignment 2:**

Length: 4-5 pages (ca. 1600-1800 words)

Write a report on a garden or park you have visited on your own - anyplace in Florence or in your wider travels. Explain the historical background, style, use/function of the garden, and lead up to your personal impressions and garden analysis. Reports may be illustrated with photographs, drawings, ground plans.

Class presentations:

The final class will be an occasion for showing your fellow students your research topic, sharing your insight and fun. Bring a page of notes of points you want to cover, don't read out your whole paper. Bring some illustrations (photographs, drawings, maps,

ground plans), printed out, as the lecture will be given outdoors, in the perfect garden setting.

6. TEXT BOOK – FURTHER READINGS

Recommended purchase:

Mariachiara Pozzana, Gardens of Florence and Tuscany – a Complete Guide, 2001.

A course pack with a selection of readings will be made available.

Below follows a brief bibliography of recommended books, all of which are available in Villa La Pietra's library.

James Ackerman, The Villa, 1985

Sophie Bajard and Raffaello Bencini, Villas and Gardens of Tuscany, 1993

Daniela Mignani, The Medicean Villas by Giusto Utens, Florence 1991

John Dixon Hunt, ed., The Italian Garden: art, design and culture, 1996

J. Jellicoe and J.C. Sheperd, Italian Gardens of the Renaissance, 1993

Georgina Masson, Italian Gardens, 1961

Charles A. Platt, Italian Gardens, 1993

Van der Ree, Smienk, Steenbergen, Italian Villas and Gardens, 1993

7. LESSONS

1. 25 June – Villa Ulivi

Introduction. What is a garden? Horticulture v. agriculture. Art or food? Features of Tuscan gardens and landscapes. Class lecture and walking visit of Villa La Pietra's gardens.

2. 27 June - Field trip

Museo di San Marco and Giardino dei Semplici.

Images of plants in paintings, religious symbolism. Spiritual healing vs. medical healing. Origins of Botanical Gardens.

Meet in Piazza San Marco, in front of Museo di San Marco, at 9:00 AM.

3. 2 July – Villa Ulivi

Monastic gardens. The Mediaeval Cloister garden and monastic communities. Certosa del Galluzzo, Cloister of Monreale, Sicily, and other European examples. Secular medieval gardens, characteristics and features.

4. 4 July - Field trip:

Certosa del Galluzzo. Monastery cloister gardens and external gardens.

Meet at TOTAL gas station.

5. 9 July – Villa Ulivi

Characteristics of Renaissance Villa Gardens. The Villa as cultural and economic entity. The Medici Villas and gardens.

- Hand in Assignment 1 – Uten's lunettes.

6. 11 July - Field trip.

Boboli gardens, including *giardini segreti* and *grotte*. Boboli's overall structure and development.

Meet in front of Palazzo Pitti at 9 AM.

7. 16 July - Field trip.

Boboli gardens and Giardino Corsi.

Precious exotics. The introduction of foreign plants and their care as an index of wealth and for botanical research. Citrus cultivation and the need for a *limonaia* (orangerie). Giardino Corsi: small 19th century garden with features of Renaissance and Romantic gardens.

Meet in front of Palazzo Pitti at 9 AM

8. 18 July - Villa Ulivi

a) Midterm.

b) Features of Renaissance, Baroque and English landscape gardens.

9. 23 July – Field trip.

Villa Gamberaia, Settignano. Renaissance, Baroque, and neo-Renaissance features of a spectacular private garden overlooking the Arno Valley.

Meet in Piazza San Marco at 8:30 AM. We will be taking bus n.10 to Settignano. Bring 2 city bus tickets (ATAF).

10. 25 July - Field trip.

Giardino Torrigiani in Florence. An exclusive private garden, the largest within the city walls, in the “English landscape” style. The garden can be read as an initiation path signposted by mysterious symbols.

Meet in Piazza della Calza, at Porta Romana, immediately inside city walls, at 9:00 AM.

11. 30 July - Field trip.

Villa Medici di Fiesole, Villa Le Balze. The legacy of the Tuscan Renaissance and the Neo-Renaissance garden.

Meet at TOTAL gas station at 8:30 AM.

- Hand assignment 2

12. 1 August – Villa La Pietra

Villa I Tatti, Villa Capponi, Villa La Pietra. Cecil Pinsent and the Anglo-American legacy in Tuscany. Class and garden lecture.

- CLASS PRESENTATIONS