



Preserving a Grandfather's Legacy: The Lockwood and Elizabeth Kellam de Forest Archives at UCSB

ANN DE FOREST

Your grandfather planted those trees," my grandmother said one afternoon when I was a teenager driving her around Santa Barbara on errands. She waved out the window at a stately row of palms that graced the grounds of the Christian Scientist Church. "He would have loved to see how tall they've grown."

My grandfather, the landscape architect Lockwood de Forest, was a potent absence in my childhood. He had died, too young, six years before I was born. I glimpsed his images on my grandmother's walls, but couldn't quite assemble a satisfactory portrait. How did the photograph of a cherubic toddler with long curls and lace pinafore connect to the charcoal sketch of a handsome young man in an army cap or to the small portrait on my grandmother's bureau, a ruddy-cheeked, bushy-haired man in a boldly checked jacket?

It was easier to find him in the artifacts of his ingenuity scattered throughout my grandmother's house. There was the intriguing "Buffalo," my grandfather's customized Model T, named for the buffalo skins that lined the seats, its wide open back designed, we were

told, so he could haul plants, tools, and materials to his landscape jobs. There were the tall and heavy metal lamps lighting the kitchen and the library which he had built from old gears, propellers, and other machine parts, then covered with shades fashioned from nautical charts and brightly colored Swedish book illustrations. The enchanting dining room with its shiny silver walls was an effect he had created with ordinary radiator paint. From such evidence, I formed a picture in my mind of my grandfather as a character I might meet in a book, an inventive, even eccentric, genius, a whirlwind of energy and creativity who was also full of fun. And my own invented image made me miss all the more the grandfather I never knew.

Yet even in his absence he had a formative effect on me. The house on Todos Santos Lane in Mission Canyon, Santa Barbara, that he and my grandmother, Elizabeth Kellam de Forest, had built the year after they were married was a magical place for a child. Each room had its own specific function, from the spacious kitchen, with its cozy sofa and blazing hearth, to the library lined with intriguing-sounding books like *The*



Lockwood de Forest in the "Buffalo," 1935.

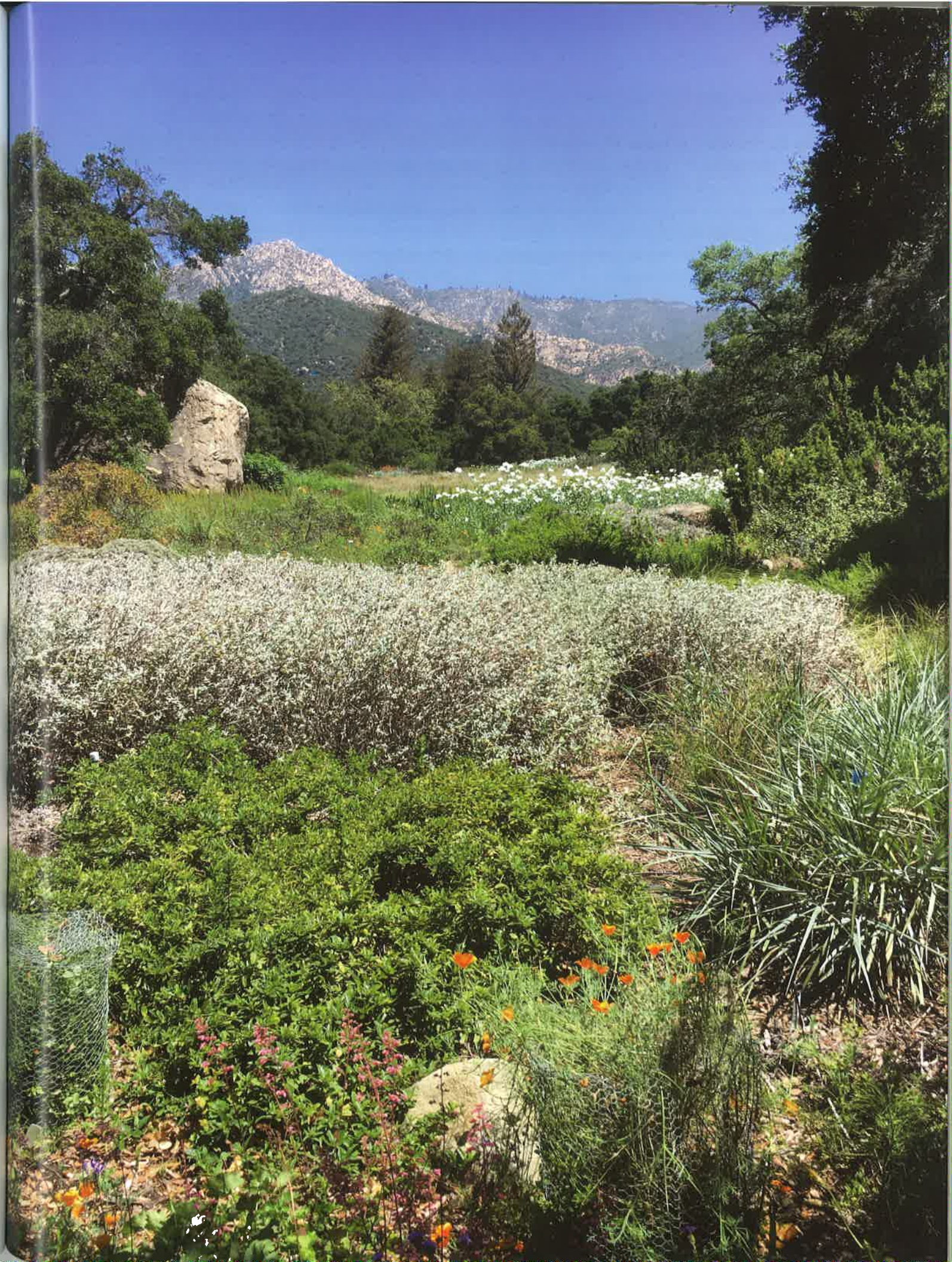
History and Social Influence of the Potato. And each room looked out onto its own garden. Inside and outside flowed together.

The outside was just as enchanting—the broad squishy lawn of kikuyu grass that turned golden yellow in the summer (perfect for practicing cartwheels), foreground to the framed magnificence of Mission Peak; the sequence of "outdoor rooms," intimate secret gardens to discover and explore; the walkway of lavender, perfumed haven for little orange butterflies. For a long time I thought that the emotions these places aroused were tied to my memories of my grandmother. After all, we always called it Grandmother's house, just like in the Thanksgiving song we used to sing on the drive up from L.A., though the rivers we crossed to get there from Los Angeles were usually dry arroyos and the woods allées of eucalyptus or stands of live oak.

But when my brother, sister, and I scrambled over boulders, chased butterflies in the lavender, explored the

hidden nooks of secret gardens, or sipped milk-weakened afternoon tea with my grandmother under the shade of a tree shaped exactly like an umbrella, we didn't yet understand that our grandfather had inspired our adventures or determined our discoveries. As kids, we thought of the vista of Mission Peak as "natural," a lucky gift of living in Mission Canyon. It was only much later, when I knew more about design principles and terms like "siting" and "composition," that I realized it was my grandfather's vision—his exquisite sense of proportion, as my grandmother described it—that shaped those inviting spaces that appealed to eye, hand, and nose. It was his love of stirring up scents as he brushed past them in the garden that accounted for the abundance of lavender and rosemary. My grandmother, an impressive and accomplished landscape architect in her own right, cultivated those gardens and animated those rooms. In doing so, she kept his presence alive for herself, and for all of us.

Meadow, Santa Barbara Botanical Garden, designed by de Forest in 1927. Photograph by Robin Karson.



Later, as I grew older, my grandmother introduced me to Lockwood de Forest's presence and influence in shaping the distinctive character of Santa Barbara. I discovered the Botanical Gardens, where the same mountain peak that graced my grandmother's house and garden rose above a shaggy, colorful meadow that seemed to cascade from its rocky slopes. Once I accompanied my grandmother on a visit to a garden my grandfather had designed in Hope Ranch. I can still picture the low limbs of live oaks casting their sinuous shadows on a green lawn, an energetic assembly that looked as much like a dance as a landscape. On drives through town she would point to the trees he had planted—those columns of palms on Santa Barbara Street, clusters of olives in front of the Lobero Theatre.

From these experiences, I formed a fuller image of who Lockwood de Forest was and what he cared about. This was in the 1970s, when environmentalism and ecology were becoming watchwords, and I noted an affinity between my grandfather's designs and contem-



TOP: Childhood watercolor by de Forest. BOTTOM: Hope Ranch, Montecito, designed by de Forest c. 1928. Photograph by Shreve Ballard, 1938. RIGHT: Elizabeth Kellam de Forest.

porary concerns. The landscapes I encountered incorporated the pitch of the terrain, the shapes of trees, the monumental presence of boulders, and the serene palette of the California hills. My grandfather's were landscapes of response rather than imposition. Later, that perspective would influence the kinds of places I would advocate for in my own writing about design.

My appreciation of my grandfather's genius has grown over the past twenty-five years. Insightful books such as David Streatfield's *California Gardens* and Robin Karson's *A Genius for Place* introduced a broader audience to his work and placed him in a historical and regional context that connects his designs to his predecessors' and contemporaries'. Landscape architects, historians, and design critics began to celebrate Lockwood de Forest's distinctive and influential vision as they discovered the timeliness of his concerns. Nearly a century before a drought-plagued California passed laws against watering lawns, Lockwood de Forest wrote an essay titled "Do Lawns Belong in Southern California?" Today, his advocacy for drought-resistant indigenous plants and water conservation seems uncannily prescient.

In October 2014, members of the California Garden & Landscape History Society met in Santa Barbara for its annual conference to present and discuss Lockwood and Elizabeth Kellam de Forest's lives, landscapes, and enduring legacy. For my family, the conference became



Morton estate, Montecito, designed by de Forest c. 1946. Photograph by William Frederick Peters, 1978.

the impetus to reckon at last with our holdings of historically significant materials related to my grandparents' lives and careers. A scheme was hatched to collect the papers, photographs, and ephemera then deteriorating in a storage locker in Goleta and establish an archive in the superb Architecture & Design Collections at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The family archives would complement the collection of Lockwood de Forest's architectural plans that were being transferred, on the recommendation of Waverly Lowell, (now emeritus) curator of the Environmental Design Archives at Berkeley, to UCSB, where they could better benefit Southern California scholars and designers.

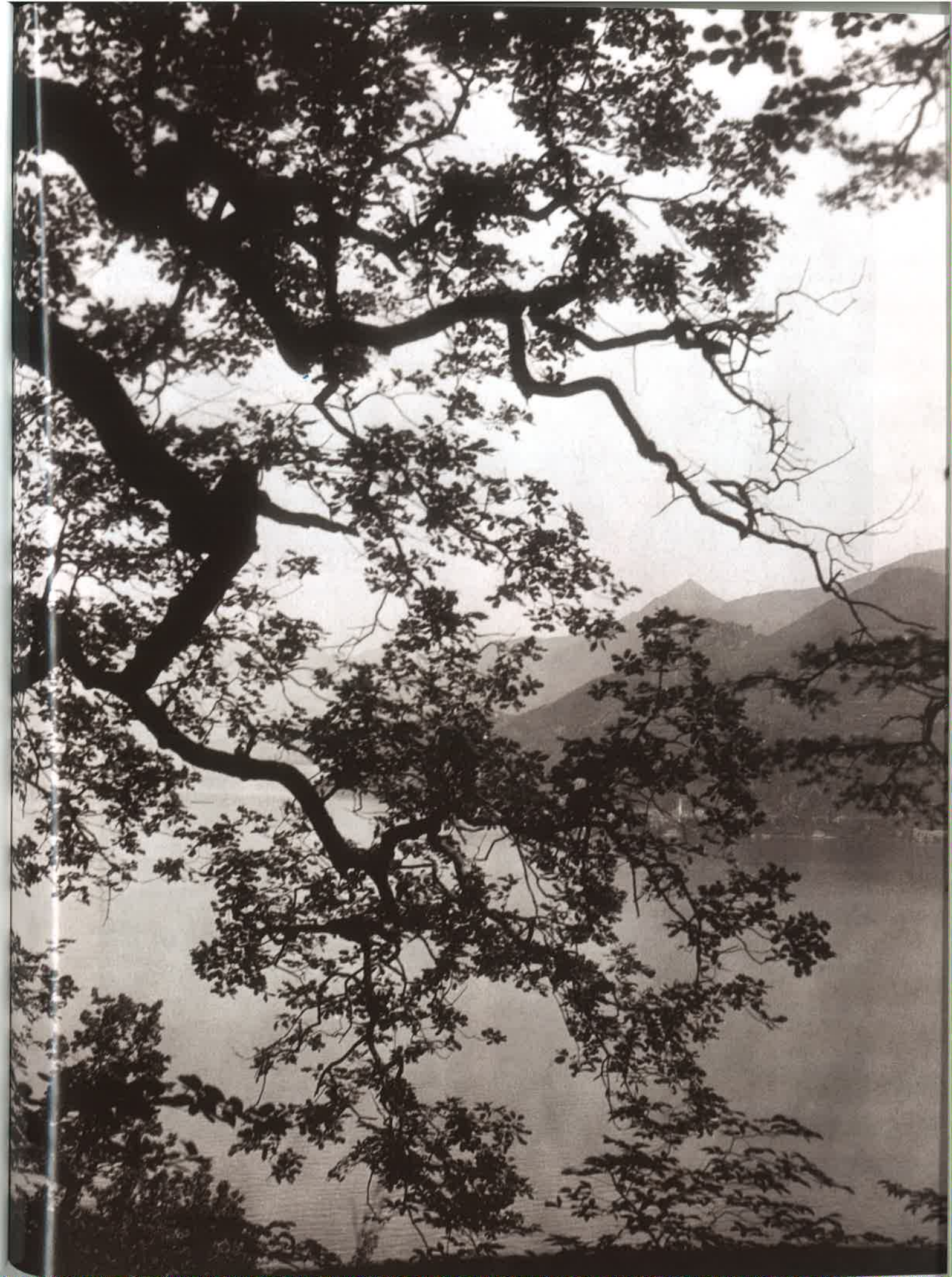
My family's storage unit was at once an archivist's dream and nightmare. On the one hand, its bureau draw-

ers, bookshelves, file cabinets, battered trunks, and cardboard boxes held three generations' worth of family stuff, an unsorted blend of treasure and trash. On the other, the garage-style space on the Goleta coast was easily infiltrated by damp and dust. Mildew, termites, and other vermin do not discriminate between trash and treasure.

Organizing that overwhelming mass of material for an archive was eye-opening. Viewed as family detritus, those stuffed boxes, drawers, and trunks had haunted and overwhelmed me. Whatever was in there—the correspondence between my grandparents when they were courting and then preparing for their wedding, boxes of slides of camping trips to the High Sierra and the Southwest, sketchbooks, even old ledgers from the landscape firm and client files—held



(Clockwise from top left): Cover, "Italy" scrapbook; Basilica, Temple of Ceres, Paestum; Wright Ludington and friends, Montefiascone. OPPOSITE: Lake Como.



sentimental interest. Viewed from a historian's perspective, the ephemera of account books, old bills, and shopping lists transformed into potentially valuable evidence. Santa Barbara-based landscape historian Susan Chamberlin, David Streatfield, and Robin Karson were all instrumental in helping us understand that these personal papers, including letters, sketches, paintings, and photographs, provided invaluable records and insights. Thanks to their efforts, especially to Robin Karson and the Library of American Landscape History, who organized a successful fundraising campaign to purchase the archives and generously donate them to UCSB, scholars and others can now peruse such revealing artifacts as a charming hand-lettered scrapbook and photo album from de Forest's 1922 trip through Italy, which inspired his earliest landscapes; an album of Carolyn and Edwin Gledhill's photographs of Val Verde showcasing Wright Ludington's collection of antiquities in situ; the extensive correspondence between Lockwood and Elizabeth during their engagement, in which they discuss plans for their magazine, *The Santa Barbara Gardener*, and the house and garden they would build in Mission Canyon; and



Ravello, from the hotel garden.



Tower in the garden of Villa Rufolo.

even, since the archive also holds some objects, one of de Forest's lamps made from machine parts.

In UCSB's Architecture & Design Collections, the Lockwood and Elizabeth Kellam de Forest archives join a collection of more than one million drawings in addition to papers, photographs, models, decorative objects, and furniture, representing such luminaries of Southern California design as Irving Gill, Cliff May, Rudolph M. Schindler, Lulah Maria Riggs, George Washington Smith, and Kem Weber. These archives, spanning the late nineteenth century to the present day, serve as an invaluable resource for historians as well as working architects, landscape architects, and designers.

"The synergy among all these collections is thrilling," says Jocelyn Gibbs, the recently retired curator of the ADC. "What makes this gathering of original drawings and papers especially rich is the possibility of tracing landscape designs through the Art, Design & Architecture Museum's collection of the archives of Southern California architects." Gibbs points out that many of the architects with whom Lockwood de Forest collaborated are represented in the collection, as well as contemporary architects such as Barton Myers, who



Gardens, de Forest house, Santa Barbara. Photograph by Steven Keylon.

designed one of his signature steel houses on the site of a de Forest landscape in Santa Barbara. Gibbs envisions that synergy reverberating across Southern California and beyond. "After visiting the Richard Neutra archive at UCLA," she speculates, "a scholar will benefit from a visit to UCSB to see Lockwood de Forest's unrealized landscape design for the famous Tremaine house in Santa Barbara."

As time has passed, my grandfather's life and achievements have come to loom larger, just as Mission Peak hovered, sharp and clear, over the back lawn on Todos Santos Lane. The archives in the Architecture & Design Collections offer an opportunity for scholars and students, homeowners and designers to see the man, his life, and his work whole. For me, he is no longer a potent absence but a vital presence.

Gardens, my grandparents once wrote in *The Santa Barbara Gardener*, are "places to enjoy, places to walk through, linger in, or live in." My hope is that, thanks to LALH, the California Garden & Landscape History

Society, and the Architecture & Design Collections at UCSB, Lockwood and Elizabeth de Forest's shared vision for creating enjoyable, livable places—places that are uplifting and sustainable, that awaken all the senses, and that sharpen attention to the natural grandeur outside their composed, cultivated confines—will continue to inspire us all.

Ann de Forest writes fiction and nonfiction that often centers on the resonance of place. She is a contributing writer for *Hidden City Philadelphia* and editor of *Extant*, the magazine of the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia.

A Genius for Place (LALH, 2007) by Robin Karson includes two chapters on Lockwood de Forest Jr., one of eight landscape architects profiled in this pioneering study of the distinct American style of landscape design developed during the Country Place Era.