

A Garden to Visit

WILTSHIRE: Iford Manor



If ever a west country garden deserves the description 'sublime', it has to be this one. Granted, it poured with rain during our visit but this just seemed to unlock the garden's real secret: it's a rain garden.

The interplay between the sound of water, rain on glistening surfaces and shiny evergreen leaves created a luminous and ethereal effect here.

For me, Iford Manor manages to balance a Zen-like sensibility in the planting and layout of spaces with a rather provocative (pastiched?) approach to the siting of classical architectural features and statuary. The overall effect is of a place where time seems to stand still, poised between epochs, falling through the gap between one era and another.

Above all, I sensed a joyful playfulness on the part of the garden's original designer and owner, Harold Peto, in the juxtaposition of artefacts and features from different eras. There is a bold, provocative challenge to the garden visitor (and garden designer) here that I found to be exhilarating.

From a design point of view, I especially liked the fact that Peto didn't set out to hide the gradient of this steeply sided slope at all. In fact, the slope is accentuated in the many stone staircases and viewpoints that are aligned on the gradient. I liked the way that this distorted my sense of distance and the optical effects created by looking sharply down or up.

Walking around the site and following weaving paths both across the gradient and up and down it, it is a garden that exercises your curiosity to the full.

Sounds (particularly the many water features) and disappearing paths are used to draw you ever inwards towards the heart of the garden.

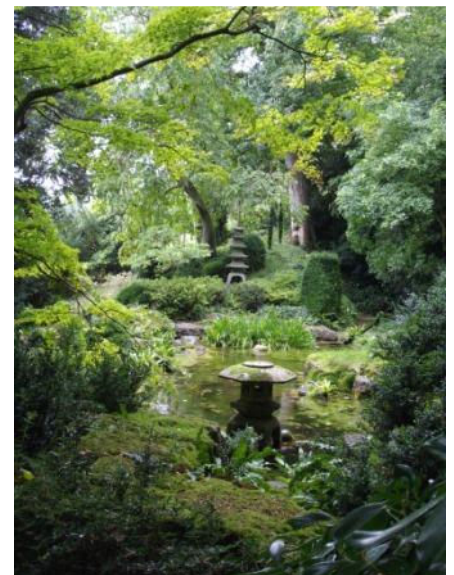
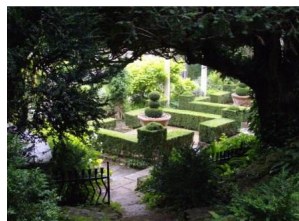
For me, the garden's centre is a formal patio terrace with topiarised box. Here is where the Greco-Zen threads become thoroughly entwined. It made me chuckle at the chutzpah of it – but I respected and enjoyed it hugely, too.

Nestled in a narrow valley with foreshortened views, Iford Manor is the place to visit whenever you may find yourself in the mood to remove yourself from the hustle and bustle for a few hours.

Iford Manor also provides an important reminder of the power inherent in the simple monochrome planting scheme.

Here, there is every shade of green, carefully pruned topiary makes way for lush aquatics, sweeping turf laps against mature shrub borders. Nowhere does the maxim that green is the universal unifier make more sense than here.

So, try to plan a day when the heavens will open – Iford Manor will then yield up its hidden treasure.



Directions:

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