

# TOWN & COUNTRY

ESTABLISHED IN 1846

Our Special  
Fashion Issue

## The Lightness Of Spring

A New Muse  
For Valentino

Blues in the  
Night—and  
The Day

The Season's  
Strongest  
Suits

Plus: Our  
Exclusive  
Runway  
Report



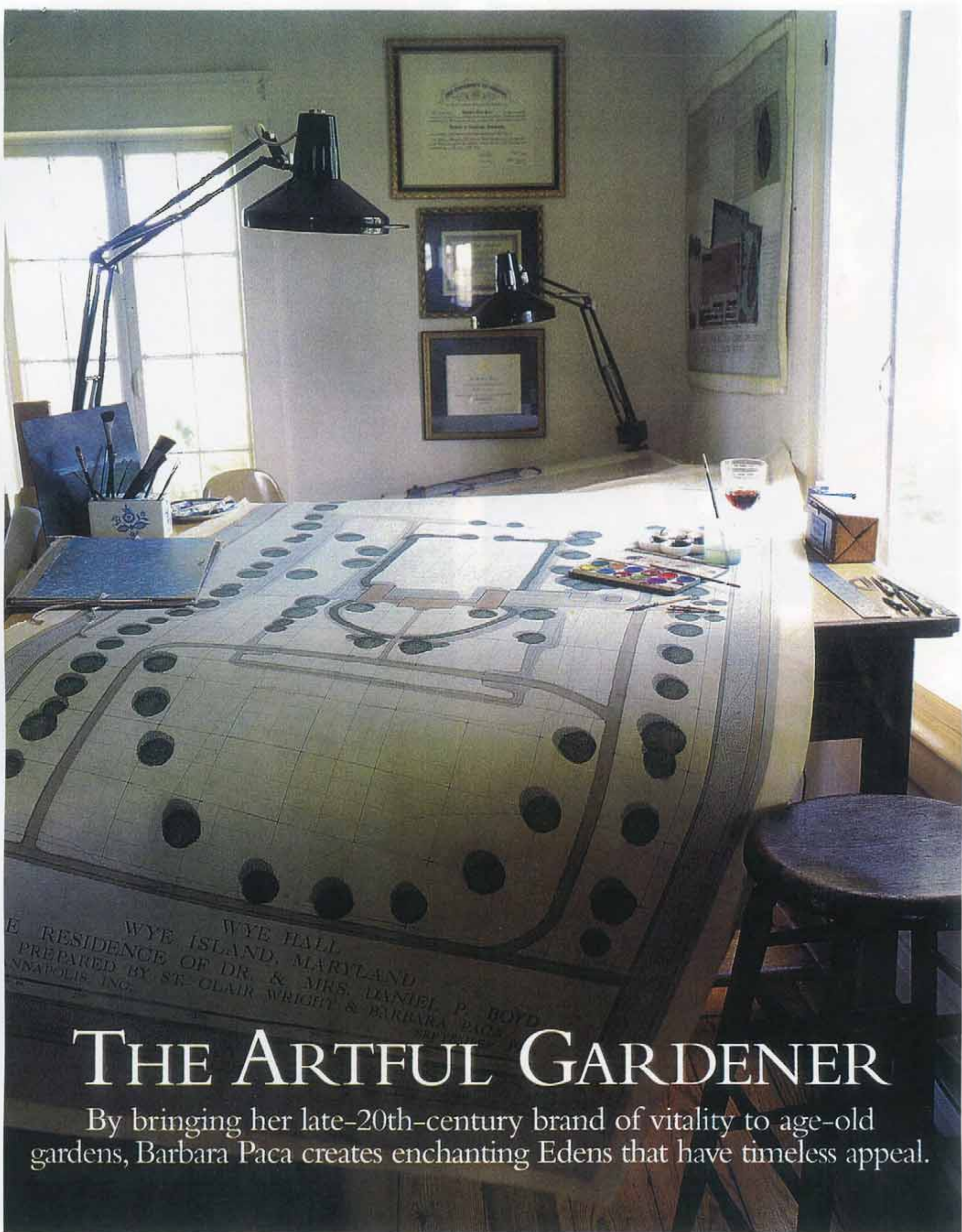
MARCH 1998  
\$4.00 CANADA \$5.00



H.R.H. Princess Rosarica  
of Bulgaria in Valentino



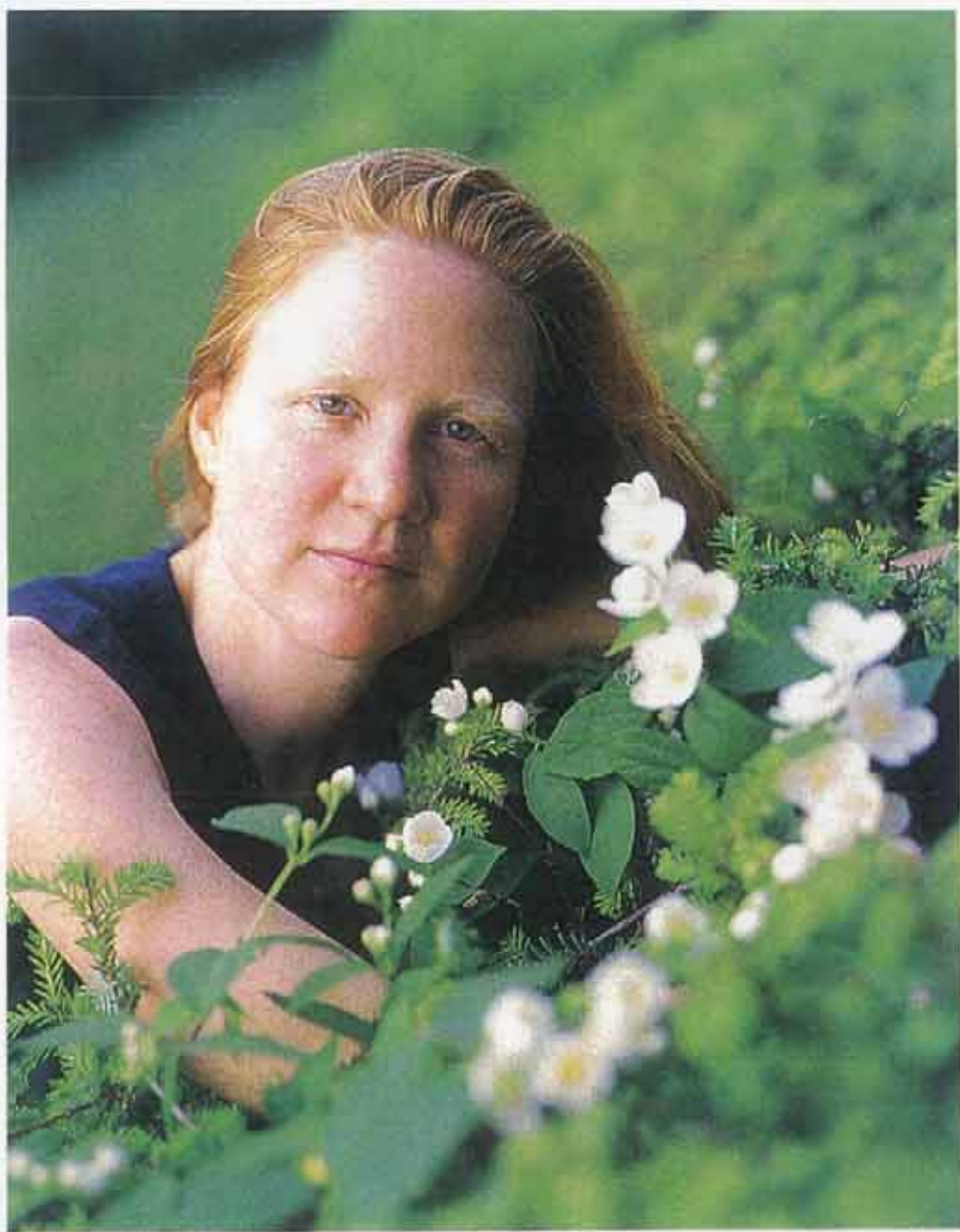
*Arbor Ardor: At the William Paca garden in Annapolis, Maryland, a conical American holly—whose Latin name, fittingly, is Ilex opaca 'Governor Paca'—is framed by a fruit-tree-covered arbor. The restoration of the 18th-century garden marked the impressive professional debut of Paca's descendant, the landscape architect and historian Barbara Paca. Opposite, the Maryland studio of "Paca the Younger."*



WYE HALL  
WYE ISLAND, MARYLAND  
RESIDENCE OF DR. & MRS. DANIEL P. BOYD  
PREPARED BY ST. CLAIR WRIGHT & BARBARA PACA  
ANNAPOLIS, MD.

# THE ARTFUL GARDENER

By bringing her late-20th-century brand of vitality to age-old gardens, Barbara Paca creates enchanting Edens that have timeless appeal.



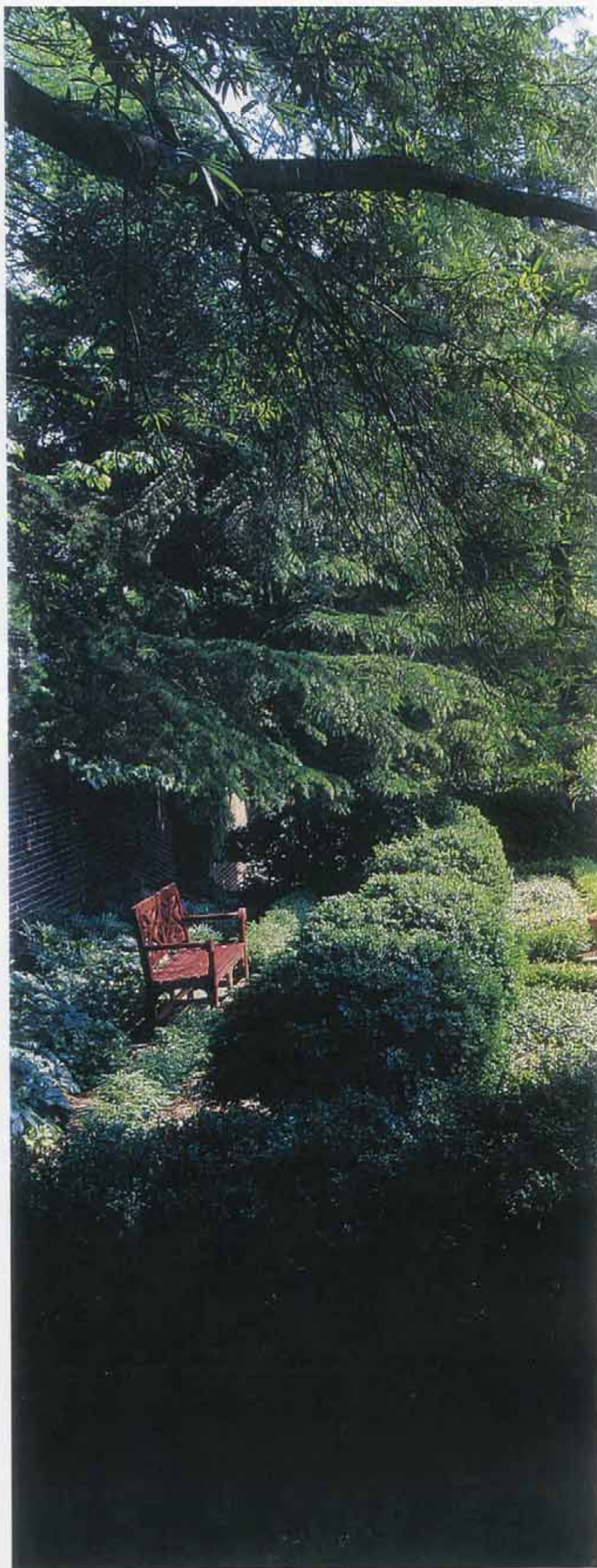
BY CAROLINE SEEBOHM  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTOPHER BAKER

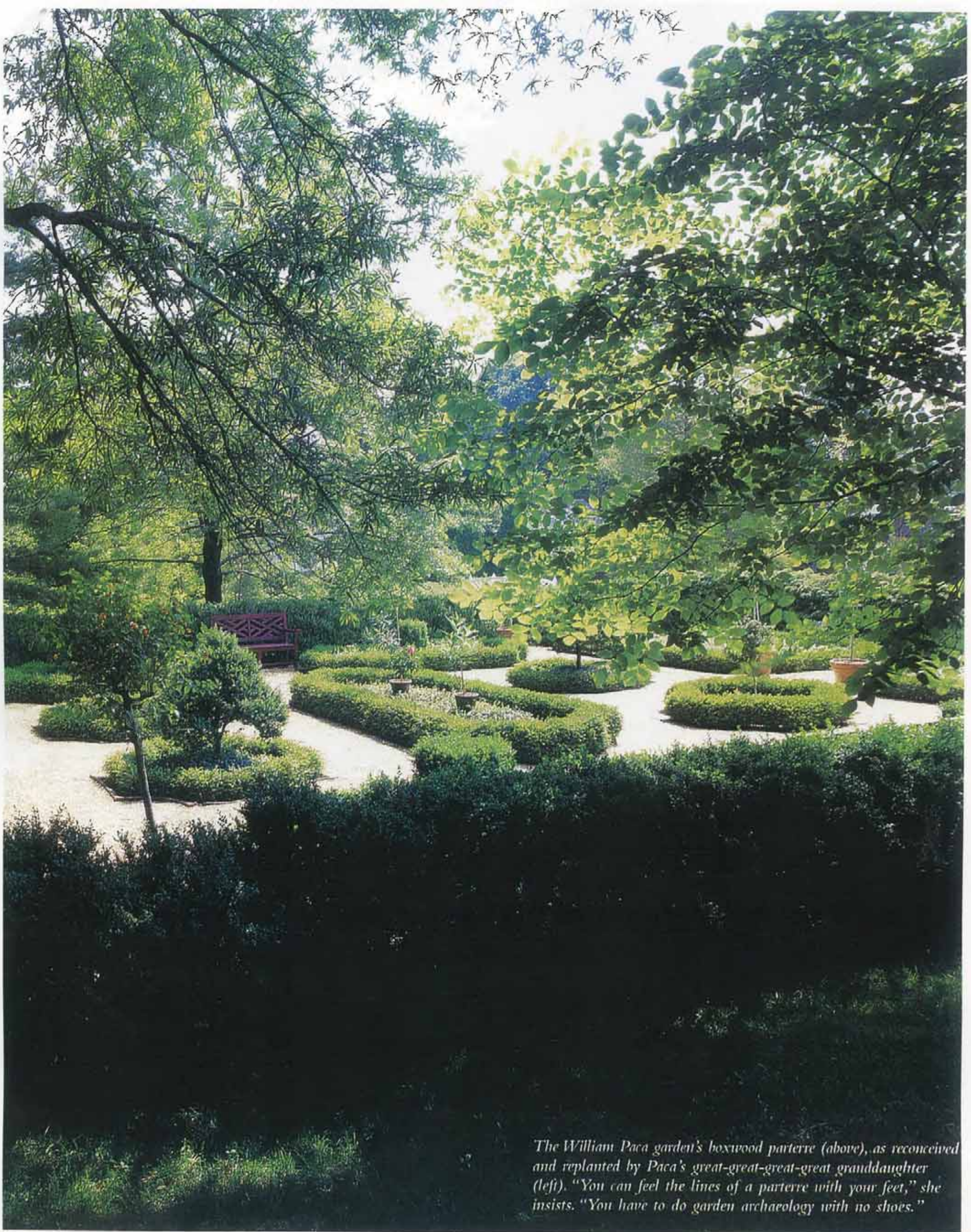
**W**alking through a garden with Barbara Paca is like “chasing an ignited match,” says landscape architect, artist and one-time co-worker Perry Guillot. Six feet tall, red hair flaming down her back, clippers and measuring tape in hand, Paca is one of a new breed of landscape gardeners—part historian, part architect, part arborist—who bring to their work a unique mixture of scholarship, energy and originality.

Although she is steeped in the arcane byways of botanical science and mathematical equations, Paca communicates an infectious pleasure in the hands-on aspects of her work. When she talks about soil compaction and hydraulics, her eyes flash with excitement. She is equally lyrical about a topiary hedge and the metal wiring that supports it. Her delight in the curl of a leaf or the slope of a lawn is palpable. “You can feel the lines of a parterre with your feet,” she instructs. “You can sense if the edges are sunken. You have to do garden archaeology with no shoes.”

Suddenly one longs to pace (a suitably Paca-like word) barefoot up and down one’s own garden, searching for hidden *allées*, bowling greens, ruined follies and heirloom plants still surviving after centuries.

Restoring historic gardens requires not only an acute knowledge of botany and history but also an almost mystical feel for the





*The William Paca garden's boxwood parterre (above), as reconceived and replanted by Paca's great-great-great-great granddaughter (left). "You can feel the lines of a parterre with your feet," she insists. "You have to do garden archaeology with no shoes."*

*At a private estate outside New York City, Paca revamped the house's 1930s gardens, which, through neglect and poor judgment, had over the years come to resemble "a corporate nightmare."*





*genius loci*, or spirit of the place. Barbara Paca's ability to "bring back" old gardens is perhaps best illustrated in her first project, undertaken when she was only 19: the restoration of the William Paca gardens in Annapolis, Maryland. William Paca was Barbara's great-great-great-grandfather, a lawyer in the important colonial city of Annapolis, who became governor of the state and then a federal judge appointed by George Washington in the early 1780s. Also a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Paca built a splendid brick house in Annapolis, with two acres of what were described as the finest gardens in the city. There, 200 years later, his young descendant performed a dramatic gardening coup.

The William Paca house had been subsumed into a 220-room hotel, the gardens covered over by a parking lot. About to be demolished in 1965, the estate was rescued by a superhuman effort from the Historic Annapolis Foundation and the Maryland legislature. Specialists were quickly enlisted to restore the house to its original architectural glory, both inside and out, at the same time adapting it to serve as a State Department residence for official state visits. Restoration of the garden began in 1966, and, under the enthusiastic guidance of St. Clair Wright, the foundation's chairman and founder, Barbara Paca (a family friend and protégé) was enlisted in 1979 to help raise her distinguished ancestor's horticultural masterpiece from the rubble.

The garden was originally a series of terraces that included flower, rose, boxwood and holly parterres, a kitchen garden, a fishpond, and a series of undulating beds filled with native plants forming a wilderness garden. Working from a

*A consultant at the Ladew Gardens, in Monkton, Maryland, Paca has replanted and revived the largest topiary garden in the United States. Above, a lead statue of a shepherdess peers out from a towering wall of eastern hemlock.*

single contemporary painting that survived the period—a picture of Paca by Charles Willson Peale that happened to portray part of the garden in the background—Barbara Paca painstakingly unraveled the garden's secrets.

It was an astonishing project. After 14 feet of fill had been removed to reach the remains of the original garden, excavations revealed the foundation of a neoclassical pavilion shown in Peale's picture. Walkways, drainage patterns and traces of brickwork led to more confident assumptions about the original design. There were stranger discoveries: William Paca had designed his fishpond in the shape of a fish. Unusual, yes, but Barbara Paca had seen a similar pond at Wroxton Abbey in England and thought it likely her ancestor had visited there, too, and carried the idea back with him to the U.S. She brought into play other contemporary documents and paintings relating to 18th-century gardens. With experts at the National Arboretum, she examined and analyzed woody samples buried all those years under the asphalt parking lot, for later replication in the planting plan.

But perhaps the most significant gift this young detective made to the re-creation of the William Paca garden was contributing her knowledge of and passion for the theories of the great 16th-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio, whose

commitment to classical architecture and its mathematical symmetry spoke powerfully to Paca's own instincts. As she meticulously drew and redrew all the archaeological drawings, made mock-ups and studied and re-traced faded blueprints for the William Paca garden, she was constantly alert to the benign influence of the Renaissance genius hovering over her drafting table.

"I was obsessed with geometry," Paca says. Like a photograph in developing fluid, the 18th-century bones of the garden, with its double squares and grids, were gradually revealed to her. But something didn't seem to fit. "In measuring the drawings, we came up with weird numbers," she remembers. "Sixteen-and-a-half-foot increments. Why? Then in a dream I saw a house being surveyed with a device called a Gunter's chain, which was used in the 18th century to lay out fields. One-quarter of the chain was sixteen and a half feet, and I suddenly realized that William Paca had laid out his garden beds to relate proportionately to the footprint of the house itself."

Dreams and revelations are the stuff of Paca's life and seem to follow her wherever she goes. In Ireland, Paca's immersion in the 18th century found a more recent outlet at Birr Castle. To her amazement, Paca discovered that the castle archives contained the *Miscelanea Structura Curiosa*, a strikingly eccentric folio of drawings by the 18th-century architect and landscape designer Samuel Chearnley. Thanks to a Fulbright scholarship and with the support of Birr's owner, the Earl of Rosse, Paca was able to seize upon this treasure trove, and her affinity for this mysterious creator of fountains, fantasies and follies is driving her to write a treatise and arrange an exhibition of his unusual work. Paca is also redesigning and restoring the castle's mostly 18th-century grounds, not only to preserve the many rare species of trees and shrubs taken there over the centuries by Lord Rosse's family but also to help turn the demesne into Ireland's first Historic Science Centre.

Barbara Paca's childhood was a good training ground for these challenges. Born in California, she was raised with five siblings in Arizona, where she spent most of her time outdoors. "As a child I thought I was a Native American," she says. Encouraged by her grandfather, an organic gardener and inveterate explorer, she learned about the environment, how to climb mountains and survive in the desert.

But her family was also deeply intellectual, with much reading and little TV at home. Both her grandmothers were English, well traveled and artists. Like her eldest sister, who became a preservation architect, Paca was fascinated by the structure of things; at age 12, she was given her first drafting table, so she could practice drawing buildings.

After completing a five-year professional degree in landscape architecture at the University of Oregon, Paca received a Master of Fine Arts and a Ph.D. in the Department of Art and

*At right, Ladew's whimsical grouping of yews holds a formal conversation. One of Paca's contributions was to ensure that these unique topiary gardens survive blight and old age.*





Barbara Paca's heart is wedded to the 18th century. Her devotion is to the proportions developed in the classical era, and she will not take on a garden that does not have "good bones."



## The Artful Gardener

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 144

Archaeology at Princeton. While accumulating these academic honors, she worked in England as a conservator of historic landscapes, parks and gardens; became a consultant at Morven, the 18th-century house in Princeton used until recently as the residence of the governor of New Jersey; and spent two summers, at the invitation of the Italian government, surveying the gardens of the Farnese Palace in Caprarola, the Villa Lante at Bagnaia and the Quirinal Palace in Rome. Awarded many fellowships, she pursues both historical and botanical research in Europe and the United States (including a year at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton that ended last summer), and she is a scholar of Greek mathematics and classical literature as well.

These credentials make her unique in her profession. With her historian's eye, she teases information out of recalcitrant old documents. With her drafting skills, she produces landscape drawings and blueprints of such elegance and style that they are prized as art. With her impressive connections on several continents, she can match a useful person with a project and maintain a steady stream of new ideas.

In all her projects, Paca seeks to establish a connection between house and garden. She spends a great deal of time indoors—stalking rooms for clues, exam-

ining light, proportions, color schemes. "I walk around the house in the middle of the night. I look at the details of the furniture and see how I can translate them outside. If I see a flower depicted in some upholstery fabric, I'll take that flower and plant it in the garden."

Like all wise garden designers, she also embraces in her plans the exterior of the house. For an estate outside New York City built for *Reader's Digest* founder Lila Acheson Wallace in the 1930s, Paca was presented with gardens that, by the time she arrived on the scene, looked to her "like a corporate nightmare." She completely redesigned the layout of the beds and lawns so that they would flow naturally from the house, planting, for instance, artemesias, old-fashioned dianthus and other silver-leafed plants to reflect its strong exterior statement of blue slate and weathered gray wood and stone. Consistent with her rule about interdependence of interior and exterior, she also selected cutting flowers that would harmonize appropriately with the interior décor of the house.

Yet Barbara Paca is not just a scholar of garden history and architecture. Her wildly imaginative temperament fuels a successful flower-arranging business that provides city dwellers with the colors and scents of their gardens in the country. Paca has also brought her sense of fantasy to bear on weddings: for a recent event in São Paulo, Brazil, she planted hundreds of orchids in trees surrounding the bride's family home.

These no-holds-barred visions of floral splendor are vintage Paca. Despite her formidable scholarship, she has an unfettered mind full of fun and mischief, and takes a joy in creating that is almost childlike. Dividing her time between Maryland horse country and New York City, Paca also moves comfortably from the public arena of institutions to the private domain of individuals, typically taking on ten to twelve commissions at a time. "That's a lot," she concedes. She is intensely discreet, respecting her private clients' wish for anonymity, just as a doc-

## The Artful Gardener

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 152

tor does the confidentiality of his patients. Indeed, Paca is, in a sense, a doctor. Horticulture has always played a therapeutic role in the community. As Paca makes her exuberant rounds, she restores gardens to health, treats sick plants and provides a place of beauty and serenity for their grateful owners. Brimming with ideas, she strides across the landscape, throwing out plant names, telling stories, a modern magician of the soil.

But her heart is wedded to the 18th century. Her devotion is to the proportions developed in the classical era by Euclid and Pythagoras and revived during the Age of Reason, and she will not take on a landscaping project that does not allow her to exercise these principles. The house and garden, to use a common expression, must have "good bones." This brings us back to geometry; that is, the careful planning and laying out of a piece of land, with formal gardens, wild areas and connecting paths all in harmonious relationship to one another and to the house. "Geometry is like the muscle under the land," she says.

Such designs outlast their owners, which is why Barbara Paca is a historian as well as a horticulturist. She believes the great historic gardens not only tell us much about gardening but also offer a more subtly nostalgic pleasure—the sense of time lost and timeliness emanating simultaneously from the pulsating soil. Charles Elliott, a garden essayist living in Wales, writes that "most surviving old gardens are a sort of palimpsest, a manuscript upon which successive generations have written and rewritten their new and often contradictory ideas."

Barbara Paca makes sense of these "manuscripts," turning them into readable volumes that allow us not only to learn how gardeners of the past created their landscapes, but to take their notions of space, line and proportion and translate them into a form of beauty that resonates in our own time as well.

*Barbara Paca can be reached at (917) 282-7102. She charges \$120 per hour, plus 15 percent of a project's total cost.* ❧