

# Gardens for Environment

JARDINES DEL PEDREGAL

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I MUST BEGIN by saying that you will have to bear with me and listen to what I am going to read, because I don't speak English; please forgive my boldness, and I promise you that not more than twenty to twenty-five minutes will you endure this suffering.

It is a great honor to have been invited to this convention of architects through my friend Arquitecto Carlos Contreras, and a greater honor to have been invited to speak on the subject of gardens which has been so well studied and developed by you in California.

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I am only going to express a few different points of view about gardens destined to complete our homes.

Basically, Arquitecto Contreras proposed as the subject for these few words to talk about a residential area which I have been developing for the past four years. This region is called Jardines del Pedregal and the houses and gardens must be built on a desert of lava of the most capricious formations. By happy coincidence, having made a garden for myself, I discovered the possibilities of utilizing that zone to enjoy a marvelous landscape and to build gardens and houses which enhance the beauty of the rocks, taking advantage of their texture and forms as the most decorative and impressive elements.

This work has required linking this zone with the city, and to accomplish this I asked Arquitecto Contreras to plan the layout of my subdivision so that, beside the original character of the landscape, we might be able to build up a development for private gardens; one for each house, limited and enclosed with walls, trees and foliage to screen the view from the outside and from neighboring houses.

In support of this idea of private gardens, in absolute contrast with

the open gardens which are built in America and in Mexico around the house, I am going to give you a few concepts about the ways of life of the modern world, trying to find the differences which are the causes of these two types of gardens, the open and the closed ones.

One of the characteristics of modern man all around the world, in Mexico as well as here, is that he lives in public; the greater part of his time is taken up in living publicly. Lunch and dinner most of the time are taken away from home. Lunch time is used to talk business, and dinner to eat and to make acquaintances, and, in Mexico, breakfast time also. Vacation time and all free hours also are part of the public life—clubs, bars, sports, and moving pictures. Weekend trips are lived generally in groups of strangers, from the familiar point of view.

Finally, the moments which, through sheer necessity, are available are used to communicate with the outside world through radio and television, which brings to your bedroom the sporting events, musical programs and news. Also the use of the telephone represents public life—life in public—which invades all private life with calls which take man from his home

for appointments of a business or social nature. It is through these facts, that the type of modern man living in public, and for the sake of publicity, has produced these open gardens which cannot have either the enchantment or the advantages of the private gardens.

I ask myself at what time of the day the modern man that lives this kind of life can meditate and allow his imagination the development of creative and spiritual ideas, and also I ask myself if this way of life permits one to find the peace and serenity that every man should have every day and especially in present times.

So I do not see that open gardens help the daily rest either of the spirit or of the body. They are enjoyed as we pass by in our cars at thirty to fifty miles per hour, but they do not invite us to sit down to use them as living-rooms. It is important that the garden, especially in some climates and in some parts of the world, during whole seasons, may serve as living-rooms, to sit and to eat, and as meeting ground for the dwellers of the house. I would like to express clearly the spiritual and physical rest which one may derive from the habit of spending some time daily in a garden, which gives one

the same sensation of private and intimate ownership as that of a traditional home. Such a garden leads a man to the common use of beauty as much as the use of our daily bread, and causes man unconsciously to fall in an atmosphere of spontaneous meditation without any effort and with reduced nervous tension. To support this idea I recall Catherine of Russia, who said that when she had problems of government, and found no solution for them through her counselors, wandering through her gardens always gave her the best solution and, in addition, peace to her mind.

So, I believe that architects must have gardens to be used, as much as the houses they build, to develop the sense of beauty and the taste and inclination toward the fine arts and other spiritual values.

Now I wish these words about private and public gardens might bring us to the conclusion that, without doing away with the necessary and unavoidable public life that man requires nowadays for pleasure's sake or as a necessity for his activities in the community, we must give back to him the treasure of having more private life through the private garden. Such a garden helps so much in the development

of personality and in avoiding standardization of the mind.

I ask myself if, beside gardens for private homes, we may be able to build gardens of a private nature for community housing groups. I believe it can be done if we study these community gardens—like those of the Generalife in Granada—as a common garden with such characteristics that the individual may feel in those partial and separate garden areas—with intimate nooks and corners—in *his own* garden. Of course one must be careful to have the character and atmosphere of these gardens modern and functional in their planning and design and in their plastic beauty.

Another question is the appearance of streets and avenues in such a subdivision with private gardens, and here I can say that streets, limited by walls, are not objectionable, provided these walls are treated satisfactorily from a plastic point of view with trees, vines and flowers as if they were vertical gardens.

Adding to the walled-in streets decorative works: railings that will not destroy the privacy of the gardens; groups of trees set back in corners from the natural limits of the streets; fountains and other

elements, one may have “garden-streets” with a special appearance, and, as an additional element of attraction, a factor of beauty: the “sex-appeal” of the gardens—the element of *mystery*. This element cannot fail to be used in the art of garden building, and so we may recall the pleasure of walking in some of the streets of Florence, limited by the walls of its large villas and gardens; in the streets of Rome and so many other cities bound by private gardens, the beauty of which goes out from walls and gates, bringing forth a greater beauty and attraction than many of the streets with open gardens that one finds in America and in Mexico City.

Likewise I can tell, especially to people that know Mexico, about the beauty of streets lined with walls and fountains, like Patzcuaro, where one finds the attraction of the streets opening and leading into open spaces and plazas with trees and fountains that increase the beauty of the streets.

Besides these ideas, that served as guiding motives in the subdivision of the Pedregal, we studied to preserve the harmony of the architectural development and the landscape. We allowed only the construction of contemporary ar-

chitecture, and we obtained municipal regulations requiring builders to design and build only modern contemporary architecture, expressing clearly that by “Modern” we do not accept what is known as California Colonial.

These regulations were made for the public at large, and now that I am talking to this distinguished group of modern architects it would be absurd to explain these regulations to you. But in Mexico we have had the misfortune of the influence of California Colonial, the use of which in our country is so absurd, since this style was brought to Mexico, and from Mexico to California. Los Angeles and Hollywood then exported it once again to Mexico as California’s Spanish Colonial.

Speaking of this bad influence we have received in Mexico, I must say that the architects of Mexico have had in the last few years a fine and valuable influence from many of the architects of California through their works, their publications and the personal relations and friendships with them, as in the case of Richard Neutra who has been three times in Mexico and who is known internationally; Frank Lloyd Wright and others, like Raymond Loewy who built

for himself a house in Tetelapa—a small village about fifteen miles from Mexico City—and a good friend of Mexican architects.

When I speak of these influences I do not wish to say that Mexican architects copy the works of the architects that I have mentioned, or of other prominent architects in this country, but they have tried to study the principles that have guided the solution of such problems in the United States, and to use them in solving our problems in Mexico, in the various regions. We are trying to have the gardens and the houses that we design and build show that they are modern works, realized in accordance with the site, the program, and the building materials required in each case.

In the subdivision of Jardines del Pedregal, with exaggerations due to the baroque formation in texture and forms, we have found that, in order not to harm and spoil this landscape beauty, and to create beautiful architectural forms that will not compete with them, they must be of such simplicity—abstract in quality, preferably straight lines, flat surfaces, and primary geometric forms.

An advantage found in this rocky formation is its fertility, due to two important factors: 1) the

cracks and porous condition of the rocks, with earth formed by dust laid over thousands of years by rain, and 2) the regular and even climate, with the heat of the sun slowly radiating back and preserving the rocks.

The grass lawns, so necessary in the gardens of modern life, have presented no difficulties for us. We have used the rock projections, removing them and using this stone in the construction of walls, leaving the free flat area for the grass lawns, which only need a layer of vegetable earth, a foot in depth; with no drainage problems, since the water finds an outlet through the cracks of the rocks.

I am now planning to build a *dry garden*, one with rocks only, no trees and no vegetation, paths and walks of black sand. This

will be another experiment on this volcanic strata.

To close, I wish to bring to you some old principles of the art of garden making: one must not overdo the theme of circular panoramic vistas—views—because a landscape that is held and framed with a proper foreground is worth double. I prefer always uneven grounds and of the craziest shapes, because they certainly assure success in gardening. Blessed be the geological disturbances!

And finally, I recall a thought of a great French writer and landscape artist, Ferdinand Bac, who said that a garden holds within itself the whole universe; it is the prize for our work, and in the art of garden making we find the greatest sum of serenity of which the work of man is capable.