
Lockwood deForest Collection, 1920-1949

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Environmental Design Archives

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Note

Arts and Humanities--ArchitectureHistory--California HistoryGeographical (By Place)--California

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Collection Number: 1965-2

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Title: Lockwood deForest Collection,

Date (inclusive): 1920-1949

Collection Number: 1965-2

Creator: deForest, Lockwood, 1869-1949

Extent: 1 half box, 12 flat file drawers

Repository: Environmental Design Archives.

College of Environmental Design.

University of California, Berkeley.

Berkeley, California

Language: English.

Access

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

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Access Points

Landscape architects--California.

Landscape architecture--California.

Gardens.

Biography

By David Streatfield

Lockwood deForest, III (1869-1949)

(known professionally as Lockwood deForest, Junior)

Lockwood deForest III was born in New York City. He was the youngest of the three children of Lockwood deForest II, landscape painter, amateur architect and interior designer, former partner of Louis Comfort Tiffany, art dealer and an acknowledged authority on Indian Architecture. In 1912 he was sent to Thacher School, Ojai, California, where he developed a deep love for Californian landscapes and plein air painting. deForest attended Williams College for one semester, worked briefly for a landscape architect in Baltimore and took a summer class in landscape architecture at Harvard University prior to serving as a volunteer in World War I.

He returned to California after the war to embark on a brief and unusual professional education. He studied Landscape Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley for one year. In 1921 he traveled for three months in Italy, Spain, France and England studying historic gardens and public parks, being especially fascinated by Spanish fountains, the gardens of Seville and the Maria Luisa Park by J. C. N. Forestier. He also spent several weeks studying plants at Kew Gardens.

From 1921 to 1922 he worked in Santa Barbara with the landscape architect Ralph Stevens. From 1922 until his early death in 1949, apart from one year in the second world war, deForest practiced as a gentleman landscape architect in the affluent communities of Santa Barbara county. His practice was largely residential, although he worked on several schools, including Thacher, and was a consultant to a number of civic organizations.

deForest was an engaging figure who was greatly appreciated by his clients for his wit, casual dress and strong passion for cars. His Model A Ford car was stripped down to the chassis, had Buffalo hide covered seats, and a rear platform for carrying plants.

From 1925 until 1942 he co-edited *The Santa Barbara Gardener* with his wife, Elizabeth Kellam deForest. This magazine was modest, with no illustration, and provided gardening advice for what they considered an unique horticultural area. While the main emphasis was on horticulture, many articles state deForest's design philosophy clearly.

deForest's designs often used clear formal and axial geometries combined with carefully selected plants complimenting the colors and textures of the regional landscape. His horticultural knowledge was considerable and he played a major role in introducing and experimenting with the use of new plants from South Africa. Rejecting stylistic eclecticism his designs are notable for very simple detailing and bold sometimes theatrical effects achieved entirely with plants. He was one of the earliest Californian landscape architects to question the ubiquitous and generous use of irrigated lawns. His early training as a landscape painter accounts for the painterly quality in much of his work. One consistent theme in his writing is the capturing of views of the regional landscape through the elimination of views of the middle ground.

'Val Verde' (1926-1949), was his most significant project and involved a highly creative collaboration with Wright Ludington. Ludington was a gifted amateur painter, a major collector of Classical art and a pioneering collector of modern painting. In two major periods in the 1920s and 1930s deForest transformed the rather boxy house designed in 1915 by Bertram Goodhue into a remarkable evocation of a classical villa with an abstract and dramatic garden setting off Ludington's collection of classical sculpture.

deForest's own small courtyard house and garden (1927) foreshadowed many of the qualities of modernist Californian gardens of the 1940s. His use of sharawadgi expanded the sense of space by completely dissolving the garden's boundaries. At the William Dickenson estate (1929-32) in Hope Ranch, one of his largest commissions, silver tones subtly unified the garden with the regional setting of ocean and mountains in the late afternoon.

From 1927-1942 and 1945-1949 he provided design advice to the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, which is devoted to the display of native plants, and served on numerous committees and as a trustee. He laid out trails to enhance visitor appreciation of the existing native plant communities with minimal disturbance and collaborated with Beatrix Farrand on the design of the Wildflower Meadow. In the late 1930s he disagreed strongly with some of her formalist proposals, believing that the garden should have a simple naturalistic character.

His practice was profoundly affected by the Depression. Commissions were smaller and maintenance became a major design factor. In a number of projects in the San Francisco Bay region designed with the architect, William Wurster, he explored the simple use of geometrically patterned colored concrete. deForest also began to practice architecture on a small scale, designing minor remodeling projects and a series of small ranch houses and beach houses. The *Moderne* Nicholas Ludington house (1932) and the Reese Taylor house (1936) at Carpinteria were illustrated respectively in *House Beautiful* and *Country Life in America*. In these and other houses he experimented with unusual and highly practical details for cabinets and lighting.

From 1942 to 1944 deForest served as a volunteer with the Camouflage Division of the U. S. Air Corps. This experience undoubtedly influenced his final transformation of 'Val Verde', where the formerly white walls were skillfully painted in numerous coats to create the illusion of an old weathered villa.

His post-war practice included the design of several small houses, most notably the Ernest Watson weekend house, Montecito (1948) which was published by Sunset Magazine as an innovative example of a well planned small house. The house appears to sit in the landscape without a garden foreground as a result of his use of local boulders and a palette of largely native plants. The axial Sterling Morton garden (1948-49) was one of his most grandiloquent mountain-oriented vistas.

While little known at the time of his death deForest seemed eager to fully embrace modernist ideas. There is little doubt that his work influenced Thomas Church. Following his death in 1949 the entry terraces to the Santa Barbara Art Museum were made into a public memorial, one of a very small number of public monuments to American landscape architects.

Scope and Contents Note

The deForest collection consists primarily of landscape drawings, arranged alphabetically by project name. The majority of these drawings relate to residential projects in Southern California, including large estates such as "Val Verde." Non-residential projects include the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, clubs, schools, exhibits, and a few commercial properties. Occasionally included are drawings of buildings designed by architects such as Chester L. Carjola, William W. Wurster, George Washington Smith, Robert Stanton, Requa and Jackson, and Lulah Maria Riggs.

The collection also includes a small amount of textual records, including some specifications. These records also include deForest's copy of his pamphlet *The Plants of Santa Barbara*, and a card file that served as a catalog of plants for the Santa Barbara region. The file is arranged alphabetically within four subject areas: trees and shrubs, vines, perennials and bulbs, and grasses.
