



## Designing a Garden for Views from Inside the House

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*From the May 2006 issue of the Study Group Newsletter.*

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The first question that springs to mind here is: What is a view? For a suburban house, views may include not just the garden, but fences, houses, street, cars, passersby, trees in the neighbours' gardens, TV aerials, power poles, telephone wires, sky. Much of this is neither wonderful nor exciting.

Looking around at the views from inside my own house, I realise that I've found the creation of pleasing views from the front rooms of my suburban house much more challenging than from the back. This may be because I am caught between two conflicting aims, to screen my activities from the street at the same time as maintaining my own outlook. From my study in the front of the house I can see quite a lot beyond my own front garden - neighbouring houses and tall eucalypts which take the light beautifully on sunny afternoons. I am lucky enough to live in a quiet court, where the wires are all underground and there are no footpaths. I enjoy seeing some movement in the street - children on bikes, people taking their dogs to the park.

But a short walk round the neighbourhood convinced me that most people do not share this preference. Most windows in the front of houses are screened by curtains or blinds, fences or dense vegetation. The gardens are not designed for the occupants to look at, but for the neighbours and the passersby. I wondered what the landscape designers had to say on the subject of views and front gardens and looked up Edna Walling and Ellis Stones.

In *The Vision of Edna Walling*, I found that 'creating views from inside looking out, not just within the garden itself, was of enormous importance to Walling'. Her publications contain many expressive, softly lit black-and-white photographs taken through doorways and windows and there are frequent references to the subject in her writings. For example 'To look through doorways and windows on to fresh green foliage in shady courtyards is to live comfortably and gently in summer'.

Unless a garden was able to 'borrow rural landscape', Walling always planted garden boundaries thickly to form a natural screen. In small gardens, she used trees on the boundaries to create a sense of distance. She wrote that 'I think it is always desirable that a garden should be made livable by screening it from the public gaze, rather than to make it a means of flaunting one's horticultural abilities.' 'I do feel that the more brilliant garden displays should, wherever possible be kept for the rear of the house. There are, of course, those who prefer to display their horticultural powers and wares for all who pass to see, and there are those who have not thought that there are better and more interesting ways of dealing with the area between the street and the house than with standard roses and annuals; and to the latter may I suggest lots and lots of trees and lawn and evergreen shrubs to conceal the boundaries'.

Walling often designed front gardens to be unrestrained and relaxed, back gardens to be carefully designed and structured. Perhaps the other way round might be more common today?

Ellis Stones seems to have had some different ideas from his mentor, making a plea that 'in designing your garden you give some thought to the view along the street.' He recognises that this is difficult, given the 'most unhappy muddle' that is characteristic of suburbia: 'a street filled with totally different-looking houses, hidden behind an array of fences and walls of various heights and in contrasting materials, each having not the slightest relationship with any other'. As he pointed out, in trying to establish our own individuality we have built thousands of different styles of house in a multiplicity of materials and we have made the unfortunate mistake of dividing all of these with ugly paling fences. It has all been unwitting, but the effect has been inevitable - we have destroyed the landscape, that most valuable of assets.

But there are other possibilities. For example, Frank Lloyd Wright developed ideas of blending building and artificial landscapes to achieve a harmonious communal environment. He believed front gardens should appear as a flowing sequence, creating a park-like effect along the street. Wright favoured the elimination of footpaths and the extension of united front gardens to the kerb. One implication is that part of one's civic responsibility is to join with the neighbours to create and maintain the parklike feeling. Easy to say, but difficult to achieve, even in areas like mine where the original subdivision was influenced by these ideals, more than thirty years ago.

## References

Trisha Dixon and Jennie Churchill, *The Vision of Edna Walling*, Bloomings Books 1988

Ellis Stones, *The Ellis Stones Garden Book*, Nelson, 1976

Simon Plant, 'Golf Links innovation', *The Heidelberger*, 22 February 1984 (remarks on Frank Lloyd Wright)