

OHME GARDENS-AN EXCEPTIONAL PLEASURE GARDEN IN THE SHADOW OF THE CASCADES



Traveling west across the United States by car is a grand journey. Anticipating new landscapes fills one's thoughts. First it's over the ancient Appalachians, green humid and circuitous. It will be at least two days drive before you pass from the soothing cloak of eastern deciduous forests into the undulating prairies past the Mississippi. Ultimately, the Rockies rise like broad icicles touching the sky. The Rockies, and further west the Sierras and Cascades are massive, young, steep and majestic. In between these high western ranges great deserts and scrublands span the horizon. Natural wonders abound, including public gardens. While negotiating a rural highway in the dry

highlands of Eastern Washington state, we spied a steep rocky hill with an unusual forested summit entirely out of place in the expansive arid landscape.

As we approached through the small city of Wenatchee the grand Columbia River flows immediately to our north. Vast orchards of apple trees dot the landscape, made possible only by large scale irrigation from the Columbia. Finally a small sign points to Ohme Gardens. There's always a fascination for veteran garden enthusiasts when stumbling upon an entirely unknown horticultural treasure. We didn't know what to expect, but our collective curiosity was peaked. Driving up a short driveway past an adjacent orchard and were suddenly enveloped in a cool sloping forest of conifers.

The rustic entrance building had information, maps and a gift shop, but the ambiance of the trails ascending onto the craggy bluff was simply too enticing. We glanced at the



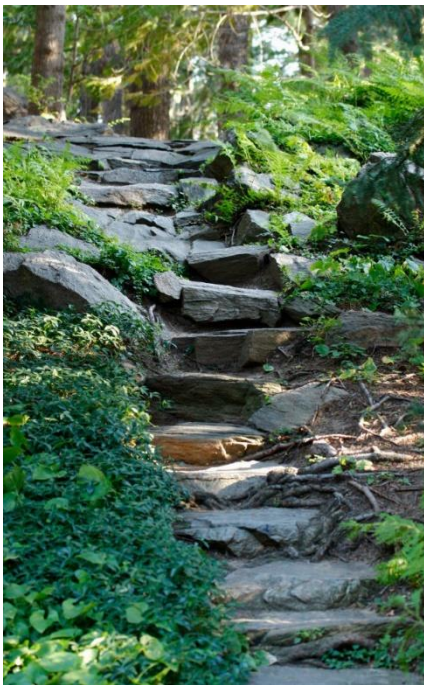
map and begin to explore. I had an initial thought; this is the only garden I've visited around the world that looked like a Maxfield Parrish painting. We half expected scantily clad angel-like maidens to appear as they do in many of Parrish's fantastical, mountainous images. But this imagery was real and the mountains are the mighty

North Cascades. As we stood on the emerald Lower Lawn, Ohme's magical setting elicited every visual sense a pleasure garden could muster. Detailed plantings of creeping sedums, low flowering shrubs and towering pines framed the view. To the west the near fang-like, snowy Cascades, to the east the meandering azure Columbia River. The contrast of the stunning views in combination with the intimacy of the gardens, ponds and trails on what is essentially a rocky reddish-brown sedimentary butte, may be unique in the world.

In 1929 Herman and Ruth Ohme purchased the land to establish an orchard. For many farmers the rocky bluff might have seemed a waste land. Perhaps a place marked with a hilltop cross or a tattered flag. But the Ohme's loved to scramble to the top and enjoy the view. Soon the vision for an irrigated alpine-like garden and family retreat took shape. Over more than forty years the garden developed. Large rocks were moved, intimate stone trails created and ponds excavated. The garden became so beautiful it

was opened to the public. In 1991 Washington State Parks purchased the land and turned over management to Chelan County. What started as a personal aesthetic notion is now arguably one of North America's most unique pleasure gardens.

Ohme is a must stop for anyone interested in rock gardening. The most important ingredients are in place; endless angular, pink-red to brown stone, scree slopes, jumbled talus boulders and cliffs. Yes cliffs. From six feet to sixty feet this bluff is perhaps the ultimate rock garden. Finely tapered crevices support dainty Penstemon while creeping sedums rap around the base of roughly exfoliated boulders. In the shade fostered by numerous conifers including the native Douglas Fir, a myriad of ferns cast a green glow aside an exquisite stone staircase. Many of the trails are so skillfully built among the rocks and cliffs you might think they are a wholly natural formation. Hosta, Foamflower and Phlox meld into a palette of the native stone with such ease that it might seem this is an entirely natural setting minus the creative intuition of human agency.



As pleasure gardens go Ohme rivals much better known counterparts of Canada's Butchart Gardens, New York's Wave Hill or Pennsylvania's Chanticleer. This is as far from the clinical university botanic garden as one can get. A blend of superb ornamental horticulture applied on an ancient geologic feature viewing one of North America's most beautiful mountain ranges. The pure magic of strolling Ohme's trails inspires the ornamental horticulturist, native plant enthusiast and geologist all at once. Such a space is a true rarity. Multiple places around Ohme embrace the magnitude of the setting. The Vista house is a small woodland gazebo sporting a lovely birds-eye view of the Columbia and greater Wenatchee; replete with orchards producing some of the world's finest apples. The small Picture Lawn and nearby Sylvan Pool provide a wonderful contrast of shade and sun enhanced by the elevated setting.

Like many gardens today Ohme offers numerous amenities for the casual visitor or serious gardener. Art exhibits, musical events and classes highlight the gardens many features. Predictably, it's a fashionable wedding spot with exceptional photo opportunities. Ohme is a relatively small space endowed by supremely creative gardening in an otherwise semi-desert environment. Whether you're a local resident or

a dedicated garden visitor who drove all the way from the east coast, Ohme Gardens is a truly enchanted landscape. Had Maxfield Parrish created a garden, it would surely look like this.

From the BGT Team

For more info.

www.ohmegardens.org