

# THE PEPSICO GARDEN

By Ian Robertson

**T**ravel north this spring and be charmed by taking a walk along a golden path. When you do, your senses will be assailed by the sight, sound, scent and feel of the garden maker's vision. North in this case, is just three states up as the crow flies from Virginia and a mere 45 minutes above New York City. Situated in Westchester County close to the Connecticut line is the garden at the PepsiCo World Headquarters. The garden is the result of the efforts of a far-sighted C.E.O. and an English and a Belgian landscape designer, along with what must be one of the finest outdoor sculptural collections backed by American corporate largesse. The result is an American landscape architectural triumph.

In 1970, the environmentally conscious PepsiCo decided to develop its new corporate headquarters outside New

York City in prestigious Westchester County. The site chosen was the Old Polo Club grounds, which is surrounded by some seven different country clubs. Architect Edward Durrell Stone designed a splendid contemporary 10-acre building complex, accompanied by upwards of 6,000 new trees and countless bulbs. These in turn are shown off by acres of lush greensward

*Hats Off by Alexander Calder, rising 31 feet into the New York air, contrasting with the spiky blue of Colorado blue spruce*



drifting out easily to the existing maple-dominant woodland.

Concurrent with the tree planting project, Donald M Kendall, Pepsi chief executive at the time, set about purchasing many exceptional sculptural pieces to be placed on the grounds for the enjoyment and education of the employees, visitors from afar, and the local population.

During this accrual process, Kendall's artistic confidant was the British international garden designer Russell Page, who was coming towards the end of a long illustrious career. Page's profound design experience and a respect shared by Kendall for classic and contemporary art allowed the two men to work closely in siting the inspired sculptural acquisitions. This talented marriage of art pieces with plant material resulted in many dramatic compositions. The following are four examples:



*Reclining Figure, 1956.* A sculpture by British sculptor Henry Moore

Russell Page spent many years designing with plants species and textures around the world. Here, formal sheets of water are gently married to the fecundity of foliage and flower.



*Triad* – Three 49-foot silver, black and Cor-ten steel fractured columns advance magnificently from the carpet-like lawn. Designed by Italian sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro, this 1970s piece surely leaves a vivid impression in most visitors' minds.

A second, dramatic black steel piece rising tall out of an extensive black mondo grass lawn is not to be forgotten, nor is the 31-foot red steel *Hats Off* by Alexander Calder, placed as foreground to a large planting of luminous blue spruce. Finally, and probably the most appreciated, is Claes Oldenberg's 11-foot *Giant Trowel*, sitting on the grass as though spiked by a stone mason with its Cor-ten steel fabric rising 37 feet into the air. Distinguished sculptors such as Henry Moore, Miro, Auguste Rodin, Max Ernst, George Segal, David Wynne and David Smith are among the numerous international artists whose works are exhibited throughout the grounds.

Displaying sculpture in the open allows the elements to influence the viewer's experience. The changing seasons, morning and evening sun, summer heat and winter's freezing temperatures, rain, snow, wind and quiet stillness—each brings another intrigue to these masterworks. Six visits will provide six different experiences of any one sculpture, most of which your writer has been fortunate enough to enjoy.

Let's return to the golden path, the beckoning, brownstone footpath that winds its way mysteriously through the grounds in a continuous inviting peregrination. An easy walk, it reveals so many vignettes and vistas: a moist valley planting of primulas, iris and a host of spring and summer delights. Close by, you are able to enjoy the magnificence of many different species of hydrangeas, or pass into a shaded woodland with deciduous azalea in harmonious color gradations and wafting scents. Passing out into the sunlight again allows the full enjoyment of disappearing mower lines on the glistening grass.

Giving a further dimension to this



Sweeping, manicured, verdant lawns set off this comprehensive landscape of tree, shrub, flower and sculpture.

green plateau are large groups of individual species of ornamental trees standing in park-like splendor. My pulse rate rises a little as I pass through the lace-bark pine grouping, where the peeling bark exposes exotic green, brown, yellow and gray patterning. Close by, a group of upright hornbeam trees resembles an alert military formation on the parade ground waiting for orders.

Along the golden path you will also see the Page-designed, elegant water-lily pond with raised terrace beds of color against the water scene. Page had his own way of laying out planting beds that involves minimal detailing on formal plan sheets. When the plants he had chosen for a particular design were being delivered to the site, he took great pleasure placing them on the planting beds and adjusting, reviewing and nudging each to its final location.

When it is time for refreshment, an outdoor terrace awaits, roofed by impressive pleached (sheared) sycamores overlooking perfect lawns, sculptures, a lake with a giant water spout and a supporting back-

ground of fine trees. All make the refueling pause quite wonderful.

Much of the more recent shrub and perennial planting was designed by Francois Goffinet, who picked up the baton from Page, respectfully carried through some of his predecessor's final schemes, then, working closely with PepsiCo, moved ahead to develop other areas. Belgium-born Goffinet, who also delights in the visual arts, was president of his own Charlottesville-based design group before moving back to Europe. He is still involved on a regular basis with PepsiCo.


One might assume that to visit such a display would entail an entrance fee and limited parking. Good news: Entry and parking to this museum without walls are simple and free. Step out of your vehicle and walk right into the gardens at any time of the year. This photogenic destination is popular with wedding parties, families, walkers, art and garden enthusiasts, and surely every other visitor who takes the time to stroll this splendid corporate oasis. For those who are interested in visiting, White Plains airport is

just 10 minutes down the road, and there are plenty of nearby accommodations. More general information, though not much about the grounds, may be found at [www.pepsico.com](http://www.pepsico.com). Neuberger Museum of Art, exhibiting 20<sup>th</sup> century, contemporary and African art, is also nearby. (914) 251-6100.

Ian Robertson is the president of the landscape design company, Ian Robertson Ltd. He is a contributor to the PBS radio series *With Good Reason*. He regularly lectures throughout the area on garden history and related subjects including biodiversity. His articles appear in *Fine Gardening* and *Central Virginia Gardener*. His book, *Six Thousand Years Up the Garden Path*, is now in press.

*Designed  
Landscapes*

*Tailored to your Lifestyle*



IAN ROBERTSON, LTD  
Charlottesville, VA

(434) 978-1714  
[irltd@earthlink.net](mailto:irltd@earthlink.net)  
[www.ianrobertsonltd.com](http://www.ianrobertsonltd.com)