



Making an entrance

Who knows where a gate will lead? Mark Griffiths considers the special kind of magic worked by beautifully designed arches, yards and garden entrances

Left Field of vision: the captivating garden gates to the park at Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, which combine timber, iron-work and stone piers in an elegant composition. *Facing page* Equestrian enfilade: the stable yard at Craigengillan

lived on in Renaissance palaces and the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. Then, we decided to let the countryside in, to leap the hedge or to knock a hole in the wall, to make another kind of gate.

Next, we combined these two ideas by creating gardens that resembled country houses in their complex corridors and compartments. The outdoor equivalents of doors and windows proliferated. At the same time, the elite noticed that most classes gardened and had their own plots and gates—an unusually British phenomenon. They liked what they saw and cross-pollination followed, with techniques and materials that once belonged to cottage and croft becoming mainstays of the Arts-and-Crafts movement. They also looked further afield, to India, China and Japan.

By the early 20th century, we had an unparalleled repertoire of ways of announcing and entering a garden: columns and arches fit to welcome Caesar, tunnels of topiary, sentries of yew, wrought-iron both rococo and rustic. There were moon gates copied from the Forbidden City, *torii* from Tokyo that put the transcendental into Pi, curvaceous cutouts from Calcutta, dry-stone pillars from the Cotswolds, lych-gate lookalikes pan-tiled and strewn with rose petals instead of confetti, and, of course, five wooden bars. Nobody was going to keep us out of Eden. And that is the root of the thing—far from ghettoising gardens as some cultures do, we want them to become part of the house, and our connection with the world beyond. Cleverly used, gates and entrances, drives and garage yards establish these links while maintaining the degree ➤

NO part of a novel or play matters more than its opening and ending. The same is true of gardens: gates are their entrances and exits in more than the literal sense. They are their first and final statement, and the most enduring. They're also the most memorable way of framing a garden. But this frame, magically, invites the onlooker to enter the picture, to step into another world, or, in the case of gates within gardens, to be in two places at once as the eye connects room with room or the cultivated with the wilderness beyond.

Of all the Western gardening cultures, the British understand this best. The Continent abounds in triumphal arches and ironwork fantasias. We boast plenty of them, too, but, for us, the gate is the book's opening paragraph as well as its decorated title page. The reasons are partly historical. We disposed of the monasteries, but the walled monastic garden with its secretive entrances to surprise-filled chambers



Heart of oak: Feather-boarding and a traditional oak framework create the garage yard at Marsh Court



of separation that is essential to all good gardens.

These contrasts, between building and garden, garden room and open landscape, enclosure and entrance, have given rise to the most beautiful and innovative design work so far this century. The revival of the oldest garden type, the *hortus conclusus*, has produced dazzling strategies for containing a space while allowing it to communicate with its surrounds—slotted stone walls, grids of girders, files of rectangular hedges, still-trunked palisades. Christopher Bradley-Hole, the designer who began this revival, is also creating new forms even more monumental than triumphal arches—a sunken stone amphitheatre with a square aperture cut into one end giving onto a vista of fields; an arc of wall placed in a driveway so that one's vision is split between parkland on the one hand and distant hills on the other. Framing the familiar to make it seem far away, and vice versa, these are all Modernist explorations of the ancient mystery of gateways visual and physical, of exits and entrances.

But there is much to be said for the gate in its starkest form. In one great Oxfordshire garden, a border famed for its painterly sophistication ends

Right 'Maintaining the degree of separation': the threshold of the recently made Collector Earl's Garden at Arundel Castle is boldly announced by a classically inspired arch. *Below* Wrought-iron perfection: painted and gilded garden gates interrupt the hedge, but are given weight by the inclusion of a statue on each side



Above Cotswold charm: the five-bar gate is a perennially appealing rural feature. *Left* Shiver me timbers: the 16th-century gatehouse at Stokesay Castle in Shropshire, dwarfing the country post-and-rail gates that precede it

with utter simplicity in a five-bar gate with a paddock and valley beyond. Seemingly artless, the contrast is brilliantly judged, the product of long contemplation and richly deserving it.

There is also that class of strangely eloquent relics that show how a gate can be the portal of the imagination and the doorway to dreams, the threshold of a space that is secret, sacred, special: the wrought-iron extravaganza that stands in a meadow in ruinous perfection, the ghost of a long-lost domain; the paired stone pillars that mark an abandoned carriageway; the broken arch that's all that remains of a priory. You have only to consider the magic these work on the landscape, their powers of drawing and defining, to see where a gate can lead.

Will Payne/CLPL, Val Corbett/CLPL, Paul Barker/CLPL, Paul Higham/CLPL



Right The lych gate is an ecclesiastical structure of ancient origin. Its roofed construction spans one, or often two, plain gates—in this case at the end of the church lane at Littlebrey, Dorset



Statement symmetry: a whitewashed stone classical arch by Craig Hamilton dignifies this converted barn

Alex Ramsay/CLPL, Paul Barker/CLPL



Scaling up: the appeal of this gateway (and the corresponding one across the yard) at Plas Teg, Flintshire, is enhanced by the presence of large-scale sentry hounds carved in stone

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