

West Looks East: The Influences of Traditional Arab Design on Contemporary Western Designers

Paradise in the Garden: the Influence of the Islamic Garden Today

LANDSCAPE DESIGN **Elin Haaga** *January 6, 2005*
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A word from the speaker: The Islamic garden was the earthly symbol of Paradise. It derived from the pre-Islamic Persian gardens which attempted to recreate the whole world within an enclosed space; a soothing world composed of symmetry, water, shade, flowers, fruit and fragrance. After the conquest of Persia by the Arabs in the 7th century, not only was the Persian garden itself influenced by Muslim philosophy, but this sophisticated form of garden spread throughout the Islamic world. It became the basis of the Moghul gardens in Kashmir and India as well as the fabled Moorish gardens in Southern Spain – the Alhambra and the Generalife. Through these Spanish gardens the idea of the Islamic garden spread to the New World where its influence can still be traced in the Spanish colonial gardens of the South West, the Revival gardens of the early 20th century, especially in California, and even in the spare modern style of the Mexican landscape architect Luis Baragan. The simplicity of form and the appeal to the senses of the Islamic garden is well adapted to the creation of peaceful and restorative outdoor spaces in the modern world.

Biography: Elin Haaga, an adjunct Professor at George Washington University where she teaches the History of the Landscape, is also a garden designer by practice, designing in the Washington, DC area through her Bethesda based firm. As a cobblestone path through a lush garden would twist and turn, Elin Haaga's career has followed many varying directions. She studied Landscape Design at both Maryland and George Washington Universities although she previously earned an MA in History at Oxford University. Haaga is Welsh and was born in Great Britain, but in 1977, she moved to the United States and has since lived in Malaysia, Bangladesh and Kenya, as well. For 17 years she worked as a writer of textbooks and children's books for both UNICEF and Save the Children, but re-rooted herself in her passion of landscape design. Haaga has lectured on garden design at the National Arboretum, Greensprings Gardens in Virginia, Brookside Gardens in Maryland and to numerous other garden clubs in the area.

Suggested Readings:

Al Hambra, by Michael Jacobs

Rizzoli, New York, 2000

Earthly Paradises, Ancient Gardens in History and Archaeology, by Maureen Carroll

The British Museum Press, 2003

Gardens Of Persia, by Penelope Hobhouse

Kales Press, 2003

Landscape Design, A Cultural and Architectural History, by Elizabeth Barlow Rogers

Harry N. Abrams Inc., NY, 2001

The Art of the Islamic Garden, by Emma Clark

Focus Publishing, 2004

The Story of Gardening, by Penelope Hobhouse

Dorling Kindersley, London, 2002

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