

# book reviews



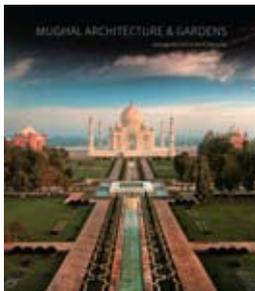
## Mughal Architecture & Gardens

**Authors:** George Michell and Amita Pasricha

**Publisher:** Antique Collectors' Club

**Price:** £45

**ISBN** 978-185149 670 9



In 1526, when the legendary Babur surged from the Asian Steppe to conquer much of the Indian sub-continent, one of the first things this tribal leader did was create a garden city for himself in modern day Agra.

For the next four generations the Mughal dynasty he founded would express its wealth, power and sophistication through buildings and gardens. Though they became increasingly settled, the Mughals retained the acute sensitivity towards nature of their nomadic ancestors.

A love of gardens infused every aspect of their life – from poetry and music, to paintings, textiles, and jewellery. From cradle to grave, whether travelling or settled, the Mughals set themselves in gardens; their tented military encampments, diplomatic conferences, sporting events, private palace quarters and grand dynastic tombs were always surrounded with fruits, flowers, trees, pools and canalized streams, creating settings of unparalleled beauty.

As this book demonstrates, it is impossible to separate architecture from horticulture when studying Mughal culture. Their mosques, palaces and mausoleums were all, essentially, garden pavilions – exquisitely ornamented structures, raised on platforms and set within glorious gardens. While the Taj Mahal is undoubtedly the best-known



example of Mughal design, it is also the culmination of decades of adaptation and innovation.

George Michell, an historian specialising in Indian architecture, traces the lines of influence as the Mughals fused the techniques and design motifs of their Central Asian past, with the forms and materials of the local Hindu population, all overlaid with the symbolism and spirituality of Islam. Michell's introduction begins by charting the evolution of Mughal design, then turns to gardens – focusing on the multi-terraced gardens of the Himalayan foothills and the geometric, four-part char-bagh in the flatter regions of the plains; walls and gateways, pavements, pools and pavilions are examined in detail,

as are the techniques used to lift and conduct the water which is crucial to the Mughal garden. The introduction also explores building types, construction methods, materials and individual features such as columns, arches, domes, vaults and decorative themes. Michell then provides a detailed investigation of key sites in the four main cultural centres of Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Lahor.

The book is large, detailed and scholarly, but Michell's lively style makes it accessible to anyone with an interest in Mughal culture, architecture or gardens. Amit Pasricha photos are staggering, and capture the finest detail, as well as the grandest panorama.

**Katie Campbell**  
Writer and garden historian



## The Garden Source: Inspirational Design Ideas for Gardens and Landscapes

**Author:** Andrea Jones  
**Publisher:** 8 Books  
**Price:** £25  
**ISBN:** 978-0955432279

*The Garden Source* is effectively a compilation of the work of photographer Andrea Jones creatively rearranged as a showcase for garden ideas. By necessity it is limited to the gardens she has photographed, rather than a true compilation of the best ideas out there, but it is an interesting exercise. I liked the way the book is divided for quick reference, and the page layouts are clever and effective. The photography is stunning and the text provides useful information about where the gardens are, what plants are used and who actually designed them. Jones is very generous in her acknowledgement

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of the interdependence between designers and photographers. So rarely do garden designers get credited for their work that I felt really grateful on behalf of our profession. Seeing all these gardens together made me think of how we need to try harder to make our work stand out amongst the sea of identikit garden design.

**Anuska Sanchez-Martin MSGD**  
 Garden designer



## The Fern Garden: How to Make, Keep and Enjoy it

**Author:** Shirley Hibberd  
**Publisher:** Cambridge University Press  
**Price:** £12.99  
**ISBN:** 978-1108037181

This is a surprising little book. First published in 1869, it is certainly not a coffee table book with lavish colour plates. Rather it is an intriguing glimpse of a 19th-century middle class hobby. It reminds us how imaginative and sophisticated the Victorians were in their use of the ever-widening range of plants available to them. Their evocative use of ferns in the domestic setting was much more adventurous than today and this book describes vividly how to use ferns inside and out – in pots, greenhouses, fern cases, stoves



and by the fireside. Some of the ideas could find a home in contemporary courtyard gardens and conservatories. The style is reminiscent of early Christopher Lloyd books – conversational, enthusiastic and with a gentle humour. It has pithy advice still relevant today, for example on propagation and how to prepare and plant containers. The best advice encapsulates this book: “It is a great secret of success in cultivating any particular class of plants – to get used to them.”

**Ros Hawley**  
 Garden designer



## Designing for Play

**Author:** Barbara E Hendricks  
**Publisher:** Ashgate; 2nd revised edition  
**Price:** £35  
**ISBN:** 978-1409409366

In this readable and thought-provoking book Barbara Hendricks masterfully builds bridges between disciplines, exploring theories from many directions and gathering together the key issues and challenges. She exhorts us to explore the way in which spaces for play are designed and questions the value we place on play. Reminding us that, for children, “playing is living”, Hendricks encourages us to ensure that children’s needs are catered for appropriately, whether in the public realm or small private spaces. In order to take a child’s eye view of the space in

all weathers, we should consider designing while outdoors.

The book includes a critique of different types and trends in playgrounds, from kit-based to natural materials. She states wisely: “There is no recipe for a playground” but says the design “should add to the quality of playfulness of the space and something more...”

This is a fascinating and enlightening book for those who have any input into the provision or design of children’s play areas, whatever their discipline.

**Alexandra Longley**  
 Spatial designer

Mughal gardens are a type of gardens built by the Mughals in the Persian style of architecture. This style was heavily influenced by the Persian gardens particularly the Charbagh structure, which is intended to create a representation of an earthly utopia in which humans co-exist in perfect harmony with all elements of nature. Significant use of rectilinear layouts are made within the walled enclosures. Some of the typical features include pools, fountains and canals inside the gardens. Afghanistan