



FOCAL POINTS

A Forgotten Part of a Once Forgotten Garden

By Barbara Israel

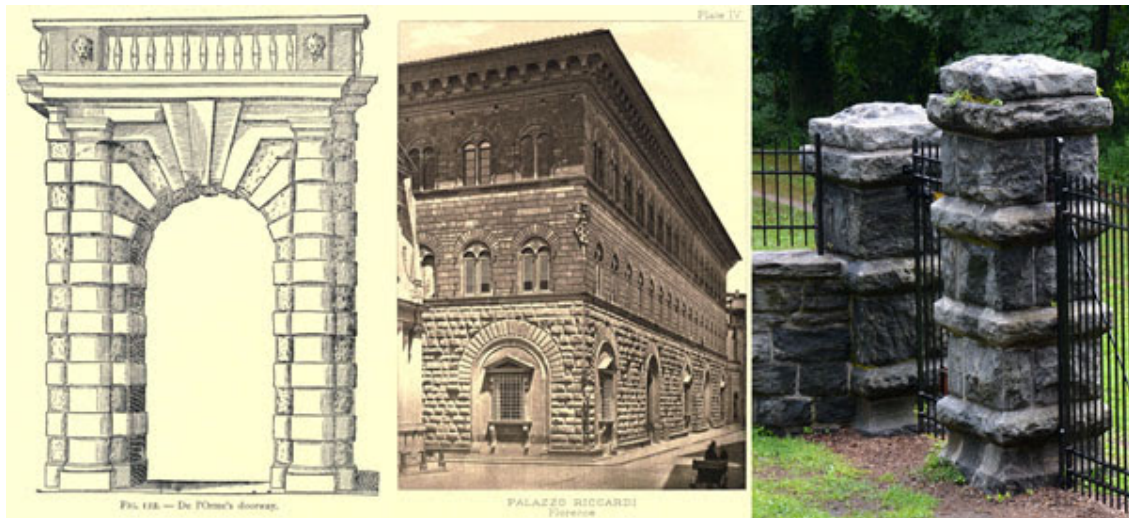


The lower gates at Untermyer Gardens. Photo: Bree Moon

At the very bottom of the hill at Untermyer Gardens in Yonkers, NY there are a series of gateposts, walls and gates comprising an impressive entranceway. In the past most visitors haven't made the long trek down to see this part of the garden but recently new direct pathways have been opened up and have drawn our attention to this area. Set into the walls are two puzzling statuary reliefs that are of particular interest in terms of their meaning and origin.

Stories abound relating to the comings and goings of famous and infamous persons in this lower section of these gardens but our aim is to get beyond these tales and get to the heart of the design story. In other parts of the garden the architect/designer William Welles Bosworth (1869-1966), who was hired by Samuel Untermyer in 1916, borrowed lavishly from exotic architectural styles--referencing Persian, Spanish, Indian and Grecian elements while taking inspiration from renowned gardens. Bosworth's plan for the lower section of the garden took inspiration from the original gates to the property, situated at the North Broadway entrance. Those gates, dating to the 1860s, were created for John Waring, the first owner of the Untermyer mansion.

At the end of the 19th century Bosworth had been trained in architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and thus brought with him the entire lexicon of its forms and elements. In 1906 John D. Rockefeller had hired Bosworth to transform the bare land around his house, Kykuit, in Pocantico Hills, NY into spectacular gardens. After visiting the Beaux-Arts gardens at Kykuit Untermyer hired Bosworth to design "the greatest gardens in the world" for his property in Yonkers.



Left to right: A Renaissance period arch using rusticated piers; the Palazzo Riccardi, a period Renaissance palace that used a rusticated surface for the lower floor (illustrated in Charles Herbert Moore,

Character of Renaissance Architecture, 1905, pp. 204 and 102); the rusticated columns at Untermyer's lower entrance (photo: Bree Moon).

The Beaux-Arts style venerated and incorporated many Italian Renaissance architectural and decorative features. Here in the lower entrance he has made clear references to that style. For one, "rusticated" stone finishes were a popular feature for ground level walls of Beaux-Arts houses and he has used them liberally in the walls and gateposts. "Rustication" was a masonry technique in which blocks of stone were cut evenly at the edges but the faces of each block were given an intentionally rough surface.



Photos: Bree Moon.

The Beaux-Arts idiom also included statuary; particularly such marble relief sculptures integrated into architecture as the two at the Untermyer lower gates (above). The lion to the right is easy to identify but, because of its missing head, the companion sculpture has been often misidentified as a horse. It is, in fact, a unicorn having the head and body of a horse, the head with a single spiral horn, and the legs of a female deer. In determining that the creature is in fact a unicorn the most potent clue is its cloven hoof; a detail that simply could not have belonged to a horse.



Looking more closely at the sculptures in the wall it appears that the wall and openings were designed and sized to fit the two reliefs implying that they were acquired before the wall was built. But where did they come from? One story that has been passed down attributes them to Edward Clark Potter, the sculptor of the lions at the entrance of the New York Public Library. But, after some research we have found no resemblance to Potter's style or workmanship and, at this point, no evidence of his having done this commission.

Historically, the lion and the unicorn have been a customary pair. They were thought to be antagonistic rivals and at times were accepted as symbols of the sun and the moon. The pairing of the two became most visible in 1603 with the accession of James I to the throne of Scotland, Ireland and England when he combined them in the Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom (right).

A closer look at the Untermyer lion and unicorn has led us in one particular direction. They are reliefs of similar height with partially rendered bodies and are consciously looking over their shoulders. If they had come from a very large stone architectural Royal Coat of Arms from Great Britain they would be just as described above except that originally they would have been facing each other. They would have been on opposite sides than they are now with their heads turned toward the center looking at a crown or central motif, as depicted in the Irish Royal Coat of Arms on the Custom House in Dublin (right). The unicorns in architectural British coats of arms had bent knees and the regal lions have full manes like this one (and the two below). Like the two at Untermyer, the lion and unicorn would not have had fully rendered bodies; just the front half would have been sculpted.



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Royal coats of arms, English, locations unknown; photos www.speel.me.uk.

If Bosworth had obtained them as salvaged fragments from a giant armorial shield from a demolished building he perhaps would have found it fitting to imbed them in a wall

looking out at the garden. By changing their viewing directions outward instead of inward he adapted them to their new location. Another Beaux-Arts architect, Stanford White (1853-1906) had imported antique fragments from Europe by the boatload and popularized their use in gardens in the early 20th century. Even though White, having died in 1906, could never have been actively involved in providing statuary for Samuel Untermyer's gardens his extraordinary taste and creativity had ripple effects long after his death. (For a discussion of White's influence see Eva Schwartz' article, "The Hurstmont Planter" in the [Marble in America](#) issue of *Focal Points*.)



Left: Untermyer Gardens English-style gates, 1937. Photo: Courtesy of the Hudson River Museum, Gift of Mrs. Karin R. Brophy, for Gordon S. Roberts, 96.4.2.

Right: Formal Beaux-Arts style forecourt gates at Kykuit, Pocantico Hills, NY designed by William Welles Bosworth after the gates at Hampton Court in England. Photo: Barbara Israel.

There are unquestionably a few answers to this overlooked lower part of the garden. The two sculptural reliefs, possibly fragments that began life atop a building in Great Britain, thematically fit into the whole lower garden concept of rusticated but refined symmetry. The wrought-iron entrance gates that we see in this archival picture of 1937 (above left) hark back to formal English style gates that had had their own antecedents on the Continent, specifically in the Renaissance. These have long since been removed and replaced. Note that the Untermyer unicorn seems to be missing its horn in this vintage photo. Perhaps the horn was missing when it was reclaimed and incorporated in the Untermyer Gardens lower entrance scheme. As he had done such commissions as Kykuit (above right), Bosworth designed a pair of wrought-iron gates that added to the formal stylistic statement. Appropriate to his Beaux-Arts training Bosworth chose to create a grand European style entrance for Samuel Untermyer with classical architectural details in the Renaissance tradition.
