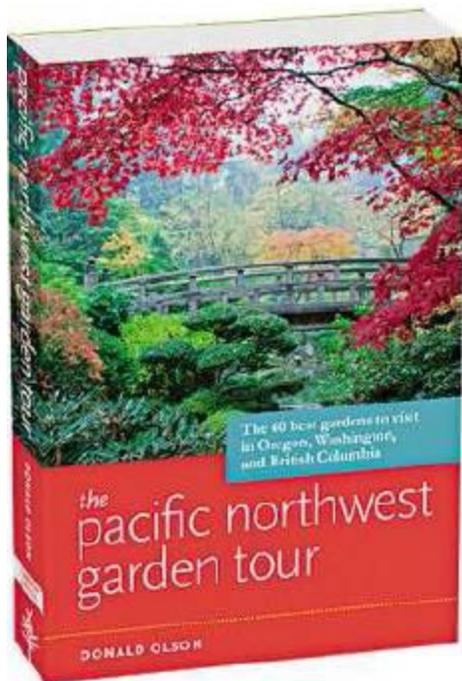


Regional Treasures Rediscovered

A new Northwest garden guide may well inspire you to visit





THE MOST ancient apple tree in the Pacific Northwest is the sole remaining remnant of an orchard planted in 1826 at Fort Vancouver. “The poor old duffer is over 180 years old and still producing,” marvels Donald Olson, author of a new travel guide to 60 of the best gardens in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. You’ll find here not only a fine, concise introductory essay on the history of gardens in our region, but also photos, descriptions and details sure to lure you out to visit gardens both new and familiar. Best of all, most gardens in the book are no more than a day trip away, or at most an easy weekend jaunt.

I admit to being embarrassed by all I’ve learned from “The Pacific Northwest Garden Tour,” (Timber Press, \$24.95). I’ve lived right here my entire life and never knew that, in addition to the venerable apple tree, the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site boasts a re-creation of the original kitchen garden planted by the British Hudson’s Bay Company.

Did everyone but me know that Everett has an art-filled arboretum so well designed that Olson describes it as “having the coherence and sophistication you’d expect to find in a well-maintained private garden”? He rates it as the top garden in the book for take-away lessons, including its urban tree walk showcasing trees short enough not to interfere with power lines.

Turns out Olson, who splits his time between homes in New York and Portland, has written more than 35 guidebooks, many for Frommer’s. This is his first garden guide. “When you write about gardens, you write about the spirit of a place,” he says simply.

Why did Olson, who has written about cities around the country and in Europe, decide to focus on Northwest gardens? “Because this is one of the greatest garden belts in the world,” he says. “This is the guidebook I wish had been available to me when I first moved to the Pacific Northwest.”

Which Seattle-area gardens does Olson most admire? The Bloedel Reserve, on Bainbridge Island, with its primeval moss garden and guesthouse designed by Paul Kirk in the 1960s. And the Dunn Gardens in North Seattle, which are a rare example of an Olmsted Brothers private estate garden. Bellevue Botanical Garden was an exciting discovery for Olson. The only Seattle-area garden that didn't thrill him was the Woodland Park Rose Garden. And yet, with Olson's love of garden history, he can't help pointing out that our rose garden is home to a secret; a scion of the oldest rose bush in the Pacific Northwest is planted there.

And next time we're in Portland? Be sure to visit Lan Su Chinese Garden, Olson says, calling it "a superlative urban garden created by artisans from Suzhou, China." He also suggests Elk Rock Garden of the Bishop's Close, designed by the Olmsted Brothers with meandering paths above the Willamette River.

The guide book emphasizes gardens for every season. Kubota Garden in South Seattle, the Seattle Japanese Garden in the Arboretum and the Portland Japanese Garden are known for their gorgeous fall color. You can enjoy the Pacific Bonsai Museum in Federal Way all year round because as the weather cools the plants are enclosed in glass-fronted, shrinelike display cases to keep them warm. "When cold, wet weather sets in, don't forget to visit the magnificent collection of plants in the Volunteer Park Conservatory," says Olson, proving this world traveler has become a true Northwesterner.

Valerie Easton is a Seattle freelance writer.

Reach her at valeaston@comcast.net.