Great Gardens of America surveys some of the loveliest grounds in America and Canada, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Quebec to California, from the tropical Southeast to the industrial Midwest. The 25 gardens showcased range from 18th-century landscape gardens, such as Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Virginia, through 20th-century creations, such as the lakeside garden at Innisfree in New York and dramatic Naumkeag in Massachusetts, to the work of exciting new designers, such as Topher Delaney in San Francisco and New Mexico's Martha Schwartz. Many of the gardens are open to the public, so readers can actually visit and draw firsthand inspiration. The others, newer domestic gardens, offer tantalizing glimpses into a glamorous world of luxurious outdoor living. Three hundred stunning color photographs by renowned garden photographer Andrea Jones accompany Tim Richardson’s insightful text.

My Personal Review:
Great Gardens of America
By Tim Richardson
Frances Lincoln Ltd
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Thank you Frances Lincoln Ltd for giving us a publication that allows us to visit some of the great gardens of North America, without having to leave home. This book surveys garden estates and private parks in practically every climate zone in the U.S. and Canada. Twenty five gardens with 300 brilliant photographs are included. For each garden surveyed, the author, Tim Richardson, provides an interesting combination of historical and architectural background that helps to identify the landowner's personal contribution to the garden design.
This is a remarkable publication in that it defines the uniqueness of North American gardens in contrast to their European counterparts. What makes them different is the American appreciation for wide vistas as opposed to object or building focused gardens in Europe. In addition, there is a markedly different attitude towards wilderness. The British gardens were intent on keeping out bandits and wild animals. In North America, there is a frontier mentality of living in harmony with nature. Consequently, we see how uniquely American gardens include distant vistas into their design by framing these perspectives with trees and shrubs planted in the foreground. As well, by living in harmony with nature and allowing pastureland to creep up to the front door of the home, the "cult of the American lawn" was developed.

The gardens surveyed in this book range from Jefferson's 18th century Montecello, to an early 20th century Rockefeller estate Kykuit, through modernist gardens commissioned by bold patrons, up to the conceptual curated gardens in Metis Quebec and Sonoma California. The most controversial of them all is the Lurie Garden in Chicago Illinois designed by Piet Oudolf. Here the armchair traveler is given an opportunity to evaluate the results of a garden conceived in the "New Perennial Style".

Some of the more interesting details revealed in this book include the fact that at Kykuit, the largest gardens surveyed, modern sculptures were brilliantly incorporated into a turn-of-the-century garden. We also discover that Viscaya is the closest copy of an Italianate garden in America. The enchanting garden rooms at Dumbarton Oaks demonstrate how one is able to beautifully landscape a property on an ugly slope. This garden offers a sense of perpetual movement that has been captured so insightfully by the book's photographer Andrea Jones.

Special mention also needs to be made of Windcliff in Seattle Washington as "one of the most horticulturally dynamic private gardens of our times". Here Dan Hinkley's design includes an interplay of color and texture that is rarely seen on properties of this size. The accompanying photos on pages 74 and 75 are such a powerful inspiration to garden designers that they alone should easily justify the purchase of this book. This publication should be a prime candidate for the best garden book of the year.

Allan Becker reviews books on gardening for [...]