

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

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Source: *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (April, 1954), pp. 127-131

Published by: American Society of Landscape Architects

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44659214>

Accessed: 05-07-2023 13:12 +00:00

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HOW OUR HALF LIVES

A STANFORD WHITE GATEHOUSE IS RESTORED AND REDESIGNED

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THE "Gatehouse Set" is a new social group, a regional phenomenon of Long Island and Westchester County.

The past twenty years of the income tax have made it almost impossible for anyone to maintain the great estates built in the first quarter of this century. And as the main houses were boarded up or torn down, or just plain sold to the Church, the "G. S." has suddenly swooped down and snatched up every available outbuilding,—not just gatehouses alone, but superintendents' cottages, barns, tennis and pool houses, and even pig houses and chicken coops. Here they have settled down, tongue in cheek and fingers tight on purse strings, to make homes that are fun to live in and pleasing or amusing to look at.

Rentals on such buildings vary all the way from gratis through exorbitant to outrageous, depending not upon sentiment but on how badly the owner has been dented by the income tax laws.

In 1951, as they were preparing to move from Massachusetts to the New York area, Robert and Beatrice Zion cast their eyes covetously on the gem of all gatehouses,—the entrance which Stanford White created in 1901 for Harbor Hill, the Clarence Mackay place at Roslyn, Long

Island. Upon approaching the owner, however, they learned that one room of the building was occupied by the elderly widow of the original gatekeeper. By the terms of Mr. Mackay's will, she was to have tenure for life.

Then, with timing which the Zions still find a trifle disturbing, they were notified—the very week they were intending to move—that this good lady had relinquished her claim to these iron gates in favor of the pearly ones beyond. They thereupon took possession in June 1951, under the following terms: the gatehouse would be theirs for two years, rent free, but all improvements (heating plant, utilities, etc.) would be made at their expense and would revert to the owner at the end of the two-year period, after which they would be charged rent for further occupancy.

The building was in an alarming state of disrepair, and in order to make it livable again, at a minimum cost, the Zions were forced to do most of the work themselves. Naturally, the work had to be done for an absolute minimum, since they knew that at the end of the two years they might lose all they had invested.

In the design of the outdoor space they were given complete freedom except for one unique restriction: they



The Gatehouse as seen from within the property when first discovered by the authors.

The entrance gate, permitting view of the interior from the public road. Through this gate fire engines pass on an average of thirty-five times a year.



had to allow for the passage—through their garden—of a hook-and-ladder fire engine! Brush fires, most of which are set by sparks from the railroad which skirts the estate, occur on the property on an average of thirty-five times a year, and the gates provide the only access from the public road. This meant that the gate on the west side had to be unobstructed, and that at least a ten-foot opening had to be provided on the east. This restriction was

accepted, not in defeat but as a challenge. The Zions were young and unafraid.

There were other problems of design which had to be met:

1. If the gates had to remain free, how was privacy to be effected for the outdoor areas? This was an important point, since the gatehouse stands at a busy intersection.



Photograph by
Alexandre Georges

Public view of the entrance gate, showing how the authors achieved privacy for the area beyond.

The outside room developed to supplement the Gatehouse interior.



Photograph by
Alexandre Georges

2. Another problem was the need for a large outdoor room for entertaining. All the rooms inside the building are twelve feet square, a rather confining space, especially since several of the tenants' friends are Texans.

3. Perhaps the most challenging of all the problems was the determination of the proportion and form of a space which would complement the building, and the choice of

materials—both plant and pavement—which would be in keeping with the quiet elegance of Stanford White's architecture.

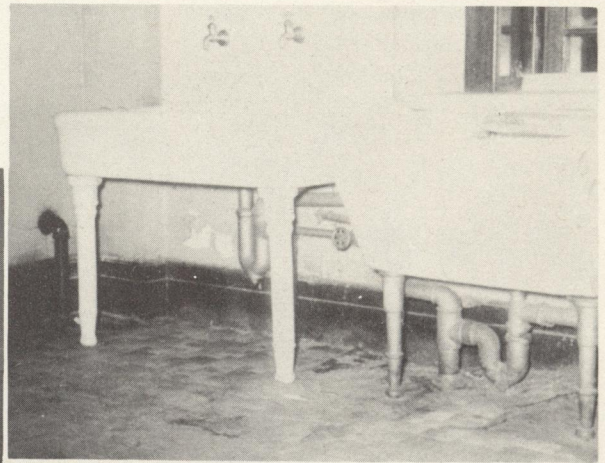
These problems were solved in the following manner:

White canvas was laced to the back of the gates (\$29) thereby giving complete privacy from the street, but leaving the gates free. From the outside the canvas



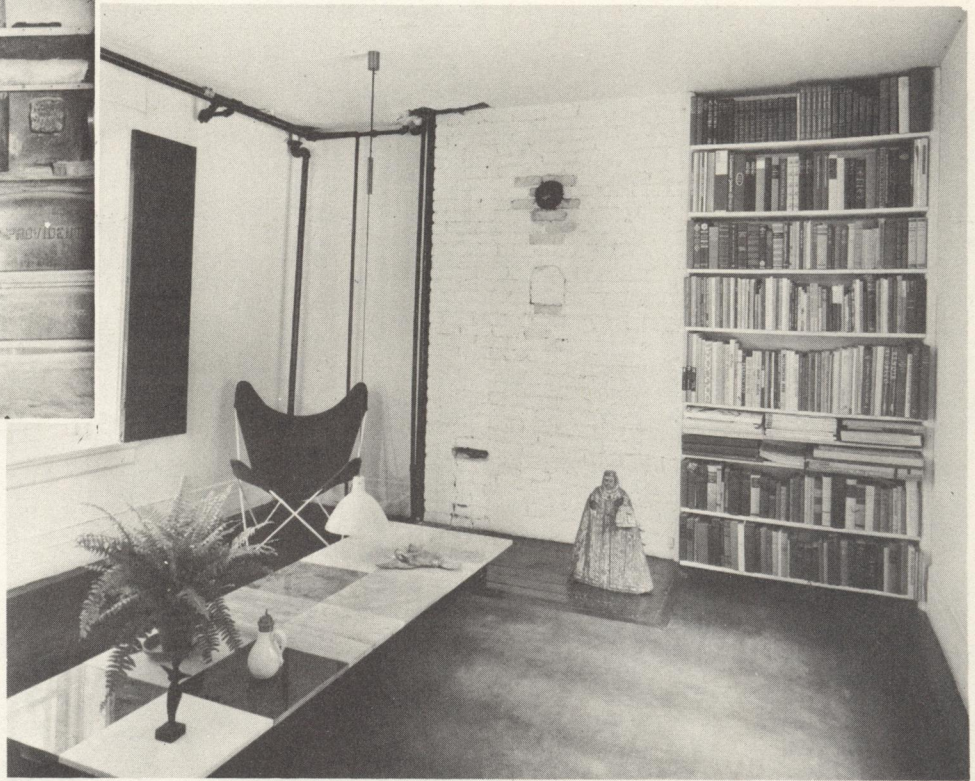
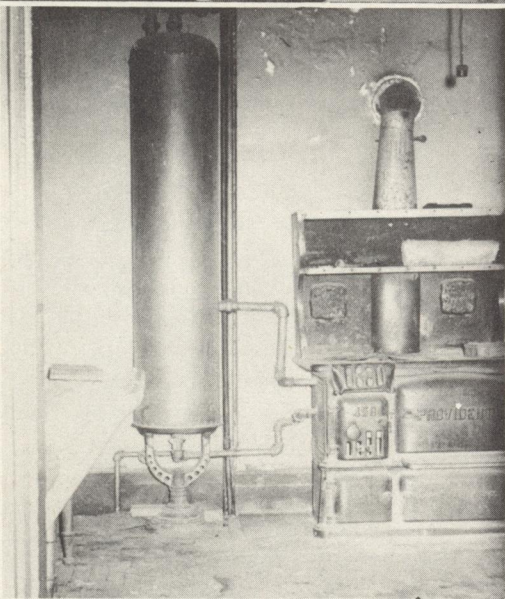
The Gatehouse entrance and planting when the authors first saw it.

Photograph by Alexandre Georges



Kitchen transformed into living room.

Photograph by Alexandre Georges





Photograph by Alexandre Georges

provides a stunning foil for the intricate black iron-work.

This outside room is walled with rhododendron and mountain laurel kalmia, which were taken from elsewhere on the property; transplanting was the only expense.

The room is floored with $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch grits from nearby Port Washington (\$32), and lined with steel edging (\$45).

It is edged with pachysandra, which the Zions themselves grew from cuttings.

With a few architectural changes on the interior they have created a living room (out of the kitchen), dining room, kitchenette (out of the pantry), bedroom, guest room, studio, and office. These rooms they have furnished principally with materials brought back from a trip through Europe and North Africa on the Charles Eliot Travelling Fellowship from Harvard (marbles and lamps from Italy, fabrics from North Africa, and furniture from the flea markets of Paris and Madrid).

* * * * *

In redesigning their new home, Mr. and Mrs. Zion came upon the one overwhelming defect of gatehouse living,—its terrible insecurity. They made their gatehouse so attractive that their landlord has taken it back for himself.

GOLD MEDAL EXHIBITION

The National Gold Medal Exhibition of the Architectural League of New York, which is conducted each year through jury selection from among many hundreds of submissions from all parts of the country, in architecture and the related design fields, was held from March 2 to 26, 1954. From the exhibited submissions—this year, 64 in all—the juries select the Medalists and Honorable Mentions. Since the founding of the League in 1881, 56 such annual Gold Medal Exhibitions have been held.

In Landscape Architecture no medals were awarded, but there were six Honorable Mentions, as follows:

Ewald Associates, Tennessee

Gardens for R. Vance Norfleet, Memphis, Tenn.

Richard C. Guthridge, New York

Two Playgrounds, Brooklyn

Harold W. Lautner, Michigan

Michigan State College Campus*

Arthur A. & Sidney N. Shurcliff, Massachusetts

Shoppers' World (Shopping Center), Framingham, Mass.†

Simonds & Simonds, Pennsylvania

Conservatory and Aviary, Pittsburgh

Frederic B. Stresau, Florida

Davis Cafeteria, Florida

*See LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE for Jan. 1954, pp. 83-88.

†*Idem*, July 1952, pp. 145-151.