

Le Bois des Moutiers: The first walled garden, after entering under an arch and going up steps, is paved with the local white caulk stone and is planted with white flowers.



THE *Gardens* OF *Normandy*

BY JUDY NAUSEEF FAPLD

I had seen the **Boxwood Tours** advertisements in *Gardens Illustrated* magazine for many years. In early 2019, I sent away for the brochures and found an available trip to France (always desirable) at the end of September. I had not been to Normandy, and the opportunity to see the French countryside and private gardens aided my choice. ➔

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Le Bois des Moutiers: In the second, more formal garden room/courtyard, the theme of arches, circles, and rays continues. A weathered Lutyens bench sits where the wall meets the entry. The stairway obscures the entry arch in an unusual way (left). This well-known portico with plantings designed by Jekyll draws all visitors to experience it by walking through, out to the park. Or you can spend time in the lovely, sunny garden within the walls (above).

All 24 participants were from the United Kingdom except for me, and all were avid, experienced gardeners. Our two guides spoke French and English, but it was an opportunity to practice my French as not all the garden owners/designers/caretakers who greeted us spoke English well. This tour featured the Gardens of Varengeville & Haute-Normandie. We stayed in Varengeville and traveled by motor coach to eight gardens over a period of four days. The hotel, a short walk from the sea, was lovely, and all meals were included, which meant wonderful French menus at lunch and dinner with plenty of wine. The stark, harborless beach and cold rolling waves of the sea have been captured in paintings by many including Monet, often from the top of the white cliffs.

The best garden visits begin with a welcome from the garden owner or designer, expressing joy at the arrival of guests. This happened at each stop of this tour. Each host guided us through the gardens, and when they spoke in French, a tour guide translated for us.

I will share four of the gardens with you. In all of them the designers magnified their

ambitious visions while transforming the landscape. The first two accomplished this on grand scales and the second two with more intimate settings.

I was convinced to attend the tour after reading the description of **Le Bois des Moutiers** in Varengeville-sur-Mer, which was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Additionally, Gertrude Jekyll, another English designer practicing in France, worked with Lutyens on the design and planting of the gardens. Guillaume Mallet and his wife, Marie-Adelaide Grunelius, commissioned the design of the exceptional house and garden. Lutyens designed the house in the Arts and Crafts style. Antoine Bouchayer-Mallet gave us a memorable guided tour of the house and gardens, and we felt specially chosen as both were soon to be closed to the public for restoration. Bouchayer-Mallet has been maintaining the estate by offering tours, concerts, and a location for filmmaking, but a buyer has now been found who plans to spend two years restoring it. Twenty-four acres in size, the property includes the house, gardens, and a large park, designed by Guillaume Mallet, leading down to the sea, visible from the top floor of the house.



PHOTOS BY JUDY NAUSEEF, FAPLD



Everything about the house and walled garden was designed to work as one from materials, stonework, site lines, movement both in the house and garden, and the views from both. Although our guide pointed out material choices and design, which we all appreciated, we weren't able to appreciate it entirely until we had a true understanding of the purpose and effect of every part.

Unless they surrounded a historical chateau, the gardens we visited did not arise from a sense of place so much as from the vision of the owner and/or designer. **L'Etang de Launay**, another private garden also in Varengeville-sur-Mer, is a property near the sea. A pond (*l'etang*), small streams, and a variety of sloping terrain provided Jean Louis Dantec a place to create a protected habitat of little valleys with streams to the sea. He planted nearly every tree and shrub and has maintained the garden himself, including doing the pruning. Twenty years ago, it was a blank slate when he began the garden by planting windbreaks with the plan to create a beautifully designed woodland. The wide number of species shows his deep horticultural knowledge. When I visited, the grass paths were wet and slippery from days of rain but we kept up with the owner to learn as much as we could about how he conceived and built this landscape.

The next day we visited **Le Jardin Plume**, which is located southeast of Rouen. It is owned and designed by Sylvie and Patrick Quibel and was begun in 1997. ➔

L'Etang de Launay: Our first view was a glimpse of the pond as we approached the woodland. Pruned boxwoods transition the landscape into the wild (far left). Verdant plantings surround a meandering stream (above).



Le Jardin Plume: Boxwood hedging protects the garden from the wind. A large block of switchgrass and smaller blocks of shorter grasses around the apple trees bring a more formal look to the landscape.

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Le Jardin Plume: We filled this garden, walking through the maze of boxwood hedges and getting close to the perennials (above). The structure of this garden is clear in this photo. The tall hedges are to protect the garden from the wind, the shorter hedges are to direct visitors, and the shaped conifers reflect the shape of the building gables (below).



Le Clos Normand: The formal entry to this garden belies its exuberant interior. I was easily drawn into the garden to explore all its ins and outs (top). Inside the garden, tall, narrow conifers provide a transition from the formal to the informal garden. The picturesque home adds to the cottage/English garden feeling as do the small paved areas throughout for sitting (above).





Le Clos Normand: Even on a rainy fall day the garden offered colors, textures, and scents to enjoy. The matching tall conifers form a strong backdrop to this area of the garden.

This 4-acre site was also a blank slate with picturesque farm buildings and an apple orchard. Patrick Quibel gave us a tour, speaking French the whole time. He spoke about plants, but I was able to catch the meaning as he used botanical names. They began by planting boxwood and yew hedges to protect the gardens from the wind, which was strong on the viewing platform where we began the tour. Much of the space is divided into spring, summer, and fall gardens with a large block of North American switchgrass. Blocks of shorter grasses surround the apple trees in a geometric pattern. A smaller garden surrounded by tall hedges and intersected by paths astounded all of us. It was a riot of color, even at the end of September. A variety of tall perennials with some annuals swayed in the wind as bees visited the blooms. The Quibels incorporate many North American natives such as Culver's root, purple coneflower, asters, and grasses.

The last garden we visited was **Le Clos** (meaning "walled or enclosed") **Normand** in Varengeville. It's another Mallet garden, owned by Constance Kargere, the sister of Robert and aunt of Antoine. We felt comfortable in this traditional French garden with its English cottage planting style. Informal sitting areas surrounded by tall see-through plants looked familiar. Our hostess was there to visit with us and answer questions. It was another rainy day, but that only improved my photos. 📷

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