



# The Life and Gardens of Harvey Ladew

*Mr. Christopher Weeks*

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He played piano with Cole Porter. He rode horseback in the Hollywood Hills with Clark Gable. He partied with Elsa Maxwell. He ate snails with the French writer Colette, in bed. It was all, as he often said, "perfectly delightful."

Few more colorful figures embellish American cultural history than the late Harvey S. Ladew, wealthy socialite, fox hunter, artist, traveler, and -- at his country estate outside Baltimore -- creator of the nation's most admired topiary garden.

In "Perfectly Delightful": The Life and Gardens of Harvey Ladew, Christopher Weeks offers an immensely readable, chatty account of Ladew's life and the glittering world he inhabited. When Ladew bought his Maryland farm in 1929, he had already lived a life few, if any, could equal: born into the upper stratum of New York society in 1887, he spoke French before he spoke English and took boyhood drawing lessons from Met curators. As an adult he gave decorating instructions to Billy Baldwin (the dean of American interior design), lived as the houseguest of the maharajah of Kapurthala, took a camel caravan across Arabia (with travel tips kindly provided by his good friend T. E. Lawrence), weekendend at the stateliest of England's stately homes, lent his favorite horse to the Prince of Wales, matched wits with Edna Ferber, Noël Coward, Saxeveverell Sitwell, Beatrice Lillie, and Dorothy Parker (in English) and with Jean Cocteau and Colette (in French), hunted fox in America, England, Ireland, and Italy, and (with Charlie Chaplin) saw off Gertrude Lawrence as she sailed from New York.

To this fascinating story of multicontinental revelry, Weeks attentively adds the background and development of Ladew's unique and wonderful Maryland garden, which attracts thousands of visitors each year, and his important role as an early environmentalist. When he began his garden in 1929, Ladew broke new artistic ground, for he was perhaps the first person in America to follow the tenets of English arts and crafts garden design. His achievements were featured in *Town & Country*, *House & Garden*, (and its French counterpart, *Maison et Jardin*), *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*. Garden clubs and gardening tourists from four continents strove to outdo one another in praise. This acclaim culminated in 1971, when the Garden Club of America gave Ladew its Distinguished Achievement Award.

To bring readers the remarkable story of Ladew and his gardens, Christopher Weeks draws on photo albums, scrapbooks, garden catalogs, thousands of pages of garden memoranda, an unfinished hand-scrawled autobiography, hundreds of letters, and guestbooks that read like a cross between *Variety* and *Burke's Peerage*. Photographs reproduced from Ladew's albums -- some taken by him, some by leading photographers of the day, including many by his friend Horst -- illustrate the text. Scores of interviews with Ladew's friends from New York to Florida help to illuminate this remarkable personality.

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