Saint Sebastian and the Garden

Photographs and Text By GARY DWYER

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Cover Photograph: palm tree with con trail, 2003 © Gary Dwyer

Gary Dwyer Photography

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This book is dedicated to all the farmers and ranchers in this world who take the trouble to feed us from the biggest garden of all; to Saint Sebastian - wherever you are I wish you had quit when you were ahead; to Lila Acheson Wallace who gave her money away to restore a garden that continues to be enjoyed by millions and finally to HAD and Qubert and that French girl with whom I hang around.

A strong and direct tip of the hat goes to Paul Gardère of New York, for his brilliance, patience and wit during our joint residency in Giverny. Thanks also to Clair Joyes and her book, ‘Claude Monet: Life at Giverny,’ and to Elizabeth Murray for her book, ‘Monet’s Passion.’ Thanks to The Académie des Beaux-Arts, and especially to Gerald Van der Kemp without whom much of France’s cultural history might have been lost. Much of the writing contained in this book was begun in 1993. It takes a long time for some gardens to bear fruit.

http://www.garydwyerphotography.com/
Gary Dwyer staring at the San Andreas Fault in 1983
Elkhorn Plain, California
Those who have made a picnic of looking are left to record it.

Paula Bohince

It may take you a long time to understand the title of this book.

What I view as a relatively direct route may seem convoluted and obscure to others. Perhaps this book is not about gardens after all and even less about Saint Sebastian.

There is an outside chance that this book is about Rousseau, but I’m not convinced. Thinking about the world might be the real topic. Claude Monet made me do it.
“Everything looks perfect from far away.”
Iron and Wine - Garden State Soundtrack

I have spent far too much time thinking about gardens. I am going to stop thinking about gardens pretty soon, but I have a few things I want to say first.

Anyone who reads this book will come to these words flipping through the book from back to front. We do this because we can’t wait, an because we don’t like being told what to do. I spent a great deal of time putting this book together in a specific order and if the reader is something other than a cavalier nitwit and actually wants to know what I have come up with after thinking about gardens, they are going to read this damn thing and then the answer as to why I did the pages in sequence might become clear. Words in sentences are sequential. So are the pages in this book. At least they are in my puny little brain. If you can’t see the logic, well, too bad.

For a very long time, I have avoided the topic of Gardens, and I think it is because I don’t understand them, but as you will soon see, I have an awful lot of ideas about them. Perhaps the real reason behind this book is to understand them better. Perhaps it is a really sleazy way to get the reader to look at more of my photographs. Right now, it’s a toss-up.
Even though it has been happening for decades, I have never been comfortable being associated with gardens.

I planted some bushes for my parents in their front yard, but that doesn’t qualify. I don’t have any great affinity for things botanic. I worked for the U.S. Forest service and I later I was forced to learn a lot of Latin names of plants, but so what? The idea of a garden confused me so, along the years, I tried to understand it better, and my thoughts ended up here:

1. What is a Garden
2. What is Nature and how do I see it
3. A Garden has Borders
4. Water in the Garden
5. Plants and what we do to them
6. I am Temporarily Able-Bodied
7. Saint Sebastian.