



a Gem of a Garden BY PAM BAXTER



Above: Titled 'Helios', this illuminated glass sculpture by Eric Hopkins is doubly striking reflected on the surface of a pond. **Top:** The rose and perennial garden in full summer bloom.

A new botanical garden on the southern coast of Maine integrates innovative designs, plantings, and artwork in a stunning natural setting.

SOME VISITORS to the Pine Tree State never get past the crowded beaches and romantic rocky outcrops along the southernmost shores. But for those whose spirit of adventure lures them a little farther up the deeply notched coastline, an inspired jewel awaits: the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens (CMBG).

The gardens provide visitors with a complete immersion in the Maine landscape, with trails through acres of pristine woods along the tidal shoreline, and a central Great Lawn distinguished by a dramatic outcropping of the underlying schist bedrock.

Getting There

The Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens is located on Barter's Island Road, in Boothbay, Maine. For more information and directions, visit www.mainegardens.org or call (207) 633-4333.

The garden is a participant in the AHS's Reciprocal Admissions Program (RAP), so AHS members receive free admission and a 10 percent discount in the gift shop.

This brand new garden in picturesque Boothbay, which officially opened in June 2007, brings a world-class garden to a region that previously had no major horticultural destinations north of Boston. The 248-acre landscape is one of only a few botanical gardens in the continental United States that embraces a coastline.

THE VISIONARIES

In 1991, the garden was just a dream shared by a small group of Maine residents who imagined what educational, economic, and cultural benefits would result from creating a botanical garden in coastal Maine.

Five years later, this grassroots group, who are now referred to as the Founders, pooled their resources—a few used their homes as collateral for a loan—and purchased a 128-acre parcel of land in Boothbay. The property included wonderful topography and ecological features such as vernal ponds, rock ledges, and the tidal shoreline. An archaeological survey indicated the site had never been farmed or even inhabited. “It contained the best of Maine and was a very exciting palette to work from,” says Maureen Heffernan, the garden's executive director.

In 2005, the Gardens received a donation from the Pine Tree Conservation Society of an additional 120 acres of undeveloped adjacent land. The acreage included another quarter-mile of shoreline, bringing the total to nearly one mile.

To get the garden off the ground in 2004, the founders recruited Heffernan, who was most recently director of education and public programs at the Cleveland Botanical Gardens (CBG), where she was responsible for coordinating the design and construction of CBG's Hershey Children's Garden. Prior to that she was education coordinator for the American Horticultural Society from 1990 to 1995.

In addition to Heffernan, the creative vision for the garden represents a collaboration of international and local talent.

veloping the planting plans for all the gardens. Terrence DeWan & Associates, from Yarmouth, Maine, helped refine the designs and coordinate the project's landscape construction.

Heffernan points out that the designers have been careful to maintain as much of the natural feel as possible, placing paths around rock ledges, drilling lights into boulders and leaving all the roads unpaved. Environmentally responsible construction methods were used throughout the gardens. Even the visi-



Left: CMBG Executive Director Maureen Heffernan inspects the large reflecting basin carved by David Holmes for the Vayo Meditation Garden, above.



tor's center incorporates “green” building features, including bamboo flooring and natural lighting.

EXPERIENCING MAINE

The Maine experience begins the moment guests step out of their cars. In the parking area, visitors find themselves in a surprisingly intimate space—a cluster of graveled parking “pods” that are tucked discreetly into the surrounding woodland. “You have a garden experience just walking up to the visitor's center,” says Heffernan.

Visitors emerging from the elegant shingle-style visitor's center immediately encounter the Great Lawn and a variety of themed ornamental gardens, includ-

Landscape architect Herb Schaal, of the San Francisco-based international design firm EDAW, Inc., created the master plan for CMBG's main campus. Bruce Riddell, a landscape architect from Bar Harbor, Maine, designed the Haney Hillside Garden and the Vayo Meditation Garden and was responsible for de-



For visitors, the garden experience begins in the parking lot, where naturalistic plantings blend in with the native pine trees on the walk up toward the visitor's center. Above: Irises flourish at the edge of Slater Forest Pond. Right: The 9,350-square-foot visitor center contains meeting, classroom, office, and research space, a café, and gift shop.



ing a rose and perennial garden with hardy ornamentals that survive and even thrive in the harsh winters and short growing season. Adjoining this is Slater Forest Pond, a tranquil water feature home to waterlilies, irises, and other moisture-loving plants. Nearby is the newly installed Burpee Kitchen Garden, where geometric beds showcase a medley

of vegetables, herbs, fruits, and flowers.

Leaving the formal area, guests can take a meandering path to various garden destinations along the shoreline, starting with the wooded Haney Hillside Garden. Here the rockiness of the Maine landscape is evoked with stone benches, terraces, and a scenic waterfall. Tucked in among the stonework is a colorful, richly-textured

blend of native and non-native plants.

Sheltered below the canopy of weeping Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), weeping Serbian spruce (*Picea omorika*), pines, dogwoods, viburnums, and rhododendrons are herbaceous plants such as ghost fern (*Athyrium* 'Ghost'), Siberian bugloss (*Brunnera macrophylla*), and bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*).



Top: Slater Forest Pond provides visitors a place for quiet reflection. **Above:** Marking the head of a fern-flanked woodland trail, this enigmatic stone face is one of eight at CMBG created by stone artisan William Jacobs.

A step or two further down the gently sloping trail is the Vayo Meditation Garden, a tranquil setting that melds the coastal elements of stone, sea, and sky.

At the end of the Shoreland Trail is the one-acre Rhododendron Garden. Walkers can then loop back to the visitor's center via the Birch Alleé. Along the way, digressions include the fern walk and access back down to the Shoreland Trail. "The way it's been designed provides the best of both worlds," says Heffernan. "You can enjoy formal ornamental gardens as well as trails through pristine woodlands lush with moss and knee-high ferns."

In addition to highlighting native plants, Heffernan plans to showcase unusual or rare species from around the world. When the gardens are completed, they will contain one of the largest hardy Kousa dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) collections in the country. [See sidebar, page 27.]

ENCOURAGING ART TO FLOWER

"My vision for this place is not just as a garden, but a center for culture as well," says Heffernan. With this in mind, she commissioned artists to create sculptures

for placing throughout the grounds.

Some of the pieces deliberately reflect Maine's botanical and historic identity. For instance, an enormous metal pine cone greets visitors a short distance from the entrance gate. (The white pine, *Pinus strobus*, is Maine's state tree.)

A glass column, titled "Lighthouse," is mounted on a pile of stones in the Kitchen Garden. Its facets hold and reflect light in a way that brings the image of a lighthouse on a rocky shore into the interior landscape.

In the center of the Meditation Garden, an enormous polished granite basin holds water that reflects the color of sea and sky and provides a perfect focal point for contemplation.

Not all the sculptures at CMBG were commissioned. One morning, while the gardens were still under construction, workers discovered carved stone faces that had been scattered throughout the trails. Crafted on a whim by Maine stoneworker William Jacobs, who also created many of the garden's walls and paved areas, these haunting faces seem to acknowledge the presence of spirits of trees, earth, and rock.

They were immediately embraced by Heffernan and allowed to stay.

In addition to the permanent sculptures, Heffernan plans to bring music and theater to the center, and to host outdoor sculpture shows.

PRESERVATION AND RESEARCH

From CMBG's inception, preservation and stewardship of the natural landscape have been a high priority. The result is that out of the entire 248-acre tract, a total of only about 10 acres will be developed.

Part of CMBG's mission is to serve as an educational resource. The Center houses a horticultural lending and research library containing more than 2,000 botanical and horticultural texts. Future plans include equipping the library with information technology that will allow access to horticultural libraries worldwide.

An internship program is currently in place, which enables horticulture students to gain hands-on experience in garden and grounds management and public garden educational programming. From CMBG's inception there have been on-site programs for children, and lectures, classes, workshops, and field trips for adults, all designed to help participants acquire practical skills for gardening in Maine.

The Education Center also provides space for ongoing research, including the continuation of a 10-year study of the native pink lady-slipper orchids (*Cypripedium acaule*) and hardy ferns that grow on the property.

LOOKING FORWARD

The first phase of the design and implementation came with a price tag of \$8.5 million. After successfully completing that fundraising campaign, CMBG has launched a new \$7.5 million campaign to raise funds to build new gardens and to begin an endowment fund.

Over the next several years, plans are for two major gardens to be added to the main campus. People of all physical abilities will be able to access and enjoy the Garden of the Five Senses, and the Children's Garden will highlight well-known Maine authors of classic children's books including E. B. White (*Charlotte's Web*), Robert McCloskey (*Blueberries for Sal*), and Margaret Wise Brown (*Goodnight Moon*).

BUILDING A FIRST-CLASS DOGWOOD COLLECTION

One of the CMBG's hallmarks is its small but growing collection of Kousa dogwoods (*Cornus kousa*). Executive Director Maureen Heffernan is quick to point out that "collection" is a loose term because the trees are not clustered in a specific area of the gardens, but rather are scattered throughout the site where they do best: in the light shade at the edges of the existing woodlands.

Running like a thread throughout the Gardens, the trees, native to Japan, Korea, and eastern China, provide four-season interest. The blooming season is long—from June through early August—and the reddish-orange fruit and brightly colored foliage provide a striking display in October and November. The vase-like shape of the trees and the jigsaw pattern of the bark add visual and textural interest in winter.

In addition to their long bloom period, which coincides with peak visiting season in summer, the Kousas have another advantage: they are highly resistant to dogwood anthracnose, a fungal disease that plagues their North American relative, flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*).

"We wanted to find something that would be unique to us," says Heffernan. "And from what we understand, there isn't a major public garden in

the Northeast that has an extensive Kousa collection." The idea started with the donation of several Kousas from former CMBG Board member Merlin Smith, a long-time Kousa enthusiast. "Merlin has access to many cultivars that are hard to find," says Heffernan. "Over the years, he has given us a number of Kousas, and I soon learned to appreciate their beauty and value in the landscape."

At present, the collection includes 11 cultivars: 'Wolf Eyes', 'Temple Jewel', 'Square Dance', 'Madison', 'Lustgarten Weeping', 'Milky Way', 'Satomi', 'Gold Cup', 'Beni Fuji', 'Summer Games', and 'Blue Shadow'. "Eventually we'd like to put together one of the larger collections in the country," says Heffernan. —P.B.



Kousa dogwoods, like this one in summer bloom in the Rose and Perennial Garden, grow throughout the CMBG.

Heffernan's goal has always been to make the CMBG a world-class horticultural center, and the gardens appear to be well on their way. "The garden is a treasure," says Katy Moss Warner, AHS's president emeritus. "The plantings complement the natural landscape and provide insight into the plants and

plant combinations that are suited to this rugged northern climate. It's a must-see garden that promises to be even more compelling as the additional garden areas are created."

Garden writer Pamela Baxter lives in West Chester, Pennsylvania.