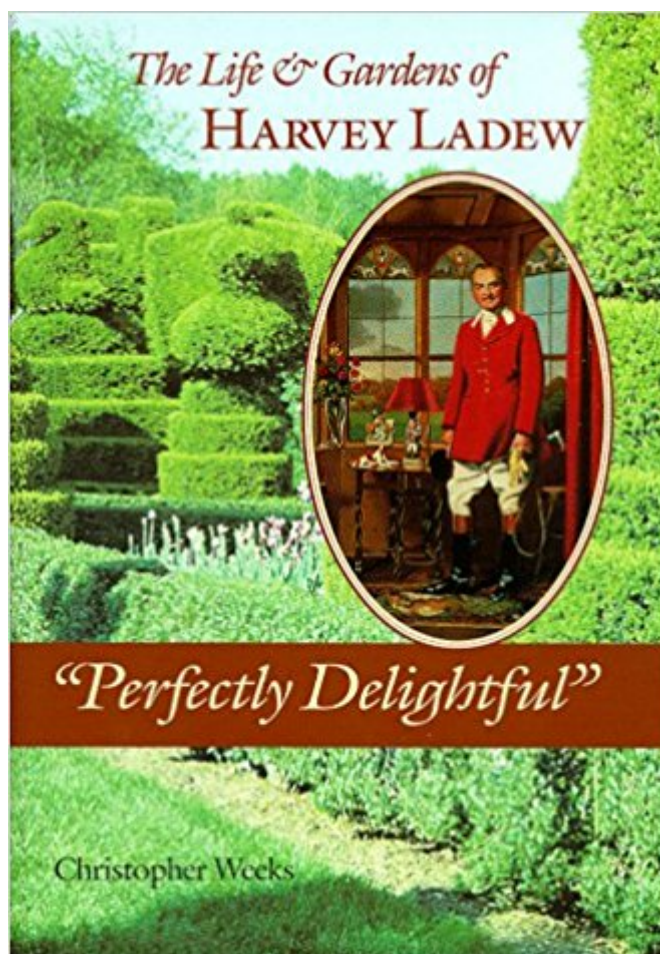


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# The Life And Gardens Of Harvey Ladew



## Synopsis

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), weekendened at the stateliest of England's stately homes, lent his favorite horse to the Prince of Wales, matched wits with Edna Ferber, Noël Coward, Sacheverell 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Harvey Ladews one significant accomplishment was to create a 22-acre garden in Maryland that was the first American garden to make considerable use of topiary. Ladew was born into upper-crust New York society in 1887 and lived a life of leisure, where his most strenuous activity for many years was an annual foxhunting trip to England. This was how he came to know and appreciate topiary. Weeks, an architectural historian and officer of the foundation Ladew created to care for his garden after his death in 1976, presents a chatty, uncritical account of Ladews life. Ladew was a gifted amateur, but his life of travel, parties, and hobnobbing with the rich and famous, including maharajahs, Lawrence of Arabia, the Prince of Wales, Noel Coward, Dorothy Parker, and Colette, among many others, will be of interest only to those who need every bit of information about topiary gardens. Recommended only for specialized gardening collections. Daniel Starr, Museum of Modern Art, New York Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"A fast-paced, breezy, cheerful, anecdotal biography that gives the reader a brisk tour of the glittering surface of Ladew's life but also amply conveys the man's deeper qualities and his contributions: his thorough investigation of the subjects that interested him; his indomitable cheerfulness; his self-education through mastery of languages, wide reading, travel, and cultivation of interesting people of many types; above all, his gift to the world of his house and gardens, truly a great work of art. In short, throughout this enjoyable book, the reader is made aware that its subject

is a life worth knowing." -- John Dorsey, Baltimore Sun"The creator of the Ladew Topiary Gardens lived an incredible life... Part of a proto-jet set, the independently wealthy bachelor spent his time fox hunting, painting, and cultivating his Harford County estate -- all the while befriending and entertaining the most celebrated minds of the 20th century." -- Margaret Guroff, Baltimore Magazine

quite interesting information.

beautiful gardens are well represented in this book, as is the interesting history of the development of the gardens and estate.

Just a wonderful book which I highly recommend. The item arrived in super condition and the seller is A-1 as well!

I am interested in his life since I lead field trips through his gardens.

Maryland has a unique treasure in the form of the Ladew Topiary Gardens. Harvey S. Ladew (1887-1976), originally from New York, came to Maryland looking for more room to fox-hunt as Long Island became built up. He bought a farm and laid out 22 acres of very distinctive gardens, including such unusual features as "room" gardens and of course, the extensive, often whimsical topiary. Ladew designed and did a great deal of the actual gardening himself. Wishing to preserve his work, towards the end of his life, he and his friends created a foundation to maintain the gardens. I am not the sort of person who watches *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* or reads society pages, so I must admit that I found Ladew's life somewhat dull. Admittedly, if I had inherited the kind of money that he did, I don't think that I would have become a wage-slave either, but drifting around the world going to lots of good parties, while undoubtedly a lot of fun for Ladew, doesn't make for interesting reading, in my opinion. There are, however, lots of people who do follow the rich and famous, so this may all be very entertaining for them to read about Ladew palling around with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Noel Coward, and various others aristocrats and socialites. The biography is generally very laudatory, though I must say that I wouldn't have been interested in second-guessing whether or not he should have fox-hunted, etc. The book is beautifully done. There is a section of color plates, and an abundance of black and white pictures scattered throughout the text. There are abundant notes, and the section is laid out so that it is easy to match the reference in the text to the corresponding notes. Explanatory notes are included with the bibliographic. There is also an index.

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