

Review of "Monet's Garden: Through the Seasons at Giverny." , Vivian Russell.

Vivian Russell's writings about European gardens are worth a read. Those who have visited Giverny will love this book and those contemplating a visit will learn much about what to expect. Monet moved into Giverny in 1883 and died there in 1926. Everyone knows Monet as an impressionist painter particularly of water lilies - he did 250 water lily paintings and the last sold for \$81million - but he was a fantastic gardener. He started painting in the now familiar impressionistic style after an 1886 visit to bulb fields in the Netherlands. He started serious gardening after moving to the large property at Giverny, N.West of Paris. Monet read the current garden magazines and catalogues, went to garden shows and became a highly respected garden authority. Who would have guessed from the stream of visitors to the garden that Monet actually did the odd painting on the side? Just for the record - he did 2050 paintings. That he regarded as his 'job' whereas the gardening was his relaxation.

The most revealing part of the book concerns Monet's life at Giverny. Since his death, the garden - now owned by the nation - has been "restored" and has become somewhat of a show garden. Only part of the garden is faithful to Monet's original. Specifically, note the 'paintbox' beds that Monet used to develop harmonious colour palettes based on natural flower colourings.

The second part of the book describes the seasons in the current garden and the photography by Vivian Russell is exceptional. Gardeners will enjoy the accounts of the gardening practices in such a huge show garden but they will not learn all that much that they did not already know. Besides the modern colour illustrations there are photographs from Monet's time in full colour. There are also numerous Monet garden paintings that are superb.

This is a very lively read with great illustrations and a powerful story to tell.

Bryan Taylor, June, 2011