ical studies of the proposed route through the years, and inevitably has revealed to the public that as much history may lie underground as above.

Seasholes has organized her fourteen chapters of text and images so clearly that the reader has no difficulty following the ups and downs and ins and outs of Boston’s complex four-hundred-year transformation from a few peninsulas and islands to the city we know today. The introduction leads the reader chronologically through the historic developments that spurred Boston’s landmaking, such as the need for docks, wharves, and defense in the seventeenth century, a town almshouse or new residential areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a site for an airport or park in the twentieth. Recurring concerns about the inadequacy of Boston’s harbors or the peril of pollution and disease were factors, as were the implementation of water and sewer systems or municipal parks. Broader historic developments such as the growth of the China Trade and the immigration of the Irish also sparked landmaking projects. A second chapter briefly discusses the technique and technology of landmaking, explaining the basic methods and their changes over time.

Having established a historical context, Seasholes methodically examines each section of the city, neighborhood by neighborhood, starting with the Waterfront, then the Bulfinch Triangle and the West End, Beacon Hill, the Back Bay and South End, the Fens and Fenway, South Cove, South Bay, South Boston, Dorchester, East Boston, and Charlestown. The book unfolds geographically, and within each chapter the land projects are considered in more or less chronological sequence. Each section starts with a bird’s-eye-view image of the area being discussed with the original 1630 shoreline marked in bold lines. The text is illuminated with copious illustrations, including readable historical maps that reveal important evidence. Where applicable, recent archaeological findings are related to the historic record.

One can, and should, read this book from start to finish, but another way to approach it is to read about the part of the city in which you are most interested. The information and insights you gain from that chapter will probably encourage you to check out another neighborhood, then another, and, in the process, you will eventually have read the entire book. It really is that good.

Though most people associate major landmaking in Boston with creation of the mid-nineteenth-century residential districts of the Back Bay and the South End, Seasholes points out that the 400 acres of the Back Bay do not compare with the more than 1,400 acres made to create the airport, or even the Boston flat projects, which created 650 acres for the South Boston Waterfront, Marine Industrial Park, and the Conley container terminal.

Seasholes has limited her investigation to land projects of organizations rather than individuals. To this end, in addition to her analysis of the historic maps and views, she has assembled an impressive research base of official reports and private papers of city boards, commissions, corporations, contractors, and others who actually made the land. Her study is distinguished by the archaeological expertise that comes from time spent on the sites combined with methodological rigor. The amount of primary information she has collected and synthesized is remarkable, and her ability to present her findings in such a clear and accessible fashion is outstanding. For instance, the timeline of neighborhoods and land projects brings together information that is presented elsewhere but gives the reader a comprehensive grasp of the entire development. With its completeness, complexity, and elegance, this book sets a new standard for topographical histories of Boston.

Differing greatly in scope, size, and ambition, The Garden Squares of Boston and Gaining Ground, each in its own way, add substantially to our understanding of and appreciation for the complexities of the urban landscape—what lies hidden below the surface and what is visible above.

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Kim Coventry, Daniel Meyer, and Arthur H. Miller
Classic Country Estates of Lake Forest: Architecture and Landscape Design, 1856–1940

Fortunate are the architectural historians of the homes of the wealthy, for they can call on a rich cache of documentary evidence. For nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies, this means drawing on high-quality photographs, renderings, plans, and portraits of the owners. Kim Coventry, Daniel Meyer, and Arthur H. Miller have combined these elements to create a visually appealing history of the landed estates of the Chicago suburb of Lake Forest. The volume is filled with elegantly composed views, color renderings, studio portraits, and the occasional family snapshot of the well-dressed owners at play. The images dominate the book and provide a look into the private world behind estate walls. The authors weave history, urban development, architectural analysis, and the history of landscape architecture and interior design into their narrative.

Lake Forest is not a suburb in the classic sense of a middle-class bedroom community. Located thirty miles north of Chicago, it served rather as a summer retreat similar to Newport, Rhode Island, and beachside towns on Long Island, New York. Its estates reached their zenith in the first third of the twentieth century. Today Lake Forest may be most renowned for the elegant work of the reigning architect of that period, David Adler. The scale of the estates, many as large as two hundred to four hundred acres, resulted in a unique landscape of clustered yet isolated homesteads. As in Long Island, Miami Beach, and Newport, the wealthy chose to congregate. In 1911–12, Lake Forest added a small shopping district; however, there has never been any significant public space or commercial center to the community. Rather, residents met in private clubs or on the estates. Over time, with
the change in American fortunes, the large estates gave way to subdivisions and a typical commuter suburb emerged, albeit a very wealthy one.

At the heart of the history of Lake Forest many readers will find a mystery. At the time the estates were being built, Chicago was home to two major movements—the Prairie School and the more commercially focused Chicago School. But the builders of Lake Forest turned their backs on this revolutionary architecture and choose classically inspired or European domestic architectural models. Coventry, Meyer, and Miller address this issue in their opening chapter, acknowledging that Chicago’s famous skyscrapers and Prairie School buildings have taken pride of place in the city’s history. They write, “Thus it has taken time for serious inquiry to explore in depth a genre of more formally conservative appearance: the country and suburban [residences] of the nation’s wealthiest citizens” (25). And so the authors explore the influences that shaped the houses and landscapes, from Renaissance villas to French country estates. They find an architectural history worthy of serious exploration.

As in many revival styles, the American version of European historic architecture can appear flat, lacking in three-dimensional vitality. In contrast to the Prairie School architects who were rethinking middle- and upper-middle-class American domestic life from the inside out, the Lake Forest architects had to reconfigure historic styles to meet contemporary needs, which led to some ungainly or lifeless solutions.

Coventry, Meyer, and Miller make a convincing case, nonetheless, that Lake Forest had many architectural masterpieces. They devote expanded discussions to several of these building projects. On the modest end of the scale was Ragdale (1897), designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw for his own family. Shaw was one of the most popular architects hired by the barons and baronesses of Chicago industry. Influenced by the English Arts and Crafts style, Ragdale was also an expression of the domestic reform ideas of Edith Wharton and Oliver Coleman. On the opposite end was Villa Turicum (1908), “perhaps the best-known of all Lake Forest Estates” (143). Frank Lloyd Wright drew the first plans for Harold and Edith Rockefeller McCormick, but they rejected his ideas and hired Charles A. Platt instead. Platt was the author of Italian Gardens (New York, 1894), a compilation of articles from Harper’s Magazine, and helped spread the interest in Italian landscape design, further popularized by Wharton. The result was an Italian-inspired house and garden that reached palatial proportions. The fact that the family barely occupied the house after 1912 raises one of the questions only partially answered by the authors: What purpose did these estates serve?

The authors present the mansions as refuges from urban life and social unrest. For the wealthiest owners they were not simply second homes, but one of several residential retreats. For contemporary readers, it may be difficult to comprehend the scale of the estates that encompassed four hundred acres and may have included entire working farms. If the book has a shortcoming, it is a lack of curiosity as to what these people were up to. As a result, when the authors focus on interiors, they view them strictly from a design perspective. There is little discussion of how rooms were used or of the placement and function of the service areas of the buildings. Some detached service buildings are mentioned in terms of location in plan or architectural details. This book does not aspire to the type of analysis that Mark Giroud provides in Life in the English Country House (New Haven and London, 1978), in which the symbolic role of estate buildings and their uses are explored. Nor does it concern itself with the larger historical phenomenon of the display of extreme wealth and cultivated taste that Mark Alan Hewitt studies in The Architect and the American Country House (New Haven and London, 1990).

A compensating strength is the attention given to the designed landscapes. “Estate landscapes and gardens were shaped by an equally impressive group [as the architects] that began with apprentices of the Victorian garden-training system and broadened to include Frederick Law Olmsted, Ossian C. Simonds, John C. Olmsted, Jens Jensen, Warren Manning, Ellen Shipman, and Rose Standish Nichols” (27). While the architects of Lake Forest worked in more conservative, revival styles, the landscape architects and gardeners used a wider array of design approaches. Jensen, for example, designed prairie-inspired landscapes and like the Olmsteds had both private and public clients. Significantly, in 1913 the Lake Forest-based Garden Club became the westernmost founding member of the Garden Club of America. These landscapes are well illustrated and occasionally upstage the architecture.

The history of Lake Forest has been examined in others’ works, including studies of individual architects, such as David Adler, Architect: The Elements of Style, edited by Martha Thorne (Chicago, 2002), or broader surveys of gardening history, such as Mac Griswold and Eleanor Weller’s The Golden Age of American Gardens: Private Owners, Private Estates, 1890–1940 (New York, 1991). Lake Forest is also discussed in the aforementioned work by Hewitt. Coventry, Meyer, and Miller have made a significant contribution with this excellent history of one community examined from many angles. They have blended their research and individual styles into a highly readable and graceful whole.

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