



Welcome to

Abkhazi Garden

Photo Robin Farquhar

Garden • Restaurant • Gift Shop

The Creation of the Garden

The story of the garden begins in 1920's Paris when the young Marjorie (Peggy) Pemberton-Carter met the exiled Georgian Prince, Nicholas Abkhazi. They established a strong friendship that was nurtured by correspondence and occasional meetings.



Photo Courtesy of BC Archives - (c) 1999

Their separate lives were filled with personal tragedy. World War II saw both Nicholas and Peggy interned in prisoner-of-war camps. During her internment, at great risk to her personal safety, Peggy kept a secret diary of her war experiences that was published as *A Curious Cage* in 1961. She also managed to keep hidden, in a container of talcum powder, a small quantity of travellers' cheques that she used, on her release, to purchase a passage to San Francisco. From there she made her way to Victoria at the invitation of her closest friends, the Mackenzies, to recuperate and plan her next move.

Peggy arrived in Victoria in December 1945 and, by March 1946, had decided to buy the large treed and rocky lot that would become Abkhazi Garden. She immediately hired landscapers to start clearing the property. By the fall of 1946 the land was fenced, a summerhouse was built and lawns and fruit trees were planted. In January 1946 Peggy had received a letter from Nicholas. They had lost contact with each other during the war and did not know that the other had even survived. Nicholas proposed a meeting in New York in the fall. Peggy agreed to meet him, and their reunion turned into an engagement. The time was right for the two of them to be together. They returned to Victoria and were married in November 1946.



Photo Courtesy of BC Archives

The Abkhazis had each led privileged lives in their early days. Together, their garden became the focus of their own artistic creativity. They carefully chose plants that would enhance its natural beauty, seeking out the best available plants from the finest nurseries of the day. They were mentored by Victoria's most distinguished horticulturalists. For over 40 years the Abkhazis continued an intense process of experimentation and constant refinement.

The Summerhouse

Designed for Peggy by John Wade, a young Modernist architect, the structure was completed by the summer of 1946.

It was the first building constructed on the property. The summer house provided shelter for the Abkhazis as well as a place to make a light meal while they developed the garden and planned their main residence. Abkhazi Garden is a superb example of artistic integration of house and garden.

Working from the original architect's drawings, the summerhouse was completely restored in 2002 with financial assistance from a generous donor. Visitors can now fully appreciate this gem of Modernist architecture perfectly placed in its glorious setting.



Photo TLC Files

The House

The Abkhazi house was built in 1947, a time of transition for architecture in the city. Victoria was experiencing a building boom after World War II, and a new movement was starting to express itself that challenged the placid image of its traditional architecture.



Photo Judith Brand

Peggy and Nicholas Abkhazi chose John Wade to design their home, indicating their willingness to embrace the new contemporary point of view, expressing the Modernist spirit of the times.

The house is constructed simply with a view to comfort and utility. Through the use of natural wood and stone, it embraces an inventive use of modern products and technology.

The bungalow house features a restaurant, a gift shop, plant displays and exhibits showing the history and evolution of the garden. The house sits easily on the terrace, perfectly sited for magnificent views of the garden, and vistas beyond.

Full colour garden maps are for sale in the Gift Shop

The Land Conservancy of BC

Acquired by TLC in 2000, Abkhazi Garden is an exquisite heritage home and garden located in Victoria, B.C. Since 1997, TLC has saved special places, like Abkhazi, throughout B.C. for present and future generations. Modelled after the National Trust in Britain, TLC as B.C.'s leading charitable land trust, has protected more than 300 properties or 125,000 acres of fast disappearing natural areas, historic sites, farms and ranches, and places of community and recreational importance. TLC works with many partners, all levels of government, businesses, community groups, and individuals to ensure the broadest support for our activities. TLC is proud to work on behalf of over 7,000 Members worldwide. Become a Member today at conservancy.bc.ca.

For volunteer opportunities contact 250-598-8096

The Walking Tour of Abkhazi Garden

Birdlife spotted in the garden:

Mallard • Glaucous-winged Gull • Anna's Hummingbird • Downy Woodpecker • Northern Flicker • Northwestern Crow
Chestnut-backed Chickadee • Bushtit • American Robin • Varied Thrush • European Starling • Spotted Towhee
Dark-eyed Junco • House Finch • House Sparrow

Quick Facts:

Abkhazi Garden is now an organic garden. We use no pesticides or herbicides and only organic fertilizers.

The ponds are home to three turtles. You can often see them sunning on the rocks.

4. The Summerhouse

The summerhouse is a focal point in the garden. Views from the small porch are some of the best in the garden. From this viewpoint, second only to that of the main residence, the vista extends to include all of the Yangtze River-inspired path, lawn, and glacial rock protrusion. It is a rare occurrence when a building and its surrounding landscape are designed as a single well-considered composition.

3. Yangtze River

One of the garden's most memorable views lies just beyond the Spanish fir tree (*Abies pinsapo*). A heather-lined path separates the undulating green lawn from the immense rock



Photo Jeff de Jong

outcropping. Peggy likened this image to the Yangtze River near her former home in Shanghai. The flow of the path celebrates the rock and Peggy's desire to collaborate with the site's natural features. Side paths lead to three ponds created from natural depressions in the rock. These provide reflections of sky and nearby plantings and also a home for families of resident Mallard Ducks. The paths' constant changes in elevation slowly reveal fresh and unexpected views over the landscape a bit at a time.

2. The South Lawn

The south lawn path skirts the west side and carries the eye up to the natural rock formations that provide the foundation for the Abkhazis' house. Bold architectural plants have created a new mixed border along the path. The original hornbeam hedge forms a dramatic, dark backdrop to a collection of silver foliage plants that continue the grey colour scheme of the dominant rock at the north end of this area. The 50-foot sweep of Agapanthus edging provides a strong flowing line consistent with the movement throughout the garden. The ashes of both Nicholas and Peggy were spread at the base of the rock at the north end of the lawn with instructions from Peggy - to shed no tears for her, but to celebrate with a glass of champagne her reunion with her beloved Nicholas.



Photo Robin Farquhar

5. The East Path

The clean and symmetrical etched concrete path that began at the bottom of the "Yangtze River" now follows the



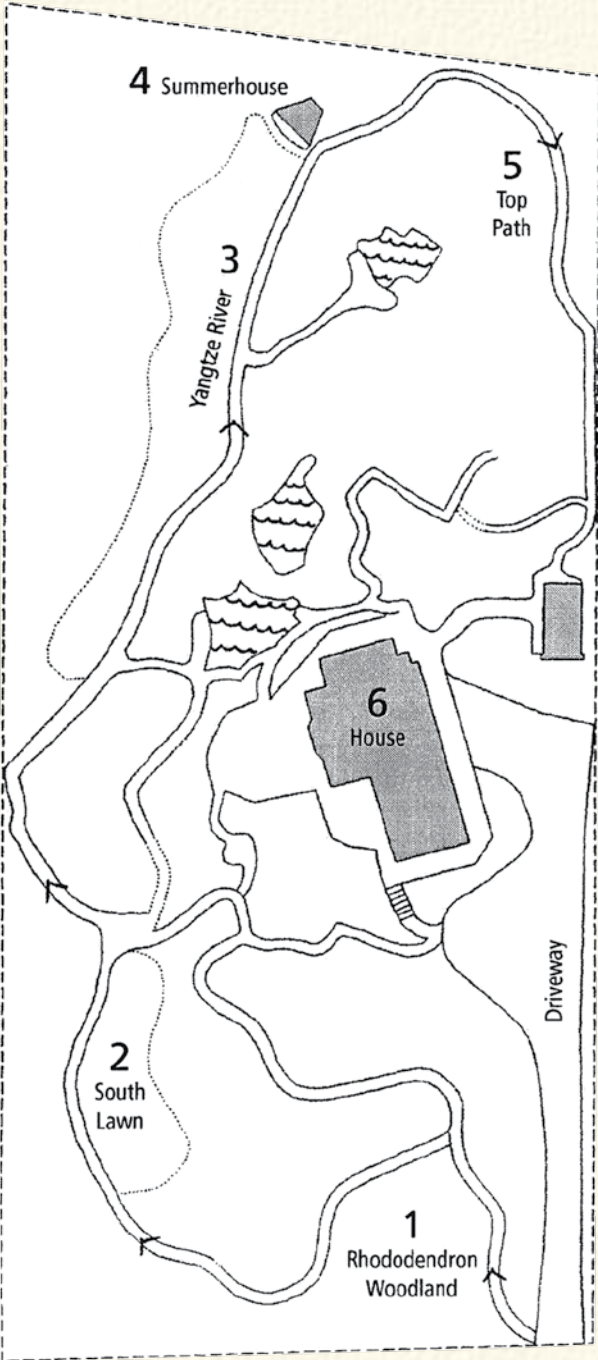
Photo Dave Skilling

contours of the rock in a more organic, free-flowing style. The planting here spills down

and around the glaciated rock and an original planting of lily-of-the-valley lies between the curve of rock and path. Mature conifers tumble down the rock face toward a hidden pool mimicking waterfalls, while ferns and native plants are encouraged to find footholds in the stone. Views from the top of the path reveal both the garden and the wider landscape beyond, including the Sooke Hills, the Juan de Fuca Strait and the Olympic Mountains. The path divides before reaching the garden shed. For the most direct, even pathway to the house, continue straight. Turn right along the concrete path for a more challenging route. Please watch your footing along this trail.

6. The House Terrace

Approach the terrace by steps or by walking over a new steel bridge. The simple lines of the new bridge rails echo the original elegant curve of the original stone steps. Alpine troughs have been added as a safety feature, but they are also proving to be a popular addition to the garden. Their rough surfaces encourage the moss and lichen on the rocks beneath to grow and expand. From the terrace visitors can visually retrace their steps and view the fully unfolded sprawl of the garden. Natural rock outcropping meets set sandstone on this terrace in a seamless blend of the natural and the designed.



1. The Rhododendron Woodland Garden

We invite you to begin your tour of the garden with a walk through the rhododendron woodland. Here the native Garry Oak trees provide shade for a collection of species and hybrid rhododendrons that speak to the age of the garden. Many of the now towering trees were already 50 years old when the Abkhazis planted them. The rhododendrons begin flowering in January and continue blooming until June. Woodland companions carpet this part of the garden. These include underplantings of wood anemone, *Trillium*, Arisaema, and our native bleeding heart. Throughout the year a succession of blooms appear including *Eranthis hyemalis*, winter aconite, *Erythronium*, fawn lilies, camas and hardy cyclamen. Summer interest is provided with a collection of unique ferns and hostas, Tigridia, Primula, Galtonia and *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, the Giant Himalayan lily.



Photo Jeff de Jong