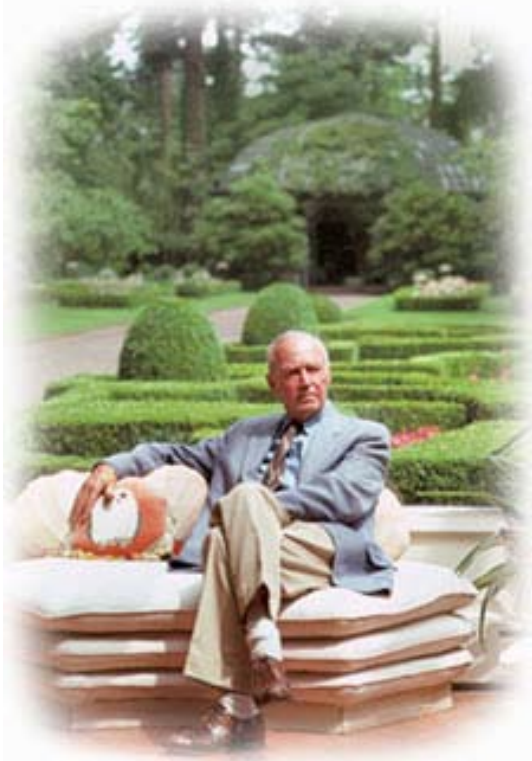


# Thomas Church

## *Landscape Architect*

Thomas Church was born in Boston but grew up in Oakland, California. He received his B.A. degree in landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley in 1922. He later received his master's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Church traveled to Italy and Spain for six months on a Sheldon Fellowship that he was awarded at Harvard. After returning from Europe he taught at Ohio State University for a year before returning to the San Francisco Bay area.

At the age of thirty, Church opened an office in San Francisco and continued to practice out of the same office until his retirement in 1977.



Lakewold Gardens is an excellent example of landscape architect Thomas Church's work. Thomas Church led the group of landscape architects that created the Modernist movement in California. Church gave the western American garden the concept of the outdoor room, to be enjoyed as a living space. This was a dramatic departure from the current concept of residential landscape trimming the grounds with foundation and boundary plantings. His primary focus was on the private residential garden, although his work also includes such projects as the Stanford Medical Center, Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley and at Santa Cruz, the San Francisco Opera courtyard, and the General Motors headquarters. His design for the Dewey Donnell ranch near Sonoma appears in virtually every book on modern American landscape architecture. Church took a detailed approach to landscape design with attention to form, surface, texture, light and the dimension of space that they define. He had used his fellowship from Harvard to study Mediterranean gardens and their adaptability to Californian conditions and applied it to his life's work on the western residential landscape. In his 50-year career he designed and built more than 2,000 gardens. Church was widely influential through his publications in magazines including: *House Beautiful*, *Sunset*, *House and Garden*, *Architectural Record*, *Architectural Forum*, *Horticulture* and *Sunday* supplement features in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Church regularly visited Lakewold, from the 1950's into the 1970's, furnishing ideas and designs for the gardens. The circular drive and the entrance court for the house illustrate his concept of a distinct sequence of arrival by bringing one around through the rhododendrons and an ever-changing

sequence of views of the garden and then to the front of the house. In the entrance court he placed two 19th century Danish lamp posts, which were from a number he acquired when the city of Copenhagen updated its streetlights, and examples of which can be found in others of Church's works.

Church's concern for a direct connection between house and garden, including provisions for outdoor living, are illustrated in a number of elements of the gardens. He retained the brick walk from the Alexander's time, enhancing its role as a north-south axis of the garden linking the house to the teahouse by making it the focal point for a more complex design within the garden. He placed two pairs of classic parterre beds along the walk. He sited the quatrefoil pool with one axis parallel to the walk and the other perpendicular to it, between the pairs of parterre beds. Focusing along a vista of Gravelly Lake with Mount Rainier rising in the distance. Opposite the pool along the same axis he placed the antique Queen Anne sundial purchased from Thornewood. He remodeled the teahouse for use as a bathhouse for the pool, which, despite its ornamental form, was intended as a swimming pool as well.

Church himself considered Lakewold significant enough to use in his influential books *Gardens are for people* and *Your private world: Gardens are for People*. The characteristics of Church's masterful work are easily recognized at Lakewold: the design pays careful attention to both details and the whole, landscape features are sited perfectly, the main planting was coordinated with existing materials (such as the Wolf Tree) and architecture, natural circulation patterns are featured and the overall design is evolved rather than imposed.