



# **Sezincote: History and Evolution of a Designed Landscape**

**Landscape Design History  
Erika Packard  
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## Introduction

Sezincote is a 4,500-acre estate located in the North Cotswolds, near the town of Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire.

Colonel John Cockerell, grandson of diarist Samuel Pepys, gained great wealth working for the East India Company, and purchased the estate known as Sezincote in 1785. (Bourne, 2012). Cockerell died in 1798, and left his estate to his siblings. His brother, Charles Cockerell, bought his siblings out of their shares for £38,000 and became sole owner of the estate in 1801. Charles Cockerell had retired from the East India Company in 1805 and become a Member of Parliament in 1819 (Sibthorpe, 2014).

A third brother, Samuel Pepys Cockerell, along with the artist Thomas Daniell, redesigned the existing Jacobean manor house on the Sezincote estate for Charles, completing it in 1805 (Wheeler, 1991). Both Samuel Cockerell and Daniell had spent time in India, and the house was designed as an homage to that country. Sezincote is thought to be “the only ‘Indian’ country house ever built in England” (Connor, 1979) (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Sezincote as depicted in 1830, about 20 years after its completion.**

Sezincote remained in the Cockerell family until they ran into hard financial times and sold it, in 1884, to James Dugdale, of Lancashire (Historic England, 2000).

The home and garden fell into disrepair during the Second World War. In 1944, Sir Cyril Kleinwort bought the estate from Mrs. Dugdale. Sir Cyril and his wife Lady Betty Kleinwort initiated a recovery of the property. In 1976 Sir Cyril and Lady Kleinwort gave control of the property to their daughter, Suki Peake. Today Suki's son Edward Peake, and his wife, Camilla run the estate.



## Sezincote Today

At present Sezincote is run as a working farm estate but also accepts visitors to the house and gardens and hosts weddings (See Figure 2). The approach winds through oak-studded pasture



Figure 2: Present-day aerial view of Sezincote.

that gives the estate its name (French: *chêne* [oak] and *côte* [dwelling] See Figure 3). The original home, modeled on Mogul and Hindu-style palaces, is made of orange-stained limestone and features “minarets, peacock-tail windows, jali-work railings, and pavilions” (Bourne, 2012). A distinctive architectural feature of the house is the long, curved orangery full of flowering container trees and plants including *Fuchsia* sp. and *Heuchera* sp. Both the house and orangery, along with other extensions, are Grade I listed buildings.

Looking out from the orangery, one views a rectangular Indian-style garden designed with a narrow pool running north to south bisected by a path at its midpoint. Where the pool and path meet in the center is an octagonal fountain. The



Figure 3: Approach to Sezincote showing namesake oaks.



paths are lined with fastigate yews (*Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata', See Figure 4). Two elephant sculptures frame the view down the pool toward the house from a hillside vantage point on the southern side of the garden, and above the sculptures is a planted wildflower meadow. Mature deciduous woodland backs the orangery and includes copper beeches (*Fagus sylvatica* f. *purpurea*) that add a nice dark backdrop to the scene.



Figure 4: "Paradise Garden" showing canals added in 1968 adjoining the original octagonal fountain, and elephant sculptures added in 2000.

There is a ha-ha at the front (east) side of the house, and the cattle-grazed pasture slopes away beyond it down to a lake designed to fake the effect of a larger river, concealing the much more modest River Evenlode. Beyond the lake are views out to the Cotswold countryside.



Figure 5: Top of the Thornery stream garden, showing original Temple Pool, Temple to Surya, and grottoes.



To the north of the house the gardens continue in an area known as the Thornery. This is a series of Indian-style pools, temples and bridges built along a spring-fed stream that follows the hill down to the lake. Near the top of the hill is the formal Temple Pool, about 20 meters in diameter, which sits below the Temple of Surya containing a stone figure of the Indian god of the sun. The Temple Pool is surrounded by grottoes set into the stone (See Figure 5).

Continuing down the hill, following the stream, one encounters the Indian Bridge above the Serpent Pool, which features a central island planted with *Primula florindae*, and a statue of a three-headed serpent winding up a staff (See Figure 6). Nearby are the Rock Pool, the Island Pool, a wildlife pond and other India-themed statuary. Notable trees in the area include four Lebanon cedars (*Cedrus libani*), thought to date from 1728, and a weeping hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* 'Pendula') that may be the largest in England (Historic England, 2000).



Figure 6: The Indian Bridge, which features a stone seat underneath in the stream designed for cooling oneself off, which is probably more appropriate to India than England, and serpent statuary.

The whole of the Thornery area is landscaped with weeping trees, shrubs, and perennial ornamental plants that thrive in the damp conditions, including *Hosta* sp., *Lysichitum americanum*, *Astilbe* sp. and *Dicentra spectabilis* (Wheeler, 1991).

## Historical Evolution of Sezincote

Around the same time as the house was built, major earthworks were begun that molded the land into a picturesque landscape garden of the style made popular by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. There is, though, some uncertainty about the designer. Humphry Repton, considered by some to Brown's successor, is connected with Sezincote in the literature. The estate's current Web site even claims him as designer: "The south front, complete with curving orangery, unfurls above a Repton landscape that has remained unchanged since the mid-19th century" (Sezincote, 2016). However, other sources state:

[Repton] was probably engaged from 1804 to 1805, and then in conjunction with the artist Thomas Daniell. It is thought (though without absolute proof) that Repton was responsible for the lake, east and downhill from the house, which overlooks the parkland from a ha-ha; and that he sited the belts of woodland round parts of the estate. He also drew a sketch for a small flower garden, but the gardens near the house, built in a distinctive 'Indian' style, are more firmly attributable to Daniell, who had been involved in the travels and topographical illustrations in India (Thomas, 1979).

When the Thornery, or stream garden, was laid out in 1804, "it was the first time that rock was used



**Figure 7: Thomas Daniell's 1819 painting of the Temple Pool and Temple of Surya, which he is credited with designing.**

to give a more or less natural effect. It is used in the creation of outcrops and waterfalls all down the stream" (Thomas, 1979). The garden's Temple Pool and Temple of Surya are attributed to Daniell, as are the Indian Bridge and Serpent Pool (Historic England, 2016) (See Figure 7).

Sezincote appears to straddle the changing fashion between the Picturesque style and the Gardenesque style that followed (Sheffield Botanical Garden, 2016). "That is the significance of Sezincote: the Arcadian park of wide vistas, lawns, temples and well disposed trees planted to exaggerate small folds of ground, is over. Parks are passé, Gardenesque layouts for detailed plant examination and appreciation are in. Classicism is out; uninhibited eclecticism is permissible." (Mowl, 2002). Some say Sezincote's Indian style reflected an "eagerness of many owners to escape from the supposed monotony of the lake-with-rolling-parkland common in the 1790s" (Thacker, 1989).



When the house was originally built, the gardens nearest the house on its south side—and an extension of the domestic space—had been raised rose beds (See Figure 8). UnIndian in design, they matched the Greek Revival architecture and Georgian decor of the house interior. Some



**Figure 8:** The original layout of the south garden, showing the raised rose beds, from a 1936 postcard.



**Figure 9:** The "Paradise garden" as it exists today, after transformation by Lady Klein and Suki Peake.

suggest that this incongruity spoke to the expatriate life the Cockerells lived during their time with the East India Company. The exoticism of work and travel in India, as evidenced in the house exterior and furthest-flung gardens, was balanced with the comfort and social acceptability of English style nearer the house and in domestic spaces (Sibthorpe, 2014).

During the Second World War, Sezincote was used to house Canadian troops, who mowed the lawns but did nothing else to care for the grounds. When Sir Cyril and Lady Klein bought the derelict Sezincote in 1944, they used scythes to recover the remains of the gardens. They



discovered the series of pools in the Thornery, which were dry and needed to be rewaterproofed in order to make the stream flow again (Bourne, 2012).

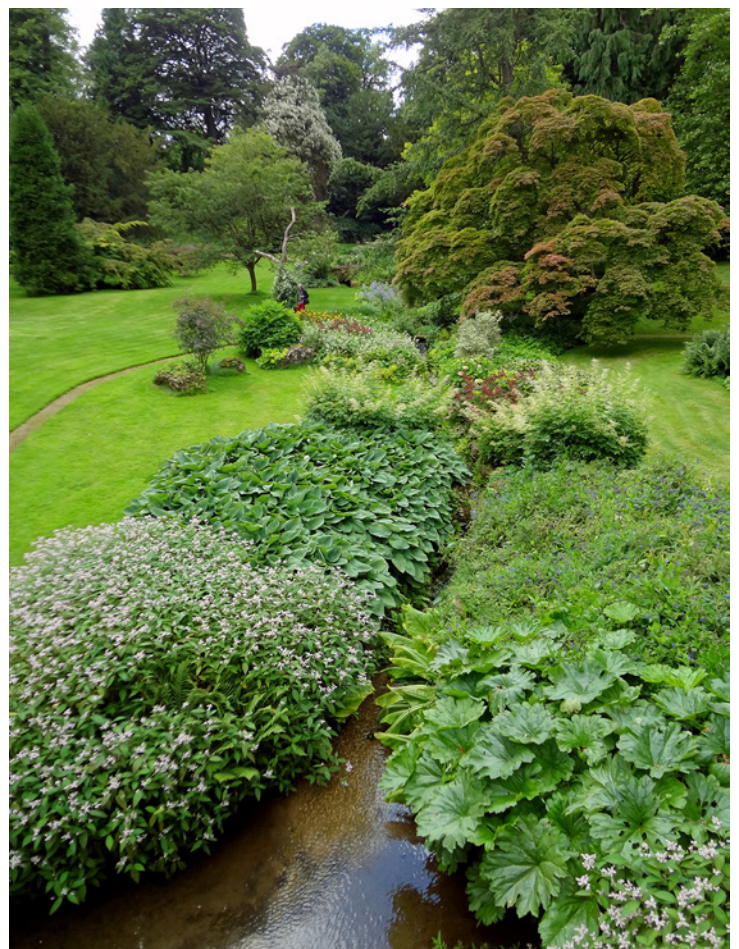
In the 1960s Lady Klein hired the English garden designer Graham Stuart Thomas to help replant the gardens, beginning what would be a thirty-year working relationship spanning two generations of the family (Bourne, 2012).



**Figure 10: The Thornery stream garden after “elaborate modern planting” by Graham Stuart Thomas.**

After a visit to the Taj Majhal, Lady Klein was inspired to replace the rose beds on the south side of the house in 1968 with the “Paradise garden” that exists there today (See Figure 9). The paths were lined with *Taxus baccata* ‘Fastigiata’—a concession to the Cotswold climate for what would traditionally have been *Cupressus sempervirens*—and an Indian pavilion was added to the south side of the garden.

Unlike in the new ‘Paradise garden,’ Klein went in an unIndian direction for her replanting of the Thornery stream. Instead of playing up the existing statuary and architecture, she capitalized on Thomas’ skills as a plantsman, adding rare trees and plants. The “large rocks are still exactly as originally placed,” but the original landscaping of fern and weeping trees was replaced “by elaborate modern



**Figure 11: The “new” plantings all but obscure the stream, hiding its original rock designs.**



planting all around” (Thomas, 1979), which still exists today (See Figures 10 and 11).



**Figure 12: The most recent garden evolution includes the installation of a new wildflower meadow in 2010.**

The garden has undergone a few more changes since Lady Klein’s renovation. To commemorate the Millennium, Suki Peake continued the Indian theme by adding two large elephant statues to the “Paradise garden,” framing the view down the canal (Bourne, 2012). In 2010 Edward Peake tasked head gardener Tony Bryant with installing a wildflower meadow on the hillside above the elephants (Cotswold Seeds, 2016) (See Figure 12), which thrives there today.

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## Image Sources

**Figure 1:** Jone's Seats, Sezincote, 1830: <http://www.rareoldprints.com/p/5117>

**Figure 2:** Google maps: <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Sezincote+House,+Moreton-in-Marsh,+Gloucestershire+GL56/@51.9775,-1.7533887,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m2!3m1!1s0x487127d9cd-90f291:0xd08210b11a3fabdb>

**Figure 3:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012

**Figure 4:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012

**Figure 5:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012

**Figure 6:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012

**Figure 7:** Thomas Daniell, Temple, Fountain and Cave in Sezincote Park, 1819: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AThomas\\_Daniell\\_-\\_Temple%2C\\_Fountain\\_and\\_Cave\\_in\\_Sezincote\\_Park\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AThomas_Daniell_-_Temple%2C_Fountain_and_Cave_in_Sezincote_Park_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

**Figure 8:** Colonel Dugdale's House and Conservatory, Sezincote, 1936: <https://tuckdb.org/pictures/276454>

**Figure 9:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012

**Figure 10:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012

**Figure 11:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012

**Figure 12:** Erika Packard, July 19, 2012