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# GARDEN MUSEUM

Mayor Bill de Blasio  
City Hall  
New York  
NY 10007

12<sup>th</sup> November 2014

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

## The Russell Page Garden at the Frick Collection

We have been asked to comment on the significance of the garden designed by Russell Page (d.1985) for The Frick Collection in the 1970s.

We understand that the development plans may affect the garden, and that city agencies will have a role in deciding the garden's future. The Garden Museum is not an advocacy or conservation organisation, and it is certainly not our business to comment on the plans of another Museum, particularly when a Museum is as precious and much-loved and reaching-out as The Frick. (We're a very small Museum but extending within a very tight site in central London with nine hundred years of archaeological and community history, and completely understand the complexity of such commissions).

However, we thought we should note that Russell Page is the subject of a retrospective at the Museum opening in March 2015, and we intend to feature the garden as one of c.20 case studies in the United States, Italy, France, Belgium, and the UK.

How important is the Frick garden? Certainly, it was close to Page's heart, and according to his close friend and confidante Gabrielle van Zuylen he worked on the project for ten years, making detours while on his trips elsewhere in the States. How important was Russell Page? He was certainly the pre-eminent designer in Britain in the 1970s, and ever since the late 1950s had an international clientele, from the rich connoisseurs of Europe to visionary makers of new communities in Australia and South America. His book 'The Education of a Gardener' is perhaps the most thoughtful and reflective book ever written about garden design, and it's pretty unique for a book about gardens to be chosen for reprint by the New York Review of Books.

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*Cont.,*

The Frick garden encapsulates what is unique to his work: that is, a combination of modern geometry with painterly perspective (he trained as a painter, and it's a case study of how to achieve perspective and movement with simple elements) and, of course, a lifetime's hands-on knowledge of plants.

Landscape designers tend to be forgotten more quickly than architects and artists, owing to the more ephemeral material with which they work – that is, organic matter. However, Page's designs have survived owing to the considered nature of his response to a site – somehow, he always got it right – and because he was interested in deeper issues of sense of place, and context, and not just ornamental planting.

I'd also like to add that it is very rare to find a garden design master-class which contributes to the public realm on this intimate, domestic scale. (This is just as true in London, where we have great public parks on the one hand, and on the other many very well-designed gardens but behind the walls of private houses; it's for this reason that we've commissioned a new garden by Dan Pearson which will have the design status and lush intimacy of a private commission but will be open to everyone).

Finally, I would just underline that although Page's name is associated with a rich clientele, he was a man of great feeling and social empathy. He was deeply influenced by Eastern philosophy and, also, believed in the spiritual and physiological value of designed landscape to everyone; I've just been reading the file on a visit to advise on a city plan in Venezuela, and his first response is to explain that before he begins a master-plan, something must be done about the danger to teenage boys of playing in rubble, which he follows by a simple proposal of making level sites for basketball.

Yours sincerely,



Christopher Woodward

Director

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Cc Mr Charles A. Birnbaum, Founder and President, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 1711 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20009