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HERMANNSHOF SHOW GARDEN AND VISITOR GARDEN AS A PLACE OF CONTEMPORARY GARDENING INSPIRATION

Cassian Schmidt, **SCHAU- UND SICHTUNGSGARTEN HERMANNSHOF MIT FOTOGRAFIEN VON PHILIPPE PERDEREAU** (HERMANNSHOF Show and Visitor Garden with photography by Philippe Perdereau)

96 pages, 72 color photographs, 2. Aufl., Stuttgart 2023, Ulmer Verlag, ISBN 978-3-8186-1936-7, www.ulmer.de

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Cassian Schmidt – the author of the book – is a garden architect and an outstanding expert in the field of perennials. Since 1998, he has managed the Hermannshof Show Garden and Visitor Garden in Weinheim and holds a professorship at the Hochschule Geisenheim University (University of Geisenheim) in the field of plants usage in ornamental horticulture.

The Hermannshof show and visiting garden is an important place for gardening inspiration in Germany and Europe:

- is among the most beautiful gardens in Germany; it provides fascinating stimuli and ideas for the shaping of contemporary garden plantings;
- unusual and durable plant combinations facilitate the possibilities of shaping the plantings; they are easily understandable from a botanical and logistical point of view;
- at the heart of the Hermannshof sits a prairie garden where, for the first time in Europe, grow over 350 typical, partly newly introduced plant species from various prairie types, originating from North America.

The book is authored by a German garden architect, prof. Cassian Schmidt, while the 72 colourful, artistic photographs of garden fragments and plants are taken by the outstanding French garden photographer, Philippe Perdereau.

In the book about the Hermannshof garden, we can distinguish the following parts: “Introduction” (pp. 4-15); “Plantings of perennial beds” (pp. 14-41); “Wet meadows and water edges” (pp. 42-49); “Sheltered areas and woodlot edges” (pp. 50-59); “Dry prairie plantings” (pp. 60-73); “Steppe plantings” (pp. 74-84); “Prairie garden” (pp. 84-93); “Information and addresses” (pp. 94-96).

Introduction – the past and the present of the Hermannshof garden in Weinheim/Bergstrasse

The “Introduction” is very clear and presents the following issues related to the past and the present of the Hermannshof garden: general characteristics of the “Hermannshof show and visitor garden in Weinheim”; “Gardening passion based on a family tradition”, “Vision of a new garden concept”; “Perennial life range concept”: “Special trees in the Hermannshof”; “Educational contribution of the garden”; “Financing”.

The Hermannshof show and visitor garden in Weinheim covers the area of 2.3 ha. It is located in the vicinity of the so-called “Baden mountain road” (“Badische Bergstrasse”), on the western slope of the Odenwald mountains. It is one of the warmest climatic areas in Germany and a typical climate for growing vines. Cypressess, figs, stone pines, evergreen magnolias and sweet chestnuts grow perfectly here. The Hermannshof garden cultivates 2,500 species of perennials and 400 species of trees, some of which are rare in Germany. The cultivated plants come from the temperate parts of Europe, North America, East Asia, as well as Asia Minor and Central Asia. The garden is over 200 years old and is closely linked to the gardening passion of the Freudenberg family. In 1888 it was acquired by Hermann-Ernst Freudenberg (1856-1923). Based on the name of the purchaser, the garden was named “Hermannshof”. He and his wife, Helene, as well as two further generations of the Freudenberg family, looked after the Hermannshof garden in the subsequent years. From 1924, Prof. Heinrich Wiepking-Jüngensmann (1891-1973), a famous German garden architect, worked closely with the Freudenberg family. After World War II, the Americans temporarily occupied the then Hermannshof house and garden. The situation further changed in the mid-1970s when the Freudenberg company took over the ownership and future maintenance of the garden.

The new vision for the garden’s concept came from the Freudenberg family, but also from the garden architect, Gerda Gollwitzer (1907-1996), long-time editor-in-chief of the “Garten + Landschaft” magazine, and from Prof. Richard Hansen (1912-2002). The latter was a critic of the previous methods of public greenery management in urban areas, where monotonous lawns without flowers typically dominated. Prof. Hansen was an avid advocate of the use of perennials in public greenery. Founded by Prof. R. Hansen in 1948, the Weihenstephan show garden in Freising served to recreate

the Hermannshof garden, which was finally shaped in the years 1981-1983. Prod. Hansen was also the originator of the concept of perennial range of life. The most important are the requirements in terms of light, soil and climate. The following ranges of plant life are listed: woodlots and woodlot edges, free areas, steppes and stony steppes, water and water banks, flowerbeds with traditional ornamental plants.

Trees are also of particular importance. In front of the Freudenberg villa one can find the majestic sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) and magnolia (*Magnolia denudata*) trees planted in 1888. There are still 35 m high plane trees (*Platanus x hispanica*) in the garden, as well as a rare oriental plane tree; all of them date back to the 1770s. Characteristic trees also include: ginkgo biloba, Atlantic cedar (*Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauc'), metasequoias, Greek fir (*Abies cephalonica*). A very characteristic specimen of myrtle is also present here, but it is kept in a heated room during the winter. There are other rarer and often sensitive trees and shrubs present in the garden, including the evergreen Turner Oak (*Quercus x turneri* 'Pseudoturneri'), Osmanthus (*Osmanthus x burkwoodii*), Redbud (*Cercis siliquastrum*), and varieties and species of North American and East Asian dogwoods. The flowering wisterias are very impressive, as is the exotic Chinese Davidia (*Davidia involucrata* var. *vilmoriniana*).

Since 1983, the Hermannshof has been a private educational and research centre, one making significant contributions to garden culture in Germany. The garden is open to the public, with 130,000 visitors per year. Hermannshof conducts intensive research on the use of perennials in the conditions of a climate crisis. Since 1999, there has also been close cooperation with the Geisenheim University College (Hochschule Geisenheim University). Students of the "Landscape Architecture" course attend lectures, exercises and design work in the garden.

The Hermannshof is the only show garden financed by the Freudenberg group of companies. Its share is 70%, with the city of Weinheim bearing 20% of the costs.

Planting perennial flower beds

In front of the gardener's house flowerbeds are located. These are often tall perennials, not only from Europe, but also from North America and East Asia. They often require fertile, fresh soil, as well as a sunny, warm location. Tulip plantings in April make a great impression and, in the high and late summer, tall perennials and grasses bloom. Annual plants also bloom in mid-May and later. Many garden varieties show stronger flower colors and more diverse flower forms than the original wild plant forms. However, in the Hermannshof garden, flowerbeds must be watered during the dry season. Spring in Hermannshof reaches its peak at the end of April. Then the apple trees (*Malus hupehensis*, *M. floribunda*), the Chinese elderberry (*Syringa x chinensis*), and wisterias bloom, followed by the garden tulips of the 'Menton' and 'Dordogne' varieties. Many other tulip varieties also bloom. The plantings of the forest tulip (*Tulipa sylvestris*) are particularly interesting. Very characteristic plantings of North American bedding perennials, which reach their flowering point in August. These are: sunflowers (*Helianthus*), heliopsis (*Heliopsis*), coreopsis (*Coreopsis*), rudbeckias, goldenrods, supplemented by annuals. In autumn, the following combinations are characteristic: *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Undine', reed grass *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster', and also the rare tree *x Chitalpa taschkentensis*. In late September, the following plants bloom: diamond grass (*Calamagrostis brachytricha*), New England aster and New York aster (in many varieties).

Wet meadows and water banks

Perennials from the "Moist Free Areas" range come from wet meadows and the banks of rivers and reservoirs. Tall perennials that bloom in both early and high summer are common here. In early May, white flowers of camas (*Camassia leichtlinii* 'Alba'), long-lived bulbous plants, bloom. Characteristically, Siberian irises, marsh spurge, meadow knotweed (*Bistorta officinalis* 'Superbum'), daylilies, as well as lady's mantles, geraniums, meadow knotweed (which grow back after mowing) are also present here. Perennials of Asian origin do well in damp-cool areas, including Henry's lily (*Lilium henryi*), Culver's root *Veronicastrum* 'Fascination' and the domestic valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*).

Tree stands and tree edges

Both ranges of plant life are characterized by light to deep shade under woody plants. Perennials have large or leathery leaves adapted to the lack of light and temporary droughts characteristic of such living spaces. The foliage of these plants often offers high ornamental value (shades of green and varied leaf texture). Flowers usually appear in spring. On the edge of woodlands the living conditions are clearly more favorable, so that lush perennials, for example from East Asia, thrive here. Most perennials prefer fertile humus and fresh soils and high air humidity, as well as cool locations (in the summer). Such perennials are Japanese anemones, which bloom from August to October. *Anemone hupehensis* 'Overture', on the other hand, blooms as early as the end of July. Such a combination of plants is very beautiful: *corydalis* (*Polygonatum biflorum*) paired with *hosta* (*Hosta x tardiana* 'June'), or *rodgersia* (*Rodgersia pinnata* 'Maurice Mason'). Under the trees, "European forest perennials" thrive, including columbines with different flower colours (*Aquilegia vulgaris*). They are accompanied by almond-leaved spurges (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*).

Dry prairie plantings

In 2006, the Hermannshof Gardens established "Grass Plantings - Echinacea" and partially reintroduced species of dry prairie sites into cultivation. Many of these perennials were grown from seeds collected during a botanical expedition to the Ozark Mountains and the prairies of Missouri. Characteristic plants here include various species of Echinacea and various species of prairie grasses. The planting was lined with a layer of fine rock fragments, 5-8 cm in thickness and reaching up to 8-16 mm in size. These plantings are not irrigated, even during longer periods of drought.

The set of plants in the dry prairie plantings served as the basis for the development of plantings of prairie plant mixtures "Prairie Morning" (pink/purple/white) and "Indian Summer" (yellow/orange/purple).

The plantings include, among others: *Nasella tenuissima*, *Platycodon grandiflorus*, *Penstemon barbatus*, and many species of coneflowers and grasses. As early as May, these plants bloom in colors ranging from purple to pink, and from white to silver-gray. These are: beebalm (*Monarda bradburiana*), coneflower (*Echinacea simulata*), pony tails grass (*Nasella tenuissima*), and Louisiana wormwood 'Dakota Strain'. In July, the combination of the *Stipa tenuissima* with a low shrub (*Amorpha canescens*) is very characteristic. In late summer, a beautiful set of plants is created by the combination of blue colors of asters and the purple-pink Mexican twig (*Agastache mexicana*). The seed heads of coneflowers and the colors of the grasses harmonize quite well with them. During autumn and late autumn, the fall coloring of grasses and echinacea seed pods combine to produce a spectacular palette of trees and shrubs.

Steppe plantings

The steppes are dominated by drought-tolerant grasses and perennials. These are the landscapes of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as Central Asia. Rainfall occurs there mainly in the spring, or shortly before the summer. High summer is typically characterized by a lack of rainfall. The flowering time of steppe plants falls in May and June (the so-called Vorsommer, i.e. the pre-summer period). In spring, numerous bulbous plants bloom, mainly tulips and species of ornamental garlic. Plantings of steppe plants inspired by natural sites include: sage – yarrow plantings, silver summer plantings, as well as steppe heath plantings (flax – *stipa* on the mountain slopes and a bordering of red cranesbill). The plants are not watered, even during longer droughts. Here too, a mineral loosening layer made of rock fragments protects the soil from drying out. The planting of sage – yarrow is inspired by the steppes of Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The following set of plants is possible: downy sage (*Salvia nemorosa*), fernleaf yarrow (*Achillea filipendulina*) and red-flowering Macedonian scabious (*Knautia macedonica*). On the other hand, characteristic plantings of steppe heaths include plants from dry grasslands of the Upper Rhine Valley: lily spiderwort (*Anthericum liliago*), or alpine clover (*Trifolium alpestre*) growing in pre-alpine areas. In the high summer, characteristic plantings of the silver summer (German: "Silbersommer") are, including Lindheimer's gaura (*Gaura*

lindheimeri) and Transylvanian melic grass (*Melica transylvanica*). For sage-yarrow plantings, the seed heads of ornamental garlics, ironworts (*Phlomis*) and grasses are characteristic, joined later by many other steppe plants. Macedonian scabious ‘Melton Pastells’ and the silver seed heads of Transylvanian pearl grass harmonize perfectly during the silver summer (‘Silbersommer’). Moreover, they persist in the garden for many years by self-seeding. Plantings of switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum* ‘Sheandoah’) and Indian grass in the company of asters, gaura, baptisia, as well as seed heads of echinacea and liatris are also very beautiful.

Prairie Garden

The prairie landscapes of the Midwest of North America serve as the model for the prairie garden, established in 2001. There, grasses of various heights that flower in the high summer dominate. Based on the amount of precipitation, a distinction is made between low, dry prairie grasses and prairie grasses over 2 meters tall on fresh and moist soils. An intermediate position is occupied by moderately dry prairies with mixed grasses. In the Hermannshof garden, different types of prairies with their characteristic perennials from different ranges of the prairie garden are shown. However, what the prairie garden presents is not a copy of the original location, but rather an attempt to present the essence and character of prairie vegetation. In the late summer and early autumn, the prairie garden is particularly colourful (especially asters, goldenrods and *Sporobolus heterolepis* with a coriander scent). On the edge of a slightly shaded patch of the garden, paniculate phlox grows well, especially of the ‘Blue Paradise’ variety in a fantastic blue-violet colour. It looks good with grasses of a similar height and coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*). The prairie garden is particularly colourful in late summer and early autumn. It is when various asters, goldenrod *Solidago speciosa* and grasses look particularly beautiful. On the other hand, the American ‘Indian Summer’ effect is created by asters and the previously mentioned goldenrod. Also worthy of note is the ‘short-grass prairie’, where grasses (*Schizachyrium scoparium*; *Buchloe dactyloides*) dominate, as well as the yucca (*Yucca smalliana*). It looks particularly good against the background of autumn-coloured sweetgum trees or Dogwoods.

The Hermannshof show and visitor garden in Weinheim has developed significantly since 1983 and has become something of a “Green Mecca” for plant use in Germany. The private park area of 2.3 ha, with a valuable tree stand, was then transformed into a public show garden. It instructs the visitors on how certain perennials have been used as plants in accordance with their place of origin. Cassian Schmidt, who has directed the garden since 1998, has developed new concepts for plant usage that are oriented towards natural patterns. His richly flowering steppe and prairie plantings – also thanks to the innovations in plant care methods developed here – serve as a model for planting in many public and private gardens.

Plantings such as “dry prairie plantings”, “steppe plantings” and “prairie garden” are a response to the ongoing climatic and ecological catastrophe observed in Germany, Europe, and also globally. Also in Poland, “The Hermannshof Show and Visitor Garden” can serve as an excellent inspiration for creating private gardens as well as public green areas. It would be worth translating this colourful and well-developed book into Polish.