

Emma Smith

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown  
b1716 d1783

Lancelot Brown is the most famous English landscape designer. Lancelot Brown was born in Northumberland and served an apprenticeship with Sir William Lorraine. Lancelot Brown moved to Buckinghamshire in 1739 and was employed by Lord Cobham at Stowe in 1741. This gave Lancelot Brown the opportunity of working with William Kent and John Vanbrugh. He later practiced as an architect in his own right. On some occasions Lancelot Brown designed both the house and its park. In 1764 Brown was appointed Master Gardener at Hampton Court. His practice expanded rapidly and he was often away on coach tours. Many examples of his work are open to the public. Many others are well maintained as golf courses. Lancelot Brown's nickname 'Capability' came from his fondness for speaking about a country estate having a great 'capability' for improvement. Lancelot Brown's popularity reached a peak at the time of his death. It then fell into decline, as explained in our online history of English Garden Design since 1650. Lancelot Brown's reputation reached its nadir in the 1880s. It then began to recover and by 1980 he was being recognised as a genius of English garden design. Lancelot Brown described himself as a 'place-maker', not a 'landscape gardener'. It was the nineteenth century which saw 'landscape gardening' become a trade name.

### Picturesque

Picturesque was an 18th-century concept in Western art, referring to scenes which occupy the mid-ground between the 'ideal' landscapes of the 17th century and the 'sublime' landscapes of Romanticism. The leading advocate of the picturesque, William Gilpin, in his *Three Essays on the Picturesque* (1792), defines it as that which stimulates the imagination to reverie or admiration. To call a landscape 'picturesque' was to mean that it had picturesque potential, and many artists used a Claude glass to concentrate the picturesque qualities under observation. In an important departure for English landscape painting, Uvedale Price, in his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), argued that consideration of the picturesque would bring landscape painting back to a celebration of nature after its involvement with the academic 'ideal'. Outside the English context, Piranesi's veduta ('view') of the ruins of antique Rome obviously calls upon qualities of the picturesque.

The idea of the picturesque influenced not only painting, but also architecture and most notably landscape gardening. In the debates between Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824) and Uvedale Price (1747-1829), two theorists of landscape gardening, 'The Picturesque' was defined as a category of aesthetics between the Beautiful (which was made of attractive parts) and The Sublime (which induced a feeling of awe). The Picturesque was distinguished by wild ruggedness and irregularity. In landscape gardening this is characterized by variety in texture, the irregular planting of trees in imitation of untrained nature, and in architecture by asymmetry, variety of form and texture, which often found the form of asymmetrical sham castles, with otherwise classical interiors, as well as cottages with the highly decorative features of almost fairy-tale rustic dwellings.

### Related Web sites:

Burghley House, Stamford, UK

<<http://www.stamford.co.uk/burghley/grounds.htm>><http://www.stamford.co.uk/burghley/grounds.htm>  
Beautiful pictures of gardens designed by Capability Brown.

Romantic Landscape Quotes

<<http://www.gla.ac.uk/~aj12x/landscape.html>><http://www.gla.ac.uk/~aj12x/landscape.html>  
Quotes from people such as Coleridge, Thomas Love Peacock, and Jane Austen on the topic of landscapes.

George Noel Gordon, Lord Byron

<<http://www.englishhistory.net/byron/life.html>><http://www.englishhistory.net/byron/life.html>  
The life of Lord Byron, with links to journal entries and letters.

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, Landscape Gardener <<http://www.capability-brown.org.uk/>><http://www.capability-brown.org.uk>

All the information you could possibly want about Lancelot Brown.