

Mon cher ami: The Letters of Edouard André to Charles Sprague Sargent

Phyllis Andersen

The friendships formed by Charles Sprague Sargent over his long life were dazzling by anyone's account, international in scope, and carefully cultivated through correspondence.

Letters are a biographer's lifeblood, "unpremeditated transmitters of fact." Nothing else can convey the vitality of life as lived—the immediacy of emotions—so well as this intimate form of personal exchange. One of the most interesting items in the Archives of the Arnold Arboretum is a group of thirty-five letters to Charles Sprague Sargent, the founding director of the Arboretum, from the French landscape architect Edouard André (1840–1911). The letters, written in French, date from 1886 to 1905 and include two letters from André's son René written shortly after his father's death. The Arboretum does not have copies of Sargent's half of the correspondence, but it is likely that he too wrote in French as he knew the language well enough to translate DeCars' *Treatise on Pruning Forest and Ornamental Trees* (Paris, 1864) into English in 1881.

André's letters to Sargent reflect a friendship based on deep professional respect and personal affection. They shared a strong interest in plant exploration, in taxonomy, and the newly emerging theories of landscape style in park and garden design. They exchanged seeds, plants, and books. From time to time, when Sargent visited Paris, they met. (André visited the United States in 1876—as we know from his *L'Art des Jardins* where he mentions his admiration of Boston's garden cemetery—but

no documentation of a visit to Sargent has been located.) André was Sargent's Paris connection, the source and expert on all things French. Despite clear differences in personality—Sargent diffident yet imperious, André clearly charming and gregarious—the two men were mutually supportive. They favorably reviewed one another's books and noted each other's accomplishments in their respective publications. They shared a strong attraction to large, challenging projects and an avid curiosity about the world.

Edouard André is known to landscape historians as a designer, an *architecte-paysagiste*, a visible figure in the Parisian park-building projects directed by Baron Haussmann for Napoleon III in the last half of the nineteenth century. He is the author of a comprehensive text on garden and park design, *L'Art des Jardins*, the designer of hundreds of private gardens and numerous public parks, a friend of Frederick Law Olmsted and of the English garden writer and designer William Robinson. In 1892 he was appointed Professor of Garden Architecture at *L'Ecole d'Horticulture de Versailles*, the first person to hold that position.

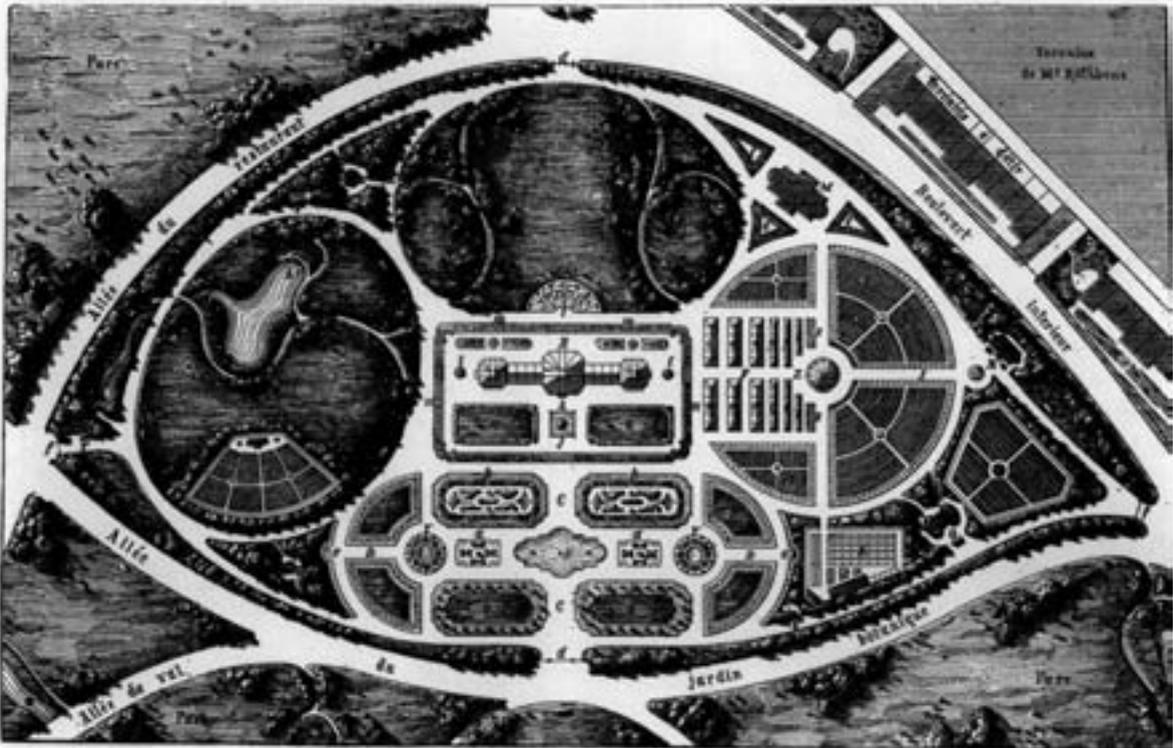
To horticulturists, André is known as a plantsman with strong credentials. He was a self-described botanical traveler. In 1875 he was sent by the French government on a plant-



On the left, Edouard Andre in a portrait that appeared in Volume 47 (1895) of the English journal *The Garden*, which was dedicated to him. On the right is Charles Sprague Sargent in a portrait taken by Horace McFarland, c. 1904. The correspondence between the two was warm and mutually supportive. In a letter of 8 April 1905, André wrote, "I have just received your beautiful and useful volume, *Manual of the Trees of North America*, and I'm sending you right away my thanks and compliments, before speaking of it in the *Revue Horticole*. You have known for a long time how much I admire your inexhaustible creativity."

collecting trip to South America, a trip that took two years and resulted in 3,400 specimens being sent back to Paris. His travels also took him to Russia, the Mediterranean, Turkey, and the United States. He amassed a personal herbarium of thousands of specimens, meticulously labeled and maintained. At his country home in Lacroix where he spent his summers, he developed an experimental nursery and arboretum. He was an expert on bromeliads and the genus *Andrea* of the Bromeliaceae was named in his honor. He published numerous plant profiles, articles on plant culture, and several monographs on his botanical explorations.

Born in Bourges, France, the son of a nurseryman, André apprenticed for a year with the municipal horticulturist of Angers and finished his education in Paris, studying for a year at the *Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle*. In 1860, at the age of twenty, he was named head gardener (*Jardinier Principal*) of the city of Paris by Adolphe Alphand, the chief park designer for Haussmann. With this position André joined the team that implemented Alphand's designs, which transformed Paris from a sprawl of disconnected enclaves into a model of monumental city form that sparked international interest. The new parks and boulevards of Paris were on the itinerary of every tourist,



*André's design for Sefton Park in Liverpool included a botanic garden, seen in the plan above (From André's *L'Art des Jardins*.)*

student, and landscape professional who embarked on the Grand Tour. André worked with Alphand on the Bois de Vincennes, the Bois de Boulogne, and the Parc Montsouris, but his reputation today rests on his work on the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, the crescent-shaped strip of land in the northeast quarter of Paris. It was molded from a municipal dump and gallows site into a park of dramatic topography, deliberate rusticity, and romantic symbolism. André was responsible for the planting of the site, a complex project because of the variety of environments—rock escarpments, water edges, woodland, open meadow.

André's approach to planting design has often been compared to Olmsted's. The similarities are there: a reliance on rich foliage texture, a sense of appropriateness, and a suspicion of anything decorative or overly

manipulated. Like Olmsted, André believed that landscape improvements elevated human morals, and he used the "ill-famed" reputation of the Buttes-Chaumont site as an example.

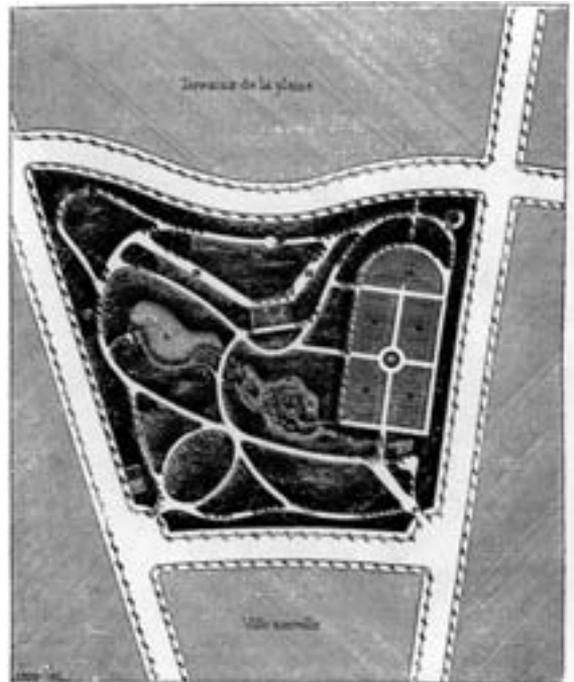
In 1866, André won a competition for the design of a large public park in Liverpool, England, to be built on land given to the city by Lord Sefton. Sefton Park emerged as a project of urban design not unlike those Olmsted was tackling in the United States. André was responsible not only for the parkland but for the adjoining boulevards and building lots. The Sefton Park project, which took ten years to complete, allowed him to set up a private office in Paris, and in subsequent years of professional practice he designed parks and gardens all over the world. The list is staggering. It includes Woodhouse Moor Park in Leeds; the park of Count de Friese in Friesenborg,

Denmark; the garden of Count Orloff-Davidoff in Russia; the parks of Prince Liechtenstein and Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild in Austria; as well as many private gardens in France. André enjoyed his wealthy clients and shared with Sargent the conviction that they alone allowed him to display his artistic aptitude.

All the same, a large part of his practice was taken up with public parks. He transformed the Citadel of Luxembourg into a large public garden and the public gardens of Monte Carlo into a grand showcase of tropical plants. Sargent praised the latter gardens in a short article in *Garden and Forest* (April 29, 1891) for the skill and refinement with which André treated this important waterfront site. In Holland he managed the reconstruction of two seventeenth-century gardens, Welham and Amerongen, and their conversion into parks for the public. He worked in Rome, refining plans for the Piazza Bianca and the Quirinal and working with Roman designers to transform the gardens of the Villa Borghese from a private garden into a public park. André also prepared plans for the redesign of Montevideo in Uruguay, predating his countryman Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier's urban design work in South America by some twenty years.

The André letters to Sargent center on Sargent's decision to have the plates of his ten-volume *Silva of North America* (1890–1902), which were drawn by Charles Faxon, engraved in Paris. He requested André to find an engraver and to supervise production. The details of these transactions form the heart of the letters. If the business details are routine, the subtext of André's measured diplomacy, mediating between a temperamental French engraver and a demanding and parsimonious American client, makes for amusing reading. Nonetheless, André felt honored to assist Sargent with the project.

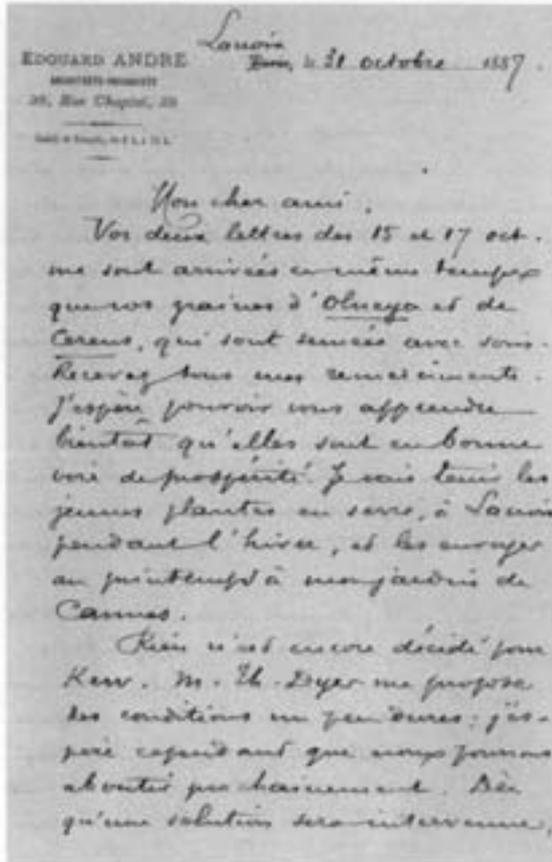
"You also know that I am not insensible of the very natural feeling of pride created in me by your choice of our country to prepare the illustrations of your great work. It will soon be a century since my compatriot André Michaux



André transformed the Citadel of Luxembourg into a large public garden. Part of his scheme of 1871 was a botanic garden dedicated exclusively to native flora. André's idea, which he believed to be novel, was to present a complete living display of the flora of Luxembourg's fields, woods, meadows, and crags that would acquaint the public with their names, botanical classification, uses, and ornamental qualities. (From *L'Art des Jardins*.)

published his beautiful studies on American dendrology [*North American Sylva*, 1810–1817]. I congratulate you on having resumed and rebuilt his work on such a grand scale, with all the resources that botanists—your compatriots and others—have accumulated over three quarters of a century, and after having made broad advances in the works of your predecessors by your personal contributions to the knowledge of North American flora" (André to Sargent, 2 March 1887).

André edited *L'illustration Horticole* from 1870 to 1880 and the prestigious *Revue Horticole* from 1882 until his death. He was sympathetic to Sargent's tribulations as editor of *Garden and Forest* and contributed regular short pieces on developments in French horti-



Lacroix, 31 October 1887

My dear friend,

Your two letters of October 15 and 17 reached me at the same time as your *Olneya* and *Cereus* seeds, which have been carefully planted. Accept my thanks. I hope soon to be able to let you know that they are prospering. I am going to keep the young plants under glass at Lacroix during the winter, and send them in the spring to my gardens at Cannes.

Nothing has yet been decided for Kew. M. Th[iselton-]Dyer is proposing rather hard conditions; I nevertheless hope that we will be able to conclude things soon. As soon as we have a solution, I will answer you about the collection for the herbarium at Harvard University. I would be happy to know that one of my collections will be part of the herbarium at that wonderful institution.

We will return to Paris the 4th of November to take up winter residence. As soon as I arrive I will see to the trees and shrubs

that you want to obtain from the City of Paris, and I hope to be able to send them to Waterer very soon, following the instructions that you gave me.

If, from your side, you send something to England, I would like to request that you add some grafts or a young specimen of a new variety of plum tree that is being much talked about in the United States. It is the Japanese Kelsey Plum. They are found at Bruckman's, in Augusta, and elsewhere, I believe.

I am sending you along with this letter some seeds from a new *Cotoneaster* brought from China by Abbé David, which I am cultivating under the name of *C. horizontalis* Decaisne. It is the prettiest plant that I know of for rocks, and I have a specimen at Lacroix that is really the prettiest thing one could ever see, with its purple leaves and its scarlet red fruits. It has the habit of *C.* of the section *Microphylla* with the fruits of the section *Nepalensis*. Perhaps you already have this species, which however is not widely disseminated and almost unknown in France.

Please remember me to Professor Gray, and do the same with Olmsted.

And believe that I remain, my dear friend, your very devoted and affectionate.....E. André.



*André ornamented this picturesque path in Parc des Buttes-Chaumont with a variety of lush vegetation. In *L'Art des Jardins*, he noted that if the rocks were arranged with taste, in a natural way, this treatment could serve as a model for similar scenes in hilly parks and gardens.*

culture, but he was not above a bit of frank criticism: "Your journal becomes better with each day, and it contains a quantity of original material of the highest quality. I am happy to give you my compliments on it. But it is too "high class"; with your American habits of abundant information, you should perhaps have more text concerning ordinary efforts in horticulture and the choice of ordinary plants" (André to Sargent, 14 July 1888).

Apprenticeship was the accepted form of training for the young field of landscape architecture in the late nineteenth century, before

university degrees were offered. André's Paris office was open to a number of Sargent and Olmsted protégés. Henry Codman, Sargent's nephew, spent a year in André's office before returning to the United States to join Olmsted's office. Charles Eliot, traveling in Europe in 1886, spent time with André, who guided him to key parks and gardens in Paris and explained his business practices. André offered hospitality to Sargent's daughter Harriet on her honeymoon trip to Paris with her young husband, the architect Guy Lowell. He appears to have grown very fond of the "young Lowells," as he called the couple, who often visited the André family at their summer home in the Loire.

André became the official host to an expanding circle of acquaintances passing through Paris. He was generous with his time, arranging itineraries through the French countryside with the attention of a personal travel agent. A detailed trip through the Loire that he prepared for Olmsted during his 1892 visit to France included several private chateaux in Orleans and the Garden of Louis XII at Blois. In Tours he recommended the public garden and the Jardin des Plantes with its fine collection of conifers. He also recommended a visit to M. Manse's residence at Les Bouches, where André "took Professor Sargent and some other American gentlemen."

André's friendship with Olmsted dated back to André's trip to New York in 1876. After being introduced through a mutual acquaintance, Olmsted arranged a large dinner for André at Delmonico's to introduce him to his co-designer of Central Park, Calvert Vaux, and other colleagues. Olmsted then drafted an itinerary for André's visit to the United States, which is a revealing summary of Olmsted's preferences in landscape design at the time.

In Philadelphia Olmsted recommends—"besides what is a matter of course"—Cypress Hill Cemetery and Bartram's Garden; in Washington D.C., Georgetown Cemetery and the Soldier's Home; in Baltimore, Druid Hills

Park; in Cincinnati, Spring Grove Cemetery; in Chicago, the park laid out by Professor [William Le Baron] Jenney and another rearranged horticulturally by Mr. [Horace W. S.] Cleveland. He recommends a day in Buffalo to see Goat Island but warns that in leaving Niagara the scenery is interesting but "rather triste" (Olmsted to André, 16 August 1876, draft).

André's relationship with Olmsted has rich potential for further research. Theirs was a more formal relationship, perhaps because of age differences; Olmsted was born in 1822 whereas Sargent was born in 1841, only one year after André. From the André correspondence to Sargent, it seems that Olmsted was a source of constant speculation among his

friends and colleagues, not unusual for a man of great accomplishment and influence.

"I was much struck by what you said about Olmsted, that he was drowning in an infinity of details instead of having assistants who could take care of that for him. . . . It seems that one becomes more difficult and more meticulous as one gets older, and that more and more one takes one's inspiration from the English proverb: 'Triflers make perfection, and perfection is not a trifle.' What one should do, by contrast, is to look only at the large lines and get rid of the small ones (André to Sargent, 12 January 1894).

More poignant was André's indirect advice to Olmsted in the same letter: "When you see Olmsted, give him my best wishes. Tell him

The Virtues of Neglect

In 1882, reflecting on Central Park in "Spoils of the Park," Frederick Law Olmsted drew on an experience with Edouard André in Paris.

Neglect for considerable periods may do no serious permanent harm. . . . Neglect, if it continues not too long, may even have its advantages. The landscape-architect André, formerly in charge of the suburban plantations of Paris, was walking with me through the Buttes-Chaumont Park, of which he was the designer, when I said of a certain passage of it, "That, to my mind, is the best piece of artificial planting, of its age, I have ever seen." He smiled, and said, "Shall I confess that it is the result of neglect? I had planted this place most elaborately, with a view to some striking immediate effects which I had conceived, and others, to be ultimately obtained by thinnings. I had just worked out my plan, when the war came; and for two

years I did not again see the ground. It was occupied as a camp; horses were pastured in it; it was cut up by artillery; fires were made in it. As a park, it was everywhere subjected to the most complete neglect. When, at length, I came back to it, expecting to begin my work over again at all points, Nature had had one summer in which, as well as she could, to repair damages; and I declare to you, that, on arriving at just this point, I threw up my hands with delight, for, spite of some yet unhealed wounds, I saw at once that in general aspect there was a better work than I had been able to imagine. That which was weak and unsuitable in my planting had, by natural selection, disappeared; and in the struggle for existence nearly all that remained had taken a wild character, such as in an art we may aim at, but can hardly hope to attain." (But see how the true artist at once bowed himself before his tutor, and recognized and seized the opportunity.)*

* From *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Central Park*, edited by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Theodora Kimball. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press (1973), 144.

that right now is the time for him to prepare a great work, well illustrated, in which he expounds on his theories of the art of the garden, bolstered by examples of his personal creations. This is what I would like to see soon. He is rich; he can give himself this satisfaction. As soon as I can, I will do the same . . ." A year later Olmsted's last illness required that he be permanently hospitalized at McLean's Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts.

André's own great work was *L'Art des Jardins*, published in Paris in 1879. It was a work of grand scale, a compendium of garden history, technical guidelines for construction, and esthetic standards. It included plant lists for specific settings and was profusely illustrated with eleven chromoliths and two hun-



A rockwork ravine in Parc des Buttes-Chaumont is planted in Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus cinquefolia*) and other climbing plants. (From André's *L'Art des Jardins*.)

dred fifty wood engravings. It was André's attempt to codify landscape design and to describe in a workmanlike manner the techniques available to accomplish a transformation of landscapes on a grand scale. The only portion of *L'Art des Jardins* to be translated into English was Chapter Seven, "A Division and Classification of Parks and Gardens," which was published in *Park International* in July of 1920. This section was André's attempt at a typological description of landscapes, by size, by land use, by historic precedent. His need to classify seemed most appropriate for a late nineteenth-century treatise by a designer/horticulturist. The chapter served as an excellent introduction of André's work to American readers. It displayed the precision and clarity of his thinking and his theory of appropriateness of design to site conditions and natural character. Olmsted was so impressed with the book that he offered to help André find an American publisher and act as the American editor, but this appears not to have happened.

The reputation of Edouard André rests on his ability to codify the *style composite*, the overlay of the *jardin anglais* on the French formal style. This hybrid of English pastoralism within an architectural frame was refined by Adolphe Alphand in his designs for the parks of Paris. André's contribution was a lush planting style based on horticultural appropriateness enhanced by the introduction of compatible exotic species, a practice that aligned him with Olmsted and his followers. Critical opinion has not rendered André as an original thinker but as a strong spokesman for the French interpretation of the pastoral style. His writings, his teaching, and his professional comportment influenced a generation of young practitioners, both French and American. When Charles Sprague Sargent dedicated the tenth volume of his *Silva of North America* to André—"Artist, Explorer, and Student of Plants"—it was not a simple payback for handling the often frustrating negotiations with French engravers but as a gesture of

friendship, an acknowledgment of André's valuable contribution to the world of horticulture and design.

Acknowledgments

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Bibliographic Note

Information about the life and work of Edouard André is scattered among the publications of landscape design history and horticulture, with the one field not fully

recognizing his accomplishments in the other. Volume 42 (1895) of *The Garden* (London) was dedicated to André and a short introductory essay in that volume describes his life and work to that date. Two memorial articles written at his death give the best documentation of his accomplishments: *Gardeners' Chronicle* (11 November 1911) and *Revue Horticole* (1 Novembre 1911). Dorothee Imbert in her book, *The Modernist Garden in France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), gives an excellent summary description of André's contribution to French landscape design within the context of the precursors to modernism.

Phyllis Andersen is landscape historian at the Arnold Arboretum.



André included this illustration of Calvert Vaux's mushroom kiosk for Central Park in his *L'Art des Jardins*.