

**ITALY-ENGLAND 1946-1960.
MARIA TERESA PARPAGLIOLO SHEPHARD, LANDSCAPE
BEYOND BORDERS**

Abstract

The case of Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard and her working experience between Italy and England, deserves to be investigated even to explore the role of women in developing a new concept of integrated landscape architecture. As her European colleagues, Parpagliolo Shephard was involved in the exploration of new ideas, through a strong innovative research of materials and construction techniques, supporting the Modern Movement in landscape architecture. In London, Maria Parpagliolo worked first on projects with Sylvia Crowe in her newly established office, and with Frank Clark for the Festival of Britain. The English period provided her the opportunity for innovative ideas of landscape design to be tried, while she was also active in the Institute of Landscape Architects, sitting on committees and editing the Institute's Journal.

Keywords: landscape, architecture, pioneer, design, innovation

After her important experience started with the project of gardens and parks for the E42 in Rome with Pietro Porcinai and Raffaele De Vico, Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard moved in England, in 1946, after her marriage with Ronald Shephard. At time, she was yet well known in London, and in the European community of landscape architects, as contributor for Landscape & Garden (1) and The Journal of Landscape Architects, and for her participations in the International meetings of

Landscape Architects in Germany, Sweden, France, England.

Maria Teresa Parpagliolo started working in England, becoming known as Maria or Marie Shephard. However, she remained always in deep contact with Italian architects, especially in Rome and Florence. (2)

An early project of Parpagliolo Shephard was to assist Sylvia Crowe to draw up plans for the renovation of sand dunes, and the development of a series of public parks at Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire, and Sutton on Sea. One preliminary report on planting conditions of the area started in 1946 for the Urban District Council. (3)

In December 1946, Sylvia Crowe (1901-1997) wrote an evidence supporting the opinion that the proposed measures for Dune Gardens will be successful. The general idea was the building up of dunes and the reconsolidation by Marram grass, that have been yet carried out with success both in England and Denmark, Holland, Germany and Northern Ireland. Also, she suggested to plant Thorn, Elder and Privet, as trees that can grow on the sand dunes (4). After the inundation of 1953, the site conditions were of ground sodden with sea water, overlaid with sand and strewn with broken sea defences. All vegetation was killed, even because of the frequent severe east wind. The problems was to re-establish plant life and bring back the sea-side attraction, on which the livelihood of the community depended, with the least possible delay. In 1954, parts of the gardens were in use in early summer and were officially opened at the beginning of August.

This first English experience of Parpagliolo Shephard was strongly important for her future landscape projects. The acknowledgement of modelling surfaces and the use of different materials was very useful for her professional growth, and it would be clear

in the expression of the gardening language she would later use. The Mablethorpe' projects (1946-1955) – Sutton Pleasure Gardens, Bohemia Caravan Camp and Dune Gardens, were as a result of a strong understanding of a place and how to work on: whale-backed plateau consisting of sand and broken concrete, the curved terrace, the garden as a long lawn, contoured in waves, and flowing up to the dunes, with planting and seating bays on each side, were elements able to design aesthetic and functional aspects. (5)

The principal plants and wind screen were: *Acer Pseudo-Platanus*, *Huppophae*, *Crataegus monogyna*, *Prunus communis*, *Salix vitellina*, *populus canescens*. *Huppophae*, *Tamarix*, *Euonymus Japonica*, *Olearia Haastii*, *Senecio greyi*, *Eryngium*, *Centranthus*, *Statice latifolia*, *Armeria* and *Santolina*, and for paths: Breedon gravel. In sheltered parts were: roses, herbaceous plants; Garden: Roses, herbaceous, *Tamarix*, *Olearia haastii*, *Genista hispanica*;

About materials, for terraces were used concrete paving, part coloured, and Khaki colorcrete in various finishes, exposed aggregate – cobble – asphalt; and for ccess road, tarmacadam.

The materials used for walls & colonnade were: formal walls reinforced concrete, finished with cementone, rough retaining “rock face” walling re-inforced concrete (shuttered with corrugated iron) finished snowcem, and, for the pergola, white painted metal barrel. For pools: reinforced concrete, Rim finished wooden bumper-board and looped road.

The 1948 founding of International Federation of Landscape Architects, or IFLA, resulted from meetings held in London and Oxford – England, the same year. As Parpagliolo Shephard wrote, it was a memorable year, marking a definitive turning

point for the Institute.(6) Discussions centered on the mission of landscape architecture, its relations to garden design and planning. The London conference took place between 9 and 11 August and focused on the theme “The Work of the Landscape Architect in Relation of Society”, thus hinting at a departure from the role of aesthetic consultant for the elite. From Italy, the delegates present at the International Landscape Architects Conference at County Hall, probably invited by Parpagliolo Shephard, were: professor Pietro Porcinai (1910-1986) from Firenze, Elena Romoli Luzzato (1900-1983), with her husband Felice Romoli, from Rome. Copiously delegates went from Austria, Chile, Denmark, great Britain, Holland, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and USA.(7)

Even the concurrent exhibition entitled “Landscape of Work and Leisure”, reflected a change of focus for a profession more concerned with everyday life and hygiene than garden design. Curated by Frank H. Clark (1902-1971) (8), Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard and Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-1996) (9), on a tight budget, the exhibition nevertheless featured materials from 13 countries on display from 10 to 21 August. The London conference and exhibition recorded the development of prewar ideals and their application to the reality of reconstruction, the planning of new towns, and land reclamation. Parpagliolo Shephard, a former supporter to the Third Reich landscape planning policies, presented her Roman work simultaneously in to the sections of Italy under her maiden name, and Great Britain, under her married name of M.T. Shephard. The differences about her name, generates sometime mistakes and difficulties to identify her contributions, as papers as works. Infact, in 1967, she wrote a note in the Members Notes Section of the Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects (10), to explain her identity.

On Building, about the exhibit, she wrote: *“Landscape architecture is not only a science, but also an art. Its ultimate aim is to create beauty, and beauty is based on two things, sensibility and perfect technique. Sensibility is a quality which is now almost old-fashioned, but it is in essence that feeling which enables the artist to grasp the essential structural basis of a composition; or, in other words, to develop its inherent ‘form’. Technique is an extension of this quality into the practical business of giving it expression. (...) The introductory screen of the Exhibition, at County Hall, explained that the work of this profession generally takes place in collaboration with the town planner, the architect, the engineer and the sociologist. And the results of this team-work between the members of these professions were illustrated by the excellent examples shown by such countries as Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Poland, America and our own country. (...) Used to dealing with the slow growth of plants, it realizes that, when planting has been done well, the reward will be sure even if it takes time. For this reason it looks to the future with high hope.”*(11)

Even in England, and all over the world, landscape architecture was a young profession, though based on an old tradition. One of the main objects that the Institute of Landscape Architects, or ILA, was tried to fulfil, since its foundation in 1929, was to establish a better training in this field. At time, Reading, Durham (1949) and London (1949), had all their landscape faculties. Shephard participated actively at the Education Committees, held in London during the Fifties and managed by ILA.

Marie T. Shephard started soon to work for the Institute and the Journal. In 1949 she wrote the Editorial (signed (A) Hon. Editor.) on the International Conference and Exhibition of 1948 and the Lectureships at Durham and London Universities.(12)

Among others echoes of the Conference, and reviews, she noticed that “(...) a first

meeting has been held in Italy for the Establishment of a professional institute under the stimulus received from the London conference.” And this, mostly by her, will happen in Italy only in Seventy years.

She was also influenced by her colleagues and ILA members as Sylvia Crowe, Brenda Colvin (1897-1981), Frank H. Clark, and in general by the interests of the Institute of Landscape Architects, about themes as: roads in the landscape, trees in the street and in the landscape, the Japanese gardens, the projects of Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994). All this will influence Shephard in all her projects.

After the exhibition on public landscaping (1948), Clark and Parpagliolo Shephard became two of the four landscape consultant for 1951 Festival of Britain, held at the South Bank in London, Clark being the overall coordinator (13). The Festival celebrated modern design and the influence of science and was grounded in the 18th-century notion of Picturesque.

The naturalistic approach to landscape design is probably England’s most important contribution to the visual arts, and the informal tree planting, the use of water, and of natural walling and paving throughout the South Bank illustrate this preoccupation.

The landscape of South Bank was conceived as being part and parcel of architecture. Architects and landscape architects worked as a team under Sir Hugh Casson (1910-1999), director of Architecture to the Exhibition to create a consciously designed townscape in the informal English tradition. Peter Shephard (1913-2002) was landscape architect for the area downstream of Hungerford Bridge; upstream, the Concourse area, was by Clark and Parpagliolo Shephard, and the rest by Peter Youngman (1911-2005).

The Regatta Restaurant, with one side on the river Thames and beside Hungerford

Bridge, had a capacity for 500 people; the space had a panoramic view of the Thames and Westminster beyond. It was decorated with furnishing and tableware derived from patterns taken from crystallography, led by Cambridge crystallographer Helen Megaw (1907-2002). Chairs designed by Ernest Race (1913-1964) for the Festival, the Antelope and Springbok constructed of steel rods stove-enamelled white, filled the café and restaurants of the South Bank. Used internally and externally in exhibitions, they removed the barrier between indoor and outdoor furnishing. (14) The building of the Regatta Restaurant has a quasi-science theme based on molecules and crystals with a garden space surrounded on three sides. Shephard, now liberated from pre-war fascism, responded by designing a large amoeba bed inside its square pond onto which she planted a mature zelkova tree as a focal point. (15). “Owing to the very heavy pressure of visitors on space, the various gardens themselves are not open to the public; they are barriers, vistas, or set pieces of one kind or another with water often used (as in historical designs) as a hazard.”. (16) This organic form with its swirling gravel and low foliage planting was probably influenced by Roberto Burle Marx’s roof garden in Rio de Janeiro from 1937, published in architectural periodicals. (17) There were a fountain, marginal plants, and a sculpture by Lynn R. Chadwick (1914-2003). The garden could be viewed from a variety of levels, within the glass fronted building as well as a series of lightweight external stairs and terraces. In contrast to this dazzlingly modern statement, the internal jungle garden Parpagliolo Shephard designed, with its Picturesque theme, was based on a pool and anchoring alder tree. The scheme relied on lush and dense shade-tolerant and humid-loving plants to give an impression of primordial vegetation, overlooked by an open-air at ground level. Clark and Parpagliolo Shephard created the illusion of a primeval forest in a narrow

space, between the back of the People of Britain pavilion, and the vast brick wall of the railway bridge. *Betula*, *Dicksoniana* and *Arundinaria* formed the canopy planting with astilbe, grasses, ferns, and ivy as ground cover. As Sheila M. Haywood wrote, *“The garden by Frank Clark and Marie Shephard, upon which one looks down from an elegant flight of steps, is particularly successful. (...) Marie Shephard has done a magnificent job here in her unremitting supervision of, not indeed daily, but almost hourly clearing up. (...) pools with fountains seemed to come off rather better than those without them.”* (18)

The South Bank was the focus of a national post-war festival and thus this garden at the Regatta Restaurant was particularly significant. Its landscape demonstrated the strong contribution landscape architects could make to public spaces. Once more, the lesson of the South Bank was the value of a multidisciplinary approach working together as a team.

Commissions continued with Clark and the London County Council. However in 1954 Maria was appointed landscape consultant for the Italian company Generale Immobiliare, they had a common office in London – 46 Well Walk L. NW3 and 3 Lake Close Lake Road L. SW19, as Clark and Shephard – Landscape Architects. (19) In any case, Maria Shephard had always her office in Rome in via Marianna Dionigi 29.

The influence of the English culture trend in the postwar era is clear in the Parpagliolo's projects, which she participated actively in the international debates on it. Her associate Frank H. Clark, that was President of ILA in 1954, published a lot of articles on the Journal of ILA and Country Life, about: “Man and the Landscape”, “The Sense of Beauty in the 18th, 19th, and 20th Centuries”, “Landscape Architecture

in New Towns”, “New Landscape Gardening”, “Trees”, etc.

In 1959 R. W. Rose wrote an article (20) on the insufficient cooperation and exchange of ideas between the engineering and planning institutions and the ILA, and the fault of the Institution that was not forging a strong link between the professions. The constitution of the ILA included, among its objects, “the advancement of the Art of Landscape Architecture, and the theory and practice of garden, landscape and civic design”.

About the Public Works Congress, held in November 1958, she wrote that twenty-two papers were being presented by Institutions representing almost all technical and professional, apart ILA, although at least four of the papers being presented deal with landscape problems.

In the article, there are two pictures and a plan of Mrs. Maria T. Shephard works in Italy.

Vigna Clara, with a view of the terraced garden on the North side slope: the area was so restricted and so steep that the only way was to build on several terraces of different sizes of which the largest is big enough for a volley ball playground and another one has a hard surfaced bowling green.

All the trees were mature specimens prepared and transplanted two years before.

The Casal Palocco project was a communal playground which will be owned and used by ten families whose private gardens and houses close it on the three sides. Play facilities for children and adults were provided: tennis court, bowling green, minigolf, dancing platform, volley ball, etc.

During the end of Fifties and the Sixties, the debate about the importance of the landscape architecture in projects of any size, was discussed in every congress

organized by IFLA all around Europe, and more.

In 1962 an article condensed the paper given by Prof. Bruno Zevi (1918-2000) to the IFLA Congress in Israel, held in the same year.(21) Zevi talked about the importance of the history of landscape as well as the study of the development of towns, for a more complete understanding of the history of environment, in sympathy with the wide field of design was required, in modern times, of the creative professions. Zevi put out five questions on the field, still actually today, as: how to revitalize the lost interest on landscape; how to establish the difference between garden design and landscape design; how to relate gardens to architecture without being a compensation of it; how to manage the limes between city and country in the new era, and how architecture and landscape could help the creation of a continuous urban landscape of tomorrow.

He concluded: *“Our culture is in a state of crisis. Someone must lead out of this. Will it be the Town Planner or thee Architect? Perhaps Landscape Architects will do this leading, if they are able to rise above their professional routine to give a modern dimension to their art”*

In 1963, Parpagliolo Shephard began landscaping the new Hilton Hotel (now the Roma Cavalieri) on Monte Mario in Rome. She designed a serpentine drive, now the trade entrance, which snaked up through the grounds to the entrance circle, allowing a quieter experience on the terraces and rooms looking over the gardens and city. Today the garden appear timeless and natural whilst the hotel, a cutting-edge at the time, appears dated. The Rome Hilton is sited on Monte Mario on the right bank of the Tiber overlooking the town. (22) Originally this area was one of Roma’s Papal defences against the nationalist forces in the wars for independence from 1848 to

1870.

The Società Generale Immobiliare bought the abandoned fort in the 1930's for future development. The Hilton Hotels Company agreed with the SGI on a combined venture to use the site for the Rome Hilton, and presented their first scheme about 1954-55.

After prolonged and heated debates, the City of Rome in 1958 granted license to build, provided the three following points were taken into account: the roof level of the building had to be kept at 137 m.a.s.l. (Monte Mario Observatory was at 155 m.a.s.l.); the new construction must be blended into the Monte Mario skyline; two hills reaching 120 m.a.s.l. had to be built before building was started; evergreen trees 17 m. high had to be planted before the building was going to emerge.

The area of about 5 hectares has two access roads, one at 110 m.a.s.l., the other below at 88 m.a.s.l. But what with the space asked by the Hilton people and the height limit imposed by the City Authority, the building extended sideways and had to be sunk into the ground for two floors.

The hills were built with the excavated soil. No top soil was saved. There were no trees on the site, apart from a group of Aleppo Pines, which have been kept on their old stand, and 5 Casuarina Tenuissima. Of these, a Casuarina 18 m. high had to be prepared and transplanted. It is now one of the features of the front terraces of the Hotel. (23)

The area that had to be landscaped for the RAI new offices in 1966 consisted of three strips of ground along three roads, the largest being on the front facing viale Mazzini, plus a patio in the centre. The palace of the Headquarters of the state radio and television company RAI is a building placed in Rome, not so much on the Viale

Mazzini itself, as happened with an even more severe design of the highest quality of the “Rinascete” building by Franco Albini (1905-1977), in accordance with a declared intention to impose a principle that would be valid for further town planning projects, on an area anonymous and devoid of all meaning.

Francesco Berarducci (1924-1992), designer of the building, demonstrates with his work a cultural consciousness that freed him from manneristic displays on the one hand and conceptions of a monumental kind on the other. It is a group of buildings of primary functions, placed in immediate proximity with the city, and furthermore, communicating through the glass partitions with the external spaces which are disposed round a green quadrangle with a pool of water which constitutes the point of greatest luminosity, and the ideal visual centre for the further developments of any kind. The square courtyard is completely glassed in all around, with a garden which constitutes the focal point of the whole ground floor, the point to which the perspective lines converge and centre of attraction for the surrounding spaces. (24)

The patio is one of the hopeful ideas of an architect. It is seen from all the main halls, and yet it is the most awkward place for plants to live in: damp, dark with no circulation of air, since no door can be left open even in summer because of the air conditioning. The suggestion to have it paved met with a firm denial. Green it had to be.

There were no trees on the site, apart from one old cedar (*C. Atlantica*), and all the planting had to be carried out on a concrete platform (the roof on the underground services and garages, except for one olive tree. Unfortunately most of the ventilation shafts and the ducts for the air-conditioning system were sited in the largest planting area. The depth of soil allowed was 40 cm. (1 ft. 3 i.). but Berarducci insisted on

having trees at least as high as the first floor windows. Luckily the soil load had been very generously considered so that mounds could be piled up where the trees had to stand, giving a more undulating earth modelling.

Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard started to design the garden in the patio, conscious that a good drainage is essential. With such a restricted depth of soil, it was necessary to find a material thin enough but able to secure a clear flow of water either from rain or irrigation. Roman tiles were finally chosen, placed on contiguous rows towards the outlets, with gravel filling the ridges between the rows. The difficulty in using such a breakable material arose when three of the four olives had to be planted. These were trees of about 60/80 years old, with branches 5/6 m x 5/6 m, and a root ball 1 m depth x 1 m diameter at the tree collar. Preparation and transplanting was done in one continuous operation in May. The tiles and gravel were placed first where the trees had to stand; over them a thin layer of soil.

The trees, moved by crane to the site, were carefully lowered. Then before the soil could be piled up, stone walls were built to contain the mound of ventilation shafts were near. Next the rows of tiles were placed over the whole surface and immediately covered by good soil of high humus content. Once the soil is in position walking and planting does not harm to the tiles underneath.

No staking was necessary, the weight of the root ball was being such that the trees once placed did not move. These olive trees, pruned back each year, seem not to mind the air that blows out of the ventilation ducts. The same applies to *Cotoneaster horizontalis*, *Juniperus pfitzeriana* and *tamariscifolia*, *Yucca aloeffolia*. But *Verbena pulchella* on the retaining walls disappeared completely after the first year. The plants chosen after one unsuccessful attempt are: *Dichodendra repens* as a carpeter, small

leaved ivy, gardenias, rhododendrons and azaleas in their own peat filled pits, one hazel, a few Japanese maples. All plants tend to grow upwards, drawn by the sky 12 floor above, become spindly and need continuous pruning and checking. To relieve the uniform green aquarium-like atmosphere, sedimental rocks of a golden colour were placed in the patio, their shapes almost modern abstracts. (25)

The project reveals the international experience of Parpagliolo Shephard and how she was opened to experiments and receptive to new trends in landscape design. The geometrical organisation of plants and paths highlights the influence of Japanese gardens, which had a substantial interest from the member of ILA (26), and Parpagliolo's endeavours to employ cross-cultural references and contemporary design in her works.

The garden has a square shape with the side of about 15 meters overlooking the lobby. It's original design shows species belonging to the "flora classica" and low herbaceous ground, inserted wisely in a main modular grid of 5 meters, of which one third is a water basin, where flows the water of the artist's bronze fountain Federico Brook (1933-). Fifteen years ago the garden was restored by making many changes, unfortunately breaking the philosophical concept of the project.

During the Fifties and Sixties, only exceptionally it was a consultant landscape architect brought in architectural projects, as when Brenda Colvin and Sylvia Crowe participated in the post-war Hertfordshire 'Schools Planting Programme'. Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard and Frank Clark's landscaping of the Festival of Britain site inspired many British landscape architects and may help explain the decision of the London County Council to commission the pair to design the grounds of a number of new primary schools in south London. (27) These include Horn Park Primary

School, Greenacres Primary School and Kidbrook Park Primary School, all in Eltham;
Glenbrook Primary School in Lambeth; Sullivan Primary School in Fulham, and
Langbourne Primary School in Dulwich. (28)