

PENNSYLVANIA | PHILADELPHIA



Glorious Gardens

The Monet Bridge at Grounds For Sculpture

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Philadelphia's beautiful landscapes are a sight to behold

By Cheryl Rodewig

The morning sun filters through dogwood blossoms as I begin my journey through Greater Philadelphia's lush landscape. More than 30 gardens bloom within a 30-mile radius here. As I drive, I'm greeted by wisteria-draped trellises, classical parterres and rolling hills flecked with wildflowers. "We have more gardens closer together than anywhere else in the country," says Stephanie McNabb, marketing consultant for America's Garden Capital, a membership organization of area gardens and arboreta. "If you're a garden lover or outdoor enthusiast, this is your playground." **CONTINUED >>**

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My road trip starts in the Brandywine Valley where the wealthy industrialist Henry Francis du Pont built chateaux more than a century ago. First stop: Winterthur, a sprawling 175-room mansion surrounded by 1,000 acres of meadows, streams and gardens.

Winterthur's style is naturalistic, with flowers blending casually with the countryside. Trails curve past peonies and azaleas, and the woods are carpeted in bluebells. Even the children's garden, with storybook features such as a thatched fairy cottage and giant bird's nest, looks at home under its canopy of live oaks.

Just a few miles away is another du Pont creation, Longwood Gardens, arguably the most lavish of the bunch. It has it all: flowers in every color, topiaries and scenic vistas. When afternoon rain begins to fall, I seek shelter inside its maze of indoor gardens where orchids, hydrangeas, jasmine and poppies bloom eternal.

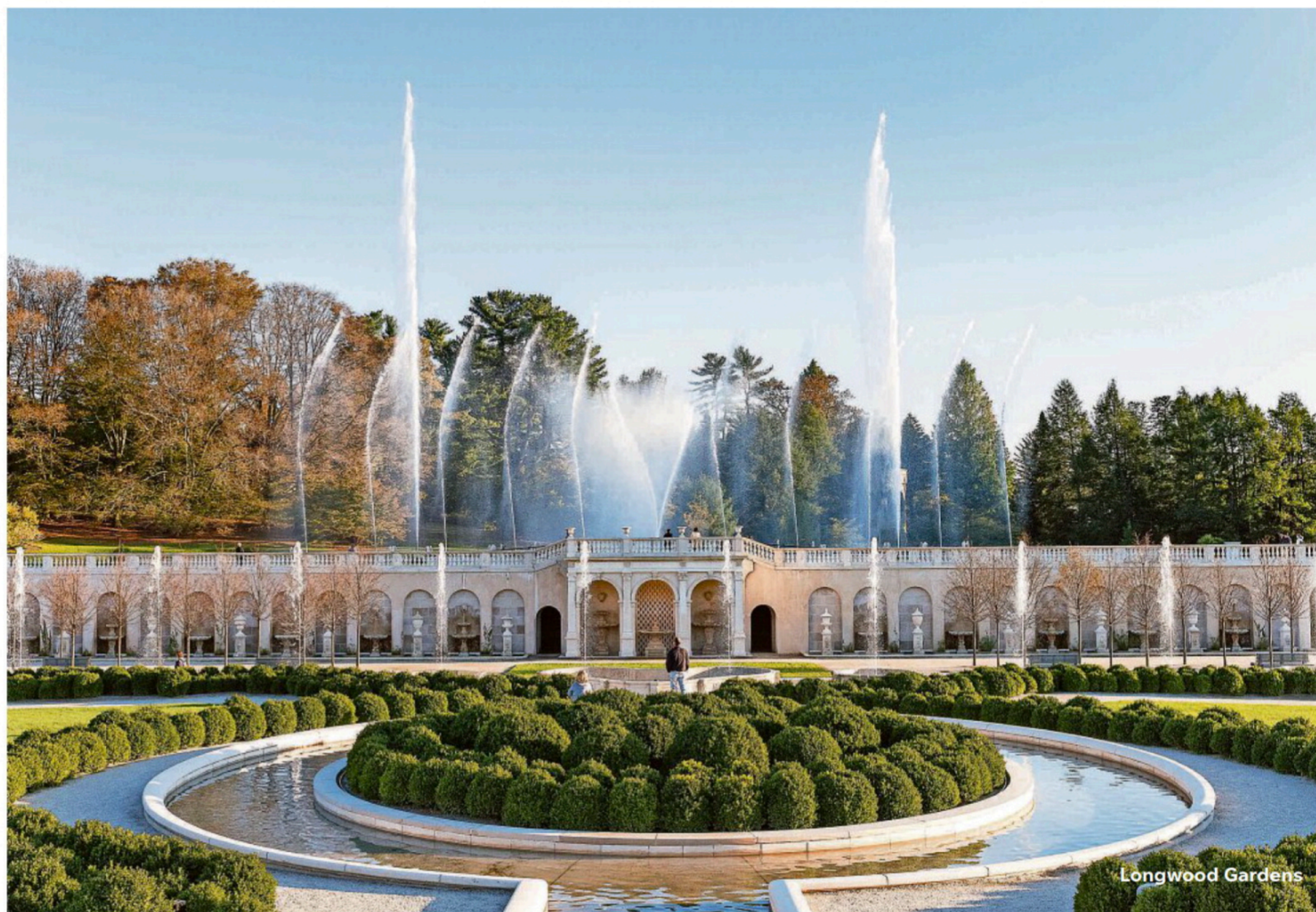
Longwood's real showstopper awaits outside, where 1,719 hydraulic jets in the Main Fountain Garden spray thousands of gallons of water daily during the summer Festival of Fountains. I make plans to return at night when they add synchronized lights, music and fire to the spectacle.

The next morning, I head to Chanticleer in Wayne. It's more intimate than Longwood's gardens, but its 35 acres are the most romantic, especially in spring when daffodils, cherry trees, tulips and rhododendrons put on a show.

What captures my imagination most are the creative architectural flourishes that accent the blooms. The Ruin Garden, an atmospheric folly built on the foundations of an old house, features rock walls covered in wisteria and clematis. Its three rooms each hold something unexpected: a water table shaped like a sarcophagus, a library of stone books and a pond with marble faces that peer back at me when I look inside.

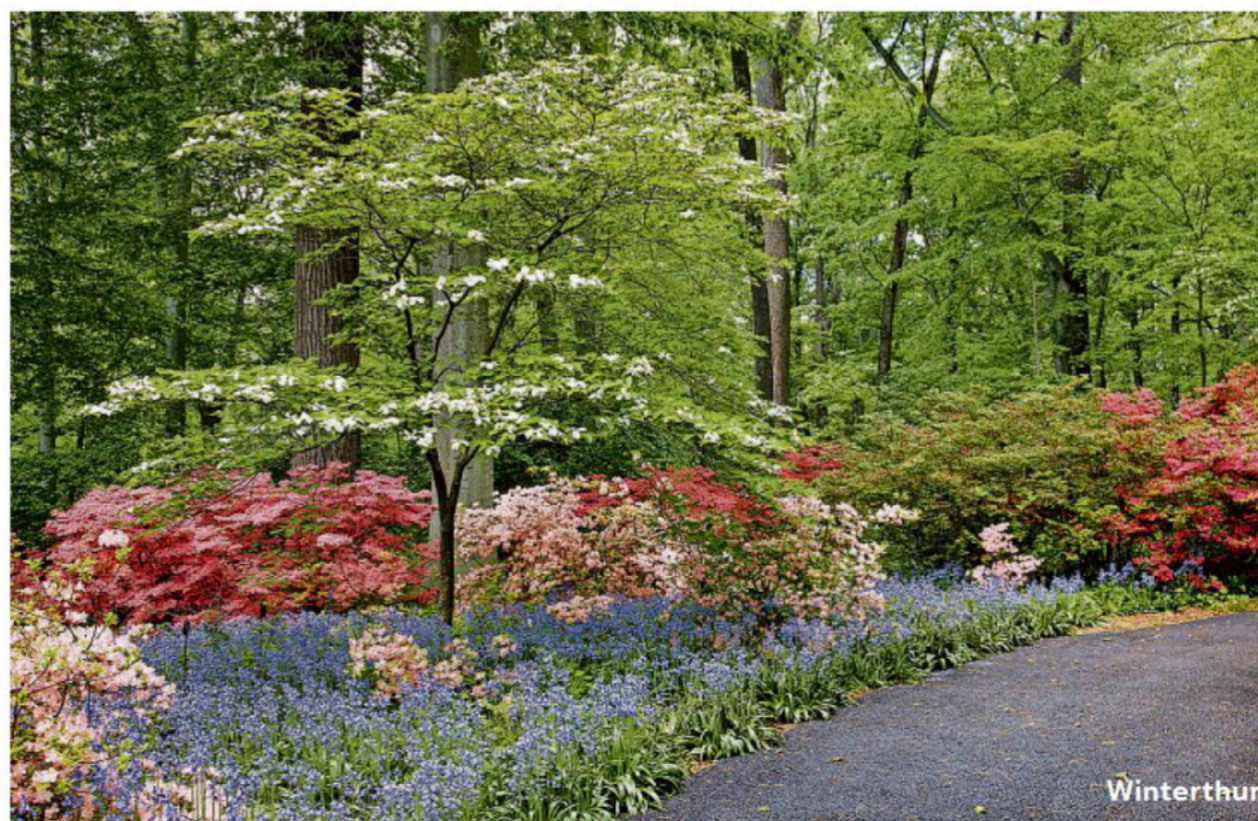
By midday, I've reached Morris Arboretum in Philadelphia proper. Now part of the University of Pennsylvania, it was one of the first gardens in America to combine global influences. Swan Pond looks straight out of an English estate, with its marble temple and pair of swans. Nearby stands a 1905 fountain inspired by the Alhambra, a Japanese garden dating to 1912, and a 1913 loggia with a statue of Mercury.

The Victorian-style rose garden and



Longwood Gardens

EILEEN TERCHA



Winterthur

LOIS MAURO

fernery are must-sees before I ascend the canopy walkway to stroll among the treetops and hang on hammock-like

nets 50 feet up. A sign reminds me to return after Memorial Day weekend for the Garden Railway, with miniature

trains chugging past sculptures crafted from natural materials.

As the afternoon wanes, I make my final stop at Grounds For Sculpture in Hamilton Township, N.J. This unique destination provides a green backdrop for hundreds of contemporary sculptures. Some loom large, but most are smaller, tucked into a bamboo grove or half-submerged in a pond.

"There's a sense of discovery and this intentional conversation between art and nature," says Lauren Collalto, director of marketing operations. "You go down a winding path and suddenly find another sculpture."

The garden makes the artwork accessible. Visitors can snap a photo inside a painted vase and walk through a Monet painting, complete with a teal bridge alongside water lilies and weeping willows. Some of the art is temporary, so like any garden, the grounds here are always changing — a perfect metaphor for this vibrant region where nature and human creativity flourish together.