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## Liss Ard, Co. Cork

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## Liss Ard, Co. Cork

*Liss Ard, the high place, is outside Skibbereen in Co. Cork. Noel Brady visited it and here describes what he calls "Perceptive Ecological Realms in the Irish Countryside."*

*"Believe one who knows: you will find something greater in woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters."*

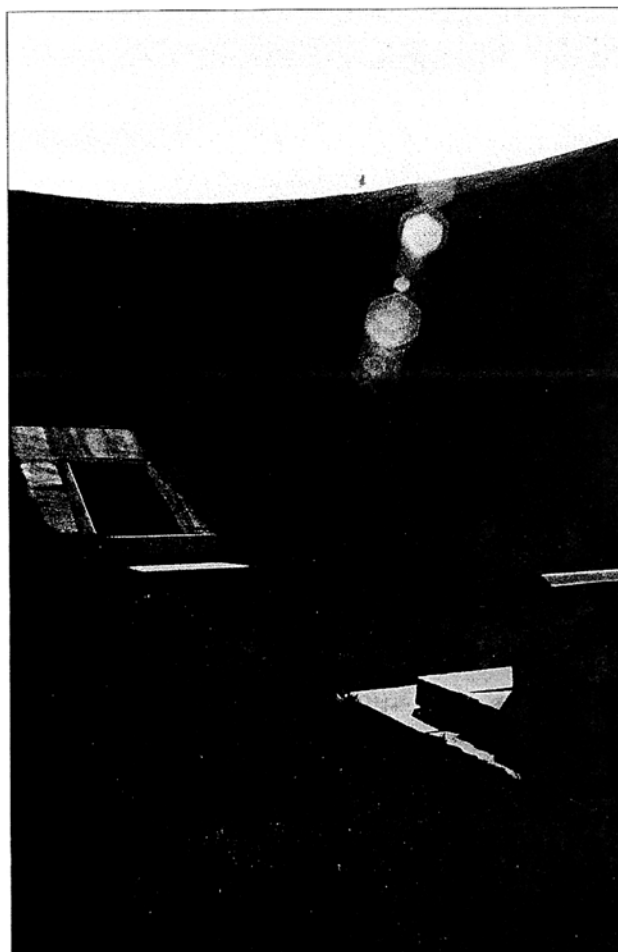
St. Bernard de Clairvaux

Arriving in September under the bloom of an Indian Summer, sheep grazing in the nearby meadow, our path winds its way between lines of trees a few years old. Around us the edges of the wood lead unto reed filled marshes and lake shores. At the end of this tree shrouded laneway one is presented with the prospect of Liss Ard, the high place, under a hooded Monterey Pine which in turn becomes the symbol for this place, or rather places.

Veith and Claudia Turske have not planted a mere garden within the country, a garden to compliment the interior realm of Liss Ard House (Hotel) though certainly that is a beautiful compliment. They have instead attempted to sow the seeds of a new landscape woven over the ancient in the hope that a new order will emerge, one in which one might learn again the secrets of Nature. We all hope to become masters and this is perhaps the school where we might learn.

Under the guidance of Mark Haberlin the Victorian Lodge has been transformed into a true villa to escape the narrow confines of our modern environment, a realm where one can sense the real, to appreciate the horizon and be at one with oneself. The stripped down interiors have both a minimal and yet tactile condition which make one wish to embrace the world. Overlooking Lough Abisdealy one is touched by the heaven like quality of the Earth, silent and beautiful.

Outside the pattern is less outward, rather each part of this extended garden relies on the creation of individual clearings. In truth the Earth has been excavated rather than planted; spaces, hollows, rooms, depressions have all been scooped out to make sense of the weave above. Unlike those within a forest these clearings are being made from below ground up. In keeping with the radical agenda of re-making the land the

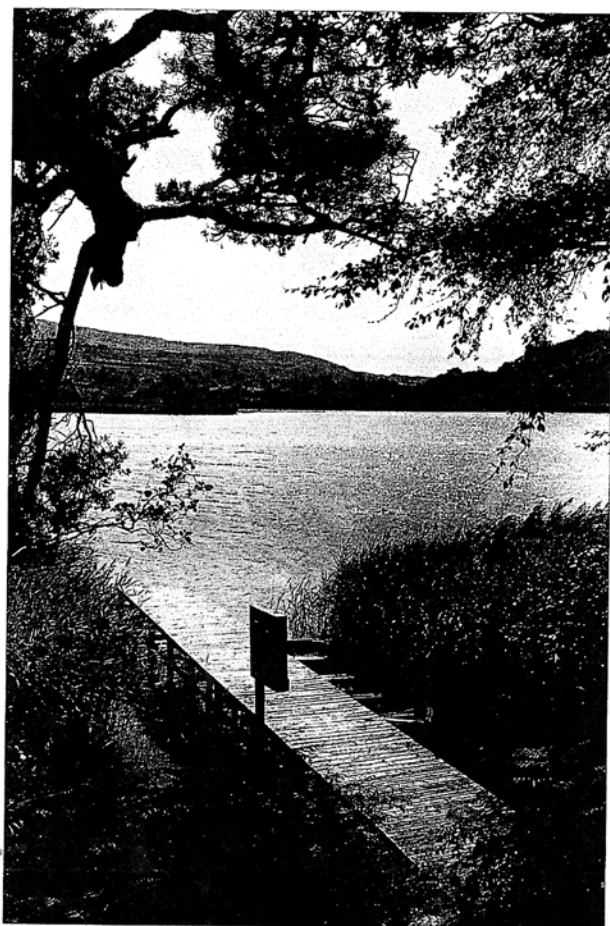


Irish sky garden — Turell's crater.

Earth is formed and reformed, it is drained, water is added and only then are trees planted, native plants which will combine to form a lacy weave shrouding each clearing with its own unique character. While this work is in its infancy it is destined to be a legacy which will span many generations. Already one can sense this continuing form.

As one enters this wonderland of condition a pattern emerges, unlike those of the gardens of famous houses such as Versailles or Powerscourt. Instead this weave is adjusted according to the land itself, one moves along lines of contours and hedgerows. Beginning with the Water garden and Arboretum with its rare species trees planted around three ponds. Each pond varies in shape and water life. Even in this early stage wild birds have taken to their new home. Overseeing these rooms the field of vision is filled with the wildflower meadow. The ponds, which form part of a natural phosphate filtration system lead you towards the Lough, through a coppice wood.

Traditional woodland techniques have all but disappeared in



Lough Abisdealy.

Ireland. Instead the countryside is filled with factory lots of Sitka Spruce or Douglas Fir. Here the wood is intimate, complete with its small water wheel directing the flow from the ponds. At twilight the sound filters and guides you towards its destination; the Lough below.

The Lough is like many other Irish lakes, deep, still and cold, a place which harbours magic and the unknown. Wrapped in the silken reed banks Lough Abisdealy is truly serene. The single jetty launches you out into this realm. Walking along its banks one is taken with this magical bowl formed by the gentle hills that surround it, protecting it from the world. To stay here one might spend a different day contemplating each specific realm discovering the passage of time, the path of the sun and the breath of the sun. Instead one might just come here to the lake day after day discovering the passage of the year.

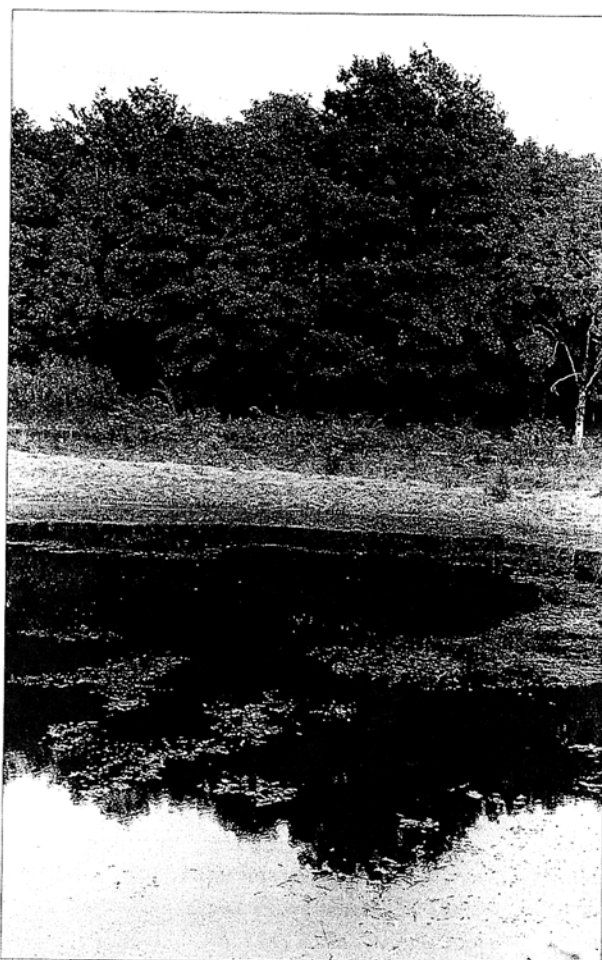
Reluctantly leaving this place one discovers accidental places, carved out of the of hills and woodland, small places for special plants, art pieces in themselves. This will be further complimented by the work of Andy Goldsworthy, the artist whose work transcends the ephemeral aspect of the natural materials he uses.

However nothing prepares you for the most structured perceptive space, that of the crater. Climbing from the lake through a winding path the mound of the crater is circumnavigated. The crater itself is approached by means of a

heavy portal of dry wall stone, ancient yet modern gate directs one towards the "garden" designed by James Turrell, the American visual and Landscape artist. Only part of Turrell's work is complete, that of the crater, a great earthen bowl. Other aspects of the work includes a pyramidal form to be placed towards the Lough. The "garden" is entered from below and can only be experienced in reality. No photograph can come close to the perceptive inversion of this bowl. For through a passage, not unlike Newgrange, one emerges into its secret and hollow interior, under the clear blue sky. The round, oval line around you completes the horizon, this is the Earth to the exclusion of all but the breeze, bird song and the clouds high above. At its centre is an altar-like podium upon which you offers yourself to the sky excluding all else, waiting while the earth itself turns upon the stars. Like children we lay there watching clouds pass far above not knowing if heaven lay below us.

This is perhaps also the most controversial of pieces because it is unlike the other perceptive realms which form a seamless connection to each other and the Earth. Instead this is apart, isolated, an icon of its own, though nonetheless extremely powerful in its idea.

Returning to the Lodge the experiences are half remembered half imprinted, vague in their outline This is a place which should be allowed to emerge in time, to ingrain itself into your being. High above the Lough the whole prospect



Watergarden and Arboretum

is united once more. What was experienced as charms on a necklace are interwoven again into the same Earth, the same country and one asks could this possibly be Ireland, could it be heaven.



*Above:*  
Hewn steps.

*Left:*  
Portal entry to Turell landscape. The crater is on the right.

*Below:*  
Coppiced woodland – waterfall.

