

# Class 4: A Place in the Country

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## Introduction

### 1. Class title 1 (*Orangerie and Jardin Anglais*)

These are both views of the gardens at Versailles. At left, we have the *Parterres* or ornamental flower beds, where each summer the thousand-plus orange trees in Louis XIV's collection could be taken out of the **Orangery** at the back and set out to create scented walks. On the right, 90 years later, is the **Temple of Love**, a "folly" or purely ornamental feature designed to create a focus in the garden laid out by the same architect, **Richard Mique** (1728–94), for the pleasure of **Marie Antoinette**, the queen of Louis XIV's grandson, Louis XVI.

### 2. Larger versions of the above

### 3. *Orangerie* with grand axis of the main park

Here they are from different angles. Don't worry about the actual buildings; how would you compare the two settings in terms of man's relationship to nature? The earlier layout, to my mind, expresses complete mastery over nature. The natural shapes are squared off and turned into geometric abstractions. In the orangery layout, and even more in the grand design for the park itself, the mastery extends as far as the eye can see, and by implication beyond. Gardening as expression of Empire.

### 4. *Jardin Anglais* larger

Ninety years later, man reserves the right to shape nature for expressive effect, and enhance it with objects of his own creation, but there is no sense of imposing one's will beyond the immediate environment. This is *natural* Nature, so to speak, though with a little artistic help from man.

### 5. Repeat of slide 2

The two pictures represent the two hours of the class. The first will concentrate on the **grand style** at Versailles: where it came from, how it was used by the Sun King, and what influence it had on other palaces elsewhere; in the terminology I used in the first class, this is all about **export**. The second hour on the other hand, is about **import**—for I hope to show that the major influence on the more natural style comes from **England**. So I shall spend a bit of time exploring how it became the dominant style in Britain, before letting Marie Antoinette escape with her friends to her idyllic country paradise.

### 6. Aspects of Versailles (*Bassin d'Apollon*)

In tracing the heritage and progeny of Versailles, we shall look at several defining aspects: **scale**, **layout**, **planting**, its use of **sculpture**, its **water features**, and **iconographic theme**—here, the glory of France.

# A. Italian Influences

7. Section title A (Villa d'Este)
8. Medici gardens in or near Florence

Much as I said in Class 2, the main influences on the grand style in France came from Italy, though the French combined them in their own particular way. When **Catherine de' Medici** came to France in 1547 as the Queen of **Henri II**, she would be familiar with ornamental gardens. Her family had laid out their retreat above Florence with formal terraces going stepwise down the hill, and about this time they bought the **Palazzo Pitti** in Florence itself, whose park, the **Boboli Gardens**, encouraged far more extensive development, in terms of layout and scale; the second Medici French queen, **Marie de' Medici**, spent her childhood there. But for the other features I mentioned, planting, sculpture, and above all water features, there was nothing to beat the **Villa d'Este at Tivoli**, laid out between about 1555 and 1575—a full century before Versailles.

## 9. Three views of the Villa d'Este

Here are the three images I showed in my introduction. At top left, a fresco showing the original plans, with the villa itself at the top of the hill, and formal gardens cascading below it. Such elaborate schemes required expensive maintenance, and many of these renaissance gardens had become romantic ruins by the mid-18th century. Fortunately, the Villa d'Este and several others have been taken over by the Italian government and carefully restored—no doubt as a money-making proposition, but a great service to the history of art.

## 10. The Oval Fountain at the Villa d'Este, Tivoli

The gardens were commissioned by **Cardinal Ippolito D'Este II**, as an expression of his wealth, power, and love of his country. Most of the features in it represent the history or geography of Italy. He badly wanted to be elected Pope, but never made it; disappointed, he retired from ecclesiastical work and concentrated on the development of his estate. Although I have lots of photographs, it is probably easiest to show you a video.

11. The Villa d'Este at Tivoli
12. The Sacro Bosco at Bomarzo

These Italian sites from the 16th century had all the features that Louis XIV would appropriate at Versailles in the 17th—I'll show you an even closer comparison in a moment—but there were some significant differences. The 16th-century Italians recognized the power of **untamed nature** and did not attempt to control it entirely, and they had a **sense of fantasy**. You can see both in what is surely the strangest garden in Europe, the **Sacro Bosco at Bomarzo**, near Viterbo, begun in 1552. The name means “sacred wood,” but a better translation might be “enchanted forest,” for the place is chock full of oddities. This leaning house, for example, has perfectly level floors inside; its intention is probably

allegorical or to illustrate a proverb, but no one really knows. So while I can show you a couple more photos, I am entirely unable to explain them!

13. [Statuary from Bomarzo 1](#)
14. [Statuary from Bomarzo 2](#)
15. [Statuary from Bomarzo 3](#)

It is thought that the hollow head in the last picture may have been used for luncheon parties, so that the guests could simultaneously eat and be eaten! The owner of the estate, **Pier Francesco Orsini**, had to gardens constructed shortly after the death of his wife, so perhaps this was all a very personal way of dealing with grief. Another theory is that it was a riposte to the extreme ordering at the Villa Lante nearby, but the dates do not really bear this out.

#### 16. [Villa Lante, Bagnaia, 1568—](#)

In any case, the **Villa Lante**, begun in 1568, is the closest Italian parallel to Versailles that I can find, albeit on a much, much smaller scale. Once again, I am going to outsource detailed description to a video. It is not the best visually, but it has an excellent guide, a Brit called **Monty Don** (which I assume is a pseudonym or nickname). Rather than go through all he is going to say, I have added little note in the corner to draw your attention to things that will resonate in the rest of the class.

#### 17. [Villa Lante video \(stop 2" before end\)](#)

Note that last remark. **Cardinal Gambara** might have been rich, but he didn't own the whole country. Part of Louis XIV's point was to emphasize that the did; the perspective at Versailles stretches into the far distance, with not another building in sight.

## B. Views of Versailles

18. [Section title B \(Apollo Fountain, with Lully Menuet des trompettes\)](#)
19. [Chenonceau](#)

Of course Versailles did not spring immediately from imported Italian influence; there were French precedents as well. One of the earliest was the **Château de Chenonceau**, spanning the Loire. The building was completed in around 1521. As you have heard, **Catherine de' Medici's** husband, **Henri II**, preferred the company of his mistress, **Diane de Poitiers**, and having confiscated Chenonceau from its previous owner, who had not paid his taxes, gifted it to Diane. However, when Henri died in 1559, Catherine—now the Queen Regent—forced Diane to move to a less picturesque château and moved in herself. She immediately had the gardens built that you see, and used them to host magnificent entertainments that would reinforce her own power and patronage. Looking back at our criteria, they had a certain scale, but they were carved out of the landscape rather than dominating it. Compared to the Italian sites, the ground is entirely flat, so there is no water pressure for fountains; anyway the Loire

is as picturesque as you could desire. But there is a very formal layout, with large *parterres* divided by box hedges, very much as in the Villa Lante. It is as though Catherine had extended her house with two enormous outdoor ballrooms or drawing rooms.

#### 20. Le Vau, Le Nôtre, and Le Brun: *Vaux-le-Vicomte* (1656–61)

Those *parterres* with their scroll patterns may have been an Italian invention first, but they became the signature motif of French designers, who bred a special variety of miniature box with which their designs could be executed with greater precision. Another name for them is *parterres de broderie*, or embroidered beds. Here they are a century later, on a much larger scale, at the château of **Vaux le Vicomte** (1656–61). Now this was not a royal palace, but the property of Louis' finance minister **Nicolas Fouquet**. Beginning in 1658, he hired the architect **Louis Le Vau** (1612–70), the landscape architect **André Le Nôtre** (1613–1700) and the painter-decorator **Charles Le Brun** (1619–90) to create the château, combining architecture, interior design and landscape into one unified design. When it was finished in 1661, he invited the King to a magnificent dinner. Mistake! The King's adviser, **Jean-Baptiste Colbert**, who wanted the finance job himself, convinced him that Fouquet's magnificence stemmed from a misappropriation of public funds. Fouquet was arrested, Colbert got the job, and Louis engaged the three artists to design a total makeover of the his relatively modest hunting lodge at Versailles.

#### 21. Transformation: *Vaux into Versailles*

#### 22. Versailles in 1662

That modest hunting lodge already had quite elaborate gardens, laid out in formal *parterres*. And here's what Le Nôtre did with it. Can you see what the changes are?

#### 23. Versailles in 1668

#### 24. Le Nôtre and the gardens at Versailles

As you can see, Le Nôtre expanded the formal gardens on either flank of the château, and greatly extended the East-West axis by a long cross-shaped canal extending into the distance. The canal could be filled with boats for the grand entertainments that Louis put on from time to time, as in this engraving from around 1680.

#### 25. Adam Perelle: *Le bassin d'Apollon* (c.1680)

#### 26. Le Brun: *Bassin d'Apollon* (1671)

The centerpiece of the engraving is the *Bassin d'Apollon*, or **Apollo Fountain**, which you have already glimpsed in my title video. The Apollo statue is important, as is the East-West layout of the entire park, because Louis—the **Sun King**—identified himself with Apollo driving the chariot of the Sun, bringing light to the world. I am sure that if his sculptor, Charles Le Brun, could have made the sculpture emerge hydraulically from under the water, he would have done so. But the fountain has much the same effect when it is turned on. And there's the rub. Unlike the hilly terrain of the Villa d'Este and Villa Lante, Versailles is flat. Water could be brought in via aqueducts, but it was next to impossible to maintain much pressure without using modern pumps. So when Louis walked or rode around the estate, his gardeners would move ahead of him, turning the fountains on just before he reached them!

27. Versailles: gardens from the West

28. Cotellet: *Three views of the Bosquets at Versailles* (c.1693)

Here is another view of Versailles. Look at the smaller areas cut into the surrounding greenery. One disadvantage of making the park so gargantuan is that it was not suitable for the smaller-scale entertainments that were also a feature of the French court. Hence the dozen or more little *bosquets*, or clearings, each designed for a particular kind of relaxation—Versailles as theme park! The one at the bottom right, for example, was known as the *salle de bal*—ballroom, or more appropriately **ballet theatre**, because Louis loved dancing and would himself take part in allegorical ballets, often in the role of Apollo. This is **Benoît Magimel** taking the role in the 2000 film by **G rard Corbiau**, *Le Roi Danse*. And here is a reconstruction of the occasion—marred unfortunately by the King’s misstep.

29. Beno t Magimel as Louis XIV in *Le Roi Danse* (2000)

30. *Le Roi Danse*, Louis as the Sun

## C. Versailles Abroad

31. Section title C (*Het Loo*, *Sch nbrunn*, *Peterhof*, *Sanssouci*, *Caserta*)

I thought the simplest way of showing the effect of the French grand style on other countries was to string them together in a video. There are five here, but there are many others I could have chosen. Even before Louis XIV’s improvements were finished, Versailles became the place to emulate. So we have **Het Loo**, begun in 1684 for William III of Holland and Mary II of England; **Sch nbrunn** in Vienna, whose gardens were laid out for Emperor Leopold I in 1689, though the house was remodeled later under Archduchess Maria Teresa; **Peterhof** in Saint Petersburg begun earlier by Peter the Great, but expanded by him as the direct result of his visit to Versailles in 1717; Sanssouci in Potsdam, created by Frederick the Great beginning in 1745, and **Caserta Palace**, near Naples, begun in 1752 for Charles VII of Naples, later Carlos III of Spain.

32. Palace of Caserta (still from the above)

33. The gardens of the Palace of Caserta (begun 1752)

From this picture, the Palace of Caserta seems the least interesting of the lot. All it has is water and scale: a series of water terraces cascading down the mountain from a great distance away. But it has two features that distinctly belong to the 18th century, not the 17th. One is the fact that there is no attempt to blur the distinction between the man-made and the natural; the terraces butt straight up against the natural-looking trees, which are in the background wherever you look. And the cascades are punctuated by mythological figure-groups that are far more complex than anything at Versailles, intended simply to tell a story rather than deliver an allegory. These are principally the work of **Paolo Persico** (1729–1796). They are all mythological stories about hunting. Here, for example, is *Venus and*

*Adonis*, in which Venus tries to dissuade her lover from going on the hunt, having the premonition that he will be killed. One more video will tell you more, both about this and the next group up the hill.

34. Caserta: *Venus and Adonis*

35. Video: **Fountains at Caserta**

And here are two close-ups of the sculpture you have just seen: Actaeon coming upon Diana while she is bathing, and his punishment by being turned into a stag and killed by his own hounds. Both stories come from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Again, note how the rocks and shrubbery is an integral part of the sculpture grouping, not all tidied away as it is at Versailles.

36. Caserta: *Diana and Actaeon*, the Diana group

37. Caserta: *Diana and Actaeon*, the Actaeon group

And further up the mountain still, you come upon a water feature, *The Grove of Venus*, that seems so natural you have to look closely to see the hand of the artist at all. After the break, we will see how this natural approach to garden design took root in Britain, and was eventually transported back to Versailles, creating quite a different aesthetic from the original.

38. Class title 2 (*The Grove of Venus*)

## D. Blenheim: Battle / Palace

39. Section title D (Blenheim)

You remember John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, from last week? His most famous victory in the War of the Spanish Succession was fought at Blenheim in Bavaria in 1704. In return, Queen Anne, who had made Churchill a Duke in 1702, gave him a large parcel of land at Woodstock, north of Oxford, and provided funds for him to engage England's leading architect (and also playwright), **Sir John Vanbrugh** (1664–1726) to build him a country house, **Blenheim Palace**—so-to-speak the Building of the Battle!

40. Closing image of the above

It may seem odd, since Marlborough got Blenheim for having defeated the French, that the resulting palace should be yet another Versailles clone. I chose this picture to illustrate this because of the formal gardens in the foreground: note the scrolled box hedges, the water terraces, and fountains. But these are a French Connection in another way; they are an early-20th-century addition by a *French* garden designer, **Achille Duchêne** (1866–1947), who made a specialty of continuing in the **Le Nôtre** tradition. But original Blenheim can be compared directly with Versailles in several other respects.

41. Blenheim from the air

Look at the palace and grounds from the air. Can you see what is like Versailles, and what is notably different? The later French gardens are on the sides of the house, not the front of it. Blenheim shares with Versailles the long central axis driving into the far distance. But there the symmetry stops. Beyond the avenue of trees, there are ordinary English fields. And instead of ponds and canals in geometric shapes, there is a lake caressing the property in the sinuous shape that nature intended for it.

#### 42. Vanbrugh bridge and Capability Brown excavations

Only the lake was *not* what nature intended. **Vanbrugh** built this magnificent bridge connecting the house to the avenue of trees. The trouble was that the stream it spanned, the **River Glyme**, was generally only a mere trickle. The poet **Alexander Pope** remarked that “*The minnows in the stream take on the grandeur of whales as they swim underneath it.*” Enter landscape designer **Lancelot Brown** (1716–83), known as “**Capability Brown**” from his habit of surveying properties with an eye to assessing their *capabilities* to be made into something better. And when the 4th Duke of Marlborough engaged him in 1763, he immediately saw that Blenheim had the *capability* of being turned into something altogether more pleasing if he were to dam the stream to create a lake, and to plant trees that would ultimately offset the formal layout so as to bring out the natural contours of the land.

#### 43. Map of Blenheim

#### 44. A view in the Blenheim Great Park

You look at a view like this and think “typical English landscape.” What you don’t realize is that such a landscape has been carefully curated by a designer in such a way as to make his work virtually invisible. Here is Brown himself describing his method; clearly he thinks of himself, not as an author in the tradition of the Versailles designers, but as an **editor of nature**.

#### 45. Brown talking to Hannah Moore.

#### 46. Temple of Apollo at Stourhead, with Pope quotation

Capability Brown might also have been following the precepts of the poet **Alexander Pope** (1688–1744), who takes the classical concept of the *genius loci*—originally the presiding deity of a particular place—and, in English translation as “the **Genius of the Place**,” made it a prescription for landscape design. Brown’s “capabilities” were a matter of looking to see how a place might most naturally be transformed. I suppose Louis XIV and his designers were also looking at the capabilities of Versailles, but more as a blank canvas that they could paint over. The park shown here, incidentally, is **Stourhead** in Wiltshire, begun rather earlier than Blenheim and not by Brown; it is the pivot into our next section.

## E. French Painter, English Park

47. Section title E (Claude and Stourhead)

48. — the two images side by side

We start this next section at Stourhead once more. It deals with a different kind of French Connection; the influence of French painting upon English landscape design. It is a difficult topic to put across, but I will do my best. Let me ask you first: what do these two images have in common? One thing I am sure you will say is the soft lighting and golden color—but I chose this particular photo to match the painting as closely as possible. You might also say the stretch of water, the bridge, the use of trees to frame the view, and the classical ruins. Two things are going on here at the same time. One is Pope's idea of the *genius loci*. When the owner of the property, **Sir Henry Hoare II**, started the conversion in 1741, he must have looked at the little stream flowing through his park, and thought how magnificent it would be turned into a lake. So like Brown at Blenheim, he built a dam and went from there.

49. Paintings by Claude and Poussin

Hoare's other inspiration was art. Like most young men of his class, he had been to the continent on the Grand Tour, certainly getting as far as Rome, and like many rich young men before him, he brought back a painting or two as a souvenir. Although they were most often acquired in Italy, the most collectable painters were *French*: **Claude Lorrain** (Claude Gelée, 1604–82) and **Nicolas Poussin** (1594–1664). Having brought them back, they set to work to make their own properties look as close to living Claudes and Poussins as possible.

50. Stourhead: Aeneas' descent into the Underworld

The picture that inspired Hoare was a Claude showing a scene from the *Aeneid*. It is actually not much of a landscape, but it did give him a scheme for his park. He laid out a walk around the newly-created lake, which would reveal various views along the way, on the general theme of Aeneas' descent into the Underworld in Book VI. There are inscriptions all along the way to orient the literay visitor, and even a grotto towards the end to represent Hades.

51. Sir George Beaumont of Coleorton Hall

52. Claude: *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel* (1646, London NG)

53. Constable: *Dedham Vale* (1802, London V&A)

A short detour. Let's leap forward to the end of the century. **Sir George Beaumont**, one of the earliest patrons of the young **John Constable** (1776–1837), was also a Claude collector, and had also remodeled the grounds of his house, **Coleorton Hall**, as you see. Anyway, he showed Constable his favorite Claude, *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel*, suggesting that he might learn a thing or two. And Constable did, as you can see in the very next painting he produced, *Dedham Vale*. But with Constable, the facts on the ground—the *genius loci*, if you like—were always more important. We think of him as the preeminent



painter of the English landscape *as it is*, beneath a sky that is as it was *right at that moment*. We tend to forget that even his realism was shaped and framed in ways that come from French examples.

54. Versailles: *Le jardin anglais* and *Temple de l'amour*.

We come back to one of the slides I showed at the very beginning, the *jardin anglais* (English Garden) created at **Versailles** in the late 1770s and early 1780s. In this case, the influence did not come from Claude, who was much more appreciated in Britain than in his own country, but directly from England. But wait—weren't Britain and France more or less at war? Yes, on and off. But the main factors were economics and fashion. The old-style Le Nôtre gardens took an army of gardeners to maintain; with an English garden, you could more or less plant it and leave it. And where frugality led, fashion followed.

55. Influence map: France—Rome—England—France

So we have **completed the circle**: (1) French artists such as Claude and Poussin move to Italy; (2) their paintings are brought home by English visitors, who remake their own properties to match; and (3) a craze for the new English style floods all of Europe, including France.

## F. Life on the Farm

56. Section title F (Boucher to Mique)

57. — the two images together

The two images of a watermill on a French farm are both real, both artificial. The top painting, by **François Boucher** (1703–70), is probably of a site that exists in some French village somewhere, but the whole thing is idealized, including the two country folk. The lower image is a photograph, of a similar mill built on the Versailles estate by the architect **Richard Mique** (1728–94), but the water beneath the millwheel is an artificial pond, and the farm was not built for real workers but as a plaything for the queen, **Marie Antoinette**. The music was by **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712–68), to whom I'll return in a moment.

58. Boucher: *Shepherdesses and Sheep by a River*

59. — landscape background of the above

Here is another picture by Boucher that came up in a sale a few years ago; it sold for only \$600, so nobody thought it was especially good, but it is interesting to analyze. Tell me what you see in it, starting with the background, then moving to the figures. The background might almost be an artificial lake like at Stourhead: it disappears into the distance in a gentle curve, it is framed by trees, and set off by classical sculpture. It is all idealized, but not half so much as those shepherdesses with their beautiful clothes and perfect make-up; they look like ladies dressing up and playing as shepherdesses.

60. Versailles: *Hameau de la Reine* (1783)

61. — the same, with interior

And this was exactly what Marie Antoinette was doing with her ladies in the play village that Richard Mique built for her. There might be real animals in the farmyard, carefully tended by farmhands who got out of sight when the Queen arrived, but the interior was set for tea served in the best Sèvres china.

### 62. Rousseau's original tomb on a island at Ermenonville

Intellectually, this derives from two sources, one real, one fictional. The real one is the back-to-nature philosophy of **Rousseau**. Rousseau was the genuine article. He was an advocate of natural simplicity, He visited Stourhead, and spent his last months in retreat at the first example of the English Landscape style to be seen in France, at **Ermenonville** in Picardy. His simple tomb on an island on a lake surely says it all.

### 63. Boucher: *Shepherd and Shepherdess*

The fictional source is once again classical: the idea, going back to Greek and Roman pastoral writers, that the **Arcadian Shepherds** led a life of perfect ease and balance. They appear in the art of Claude and Poussin. They appear in Boucher too, barefoot but improbably clean, and surrounded by bouquets you would be lucky to get from any flower shop. Rousseau wrote an opera—yes, he was a composer too—celebrating this vision of pastoral perfection. Called ***Le devin du village***, or “The Village Soothsayer,” it was performed at the wedding Marie Antoinette to King Louis XVI. The words here are part of a celebratory chorus sung near the end. I won't play that actual bit, but since I have been rather short of videos to break up this hour, I am going to offer two sections to end up with. The first is where the shepherd **Colin** declares his love for the shepherdess **Colette**. Then the villagers come in to celebrate, and I'll cut to the first section of their rustic dance.

This production, which came out only a few weeks ago, is as authentic as you could get. Using scenery of the original period and similar costumes, it is performed at the **Queen's Theatre at Versailles**, where Marie Antoinette herself took the role of Colette at a special performance in 1780.

64. Rousseau: *Le devin du village*, duet

65. Rousseau: *Le devin du village*, dance

66. Class title 3 (still from the above; The Queen Sings)