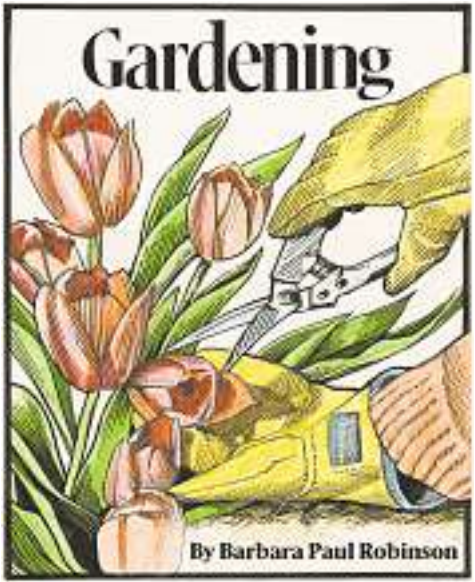


SPRING BOOKS

‘I must have flowers, always, and always.’ –CLAUDE MONET

IN THESE TIMES of pandemic, it is easy to understand why solitary confinement is considered by many to be torture: lockdowns and social isolation have challenged the well-being of us all. How reassuring, then, to read Sue Stuart-Smith, a prominent psychiatrist and psychotherapist, extolling the impact of nature and gardens on mental health and spiritual recovery in **“The Well-Gardened Mind”** (Scribner, 340 pages, \$28). The wife of the English landscape architect Tom Stuart-Smith, she began married life as a gardening skeptic, having long viewed tending the soil as “outdoor housework.” Over time she became an enthusiast, inspired by watching seeds germinate and new life come into being. Drawing upon scientific data and case studies to make her case for “the restorative power of nature,” she describes the profound, positive effect of gardening and green spaces on everyone, including, for example, prisoners on New York’s Rikers Island, who when assigned to a professional gardening project are statistically unlikely to return upon release, some even finding work in public parks. To reinforce her point, she skillfully weaves into her narrative a rich, idiosyncratic mix of archeological evidence of man’s earliest gardens, quotations from Scripture and the great books, and anecdotes from her own psychotherapy practice. She describes planting a single bulb as “setting a little time bomb of hope in motion,” and calls a garden a place not of retreat but of refuge. Instead of the Latin motto *veritas*, “truth,” she prefers St. Hildegard’s *viriditas*, “green and truth,” the “connection between the human spirit and the growth force of the earth.” In closing, she says that “now, more than ever, we need to remind ourselves that, first and foremost, we are creatures of the earth.”

When the renowned plantsman Daniel J. Hinkley sold his home in Kingston, Wash.—where, from 1987 to 2006, he had found his “true soul” as a garden maker—he was, for the first time since childhood, without a greenhouse, a potting bench, all the elements of a garden. “Not fully realizing the magnitude of these absences,” he writes, “for two years I was crippled emotionally”; he “did not have a clue how to leave a garden.” When he then sold his specialty nursery, Heronswood, much of the gardening world mourned too. He recounts all this in **“Windcliff”** (Timber Press, 279 pages, \$35), a book magnificently enriched with photographs by the author and Claire Takacs. With



his talented architect-husband, Robert Jones, he began again not very far away, creating Windcliff in Indianola, Wash. While Heronswood sat in a shady, moist woodland without views, Windcliff sits on 6.5 acres of dry, open land on a windswept bluff with views of Puget Sound. Mr. Hinkley waited three years before starting a garden again, getting to understand the land and watching the arc of the sun. The wry humor that infused his Heronswood catalog re-emerges here—he describes a plant leaning on its neighbor as “James Dean slouching on a wall while smoking a cigarette”—and belies the patient, selfless plantsman who has happily returned to Heronswood part-time to help the new owners, the Port Gamble S’Kallam Tribe, maintain the gardens. He has even begun a small nursery, but sells plants only on-site to those lucky enough to live nearby. Echoing a message from Ms. Stuart-Smith, Mr. Hinkley recalls as a child watching an orange-pip open on his windowsill, the miracle of “the ignition of life in a germinating seed” for which he remains ever grateful.

In her own story of leaving a garden, Page Dickey recalls that having abruptly left several places and relationships in her life, she at last firmly planted herself when she created Duck Hill, in North Salem, N.Y., certain it would be her home for the rest her life. Then, after 34 years of loving and nurturing her 3 acres of manicured gardens and formal hedges, she and her husband moved north to Church House, on 17 acres in Falls Village, Conn., a major change she describes in **“Uprooted”** (Timber Press, 243 pages, \$27.95). At first she planted echoes of Duck Hill but soon was drawn away from her new garden to the wild land, fields and woods stretching out to sweeping views of the distant Berkshire Hills. Her memoir, illustrated by color photographs by Ngoc Minh Ngo and Marion Brenner, reveals how this late-life uprooting changed her as a gardener. No longer feeling compelled to create a showcase, she savors the garden and untamed landscape for the pure joy of it. Despite all the bad news of the day, she can lose herself in nature, “among trees and flowers and birds,” and “forget the troubles of our world.”

—Ms. Robinson is the author of “*Heroes of Horticulture: Americans Who Transformed the Landscape.*”



SAME TIME NEXT YEAR ‘No. 180’ (11 April 2020), an ‘iPad painting’ by David Hockney, made in Normandy, France, during lockdown.

Weathering the Storm

Spring Cannot Be Cancelled
By David Hockney and Martin Gayford
Thames & Hudson, 280 pages, \$34.95

By DOMINIC GREEN

THE PAINTER David Hockney and the critic Martin Gayford have been friends for 25 years. Their friendship, Mr. Gayford writes, has largely been “conducted at a distance, by email, phone calls, an occasional parcel, and a steady stream of pictures that arrive almost daily in my inbox.” When they meet again “after months or even years,” their conversation resumes “as if there had been no interruption,” except for “a constant, almost imperceptible, shift in perspective.” Messrs. Hockney and Gayford were better prepared than most of us for the distancing, interruptions and shifts in perspective that came with the Covid-19 pandemic. “Spring Cannot Be Cancelled” is Mr. Gayford’s warm, intelligent and quietly inspiring report on what Mr. Hockney has been up to. It’s also a memoir of love in the time of Covid: of friendship and a shared passion for art.

In late 2018, Mr. Hockney tells Mr. Gayford that he’s about to go to France. At Honfleur on the Normandy coast, he and his assistants are stunned by a three-hour sunset: “It was like van Gogh’s paintings: you could see everything very clearly.” Driving through the countryside to Paris, Mr. Hockney has an idea: “Maybe I could do the arrival of spring here, in Normandy.” The next day, he buys a farm, La Grande Cour, a “higgledy-piggledy building” with barns, fruit trees and a treehouse in its grounds. In January 2019, Mr. Hockney moves in and local laborers convert a barn into his studio. In March 2019 the “stream of pictures” to Mr. Gayford’s inbox resumes in earnest.

The painter was drawn to La Grande Cour not just by the French light or the mental company of van Gogh and Braque, who painted in the region, or even because Mr. Hockney, a smoker, “sybarite” and “an enthusiast for Bohemian society,” finds France “a lot more smoker-friendly than mean-spirited England.” Mr. Hockney has been famous for 60 years. He craves, Mr. Gayford writes, the “isolation that van Gogh experienced in his little Yellow House at Arles, living surrounded by his subject matter and able to concentrate utterly on painting it.”

When Mr. Gayford visits, he stays at a nearby farm: The renovations to La Grande Cour do not include a guest room. “I think I’m on the edge of something, a different way of drawing is coming through,” Mr. Hockney tells him.

“I couldn’t do it anywhere else: London, Paris, New York. You have to be somewhere like this.” Mr. Gayford is reminded of Braque’s remark to a fellow artist, “I am in the middle of my canvases like a gardener among his trees.”

By now, most of us have had enough of being locked up with our thoughts and a computer. Mr. Hockney, who is 83 years old, paints seven days a week and has been drawing and painting on iPads since 2010. When the lockdowns begin in March 2020, Mr. Hockney’s world contracts into the little kingdom he shares with his dog, Ruby, and his assistant, J-P. Mr. Hockney increases his already staggering pace of work, reminding Mr. Gayford that art is about optics and perception and may arise from the most unpromising of sources. Mr. Gayford cites Walter Sickert: “The artist is he who can take a piece of flint and wring out of it drops of attar of roses.” The Gayford-Hockney friendship enters another of its long-distance phases.

Messrs. Gayford and Hockney’s previous collaborations include a book of conversations about art, “A Bigger Message” (2011), and “A History of Pictures: From the Cave to the Computer Screen” (2016). Mr. Gayford has also written “Man With a Blue Scarf” (2010), on sitting for his portrait by Lucian Freud, and “Modernists and Mavericks” (2018), a richly entertaining group biography of postwar London painters. No one knows Mr. Hockney’s subject matter better than Mr. Gayford, and no one writes about it so well. “Spring Cannot Be Cancelled” takes us inside the mind of a major modern artist.

Yorkshire cast of mind. But the two men’s responses to the Klimt drawing also reflect their different perspectives on art.

Mr. Hockney is a technician: He responds to Klimt’s freedom of line. When he is intrigued by the way these spindly threads on a page combine to create the “shimmer” of a three-dimensional impression, we can almost hear his mind working on how to use that perception as fuel for his own work. Mr. Gayford is a critic: His first task is to say something useful about the finished image to the public. When he suggests that Mr. Hockney’s response tells us something about the artist’s psychology, we can almost hear Mr. Gayford’s mind working on the next steps of the critic’s task: how

to further develop our understanding of the mysteries of artistic production.

All this complicated “debate” takes place in the manner of a casual chat between old friends. Mr. Hockney has the painter’s chummy irreverence for his constant companions, the masters of the past. Van Gogh’s life in Arles, he reckons, “must have been quite pleasant, even though nobody liked him there, because he went out painting every day.” If Vincent had been alive today, he wouldn’t have left us that marvelous volume of correspondence with his brother Theo: “He would have been on the phone to him instead, and the letters wouldn’t have been left for posterity.” The implication here is that Vincent would, like Mr. Hockney, have spotted the

iPad paintings with added depth of meaning during the pandemic. When the museums and art schools closed, all art became virtual. “It is characteristic of the online world,” Mr. Gayford observes, “that it simultaneously expands and contracts experience. You can go anywhere and see anything at the click of a mouse, but only transformed into illuminated pixels on a computer screen.”

The danger, familiar to us all, is losing the habit of what Mr. Hockney calls “really looking.” Your perspective depends, in brushwork as in computing, on your application. The question isn’t whether digital art is more real, but whether a new medium can be adapted to the traditional subjects and methods of art.

When the lockdowns began, David Hockney upped his already staggering pace of work.

Unable to meet, Messrs. Hockney and Gayford communicate through the FaceTime app. “My iPad pictures are made on this thing we’re talking on, so they are more real, aren’t they?” Mr. Hockney says. But he has no doubt that the old ways and Old Masters are the best:

“Photographs of gardens are OK, but paintings of gardens look a lot better, particularly if they are by Monet!”

For Mr. Hockney, the camera always lies: “Photographs of sunsets are always clichés. That’s because they show just one moment. They don’t have the movement, and so they don’t have space.” The sun, the artist points out, is “the furthest prominent thing that we can see; it’s a good few million miles away.” A photograph cannot guide our eye to recognize that distance. A painting can do so, by containing multiple perspectives that still make perfectly ordered sense to the eye, as in those Chinese scroll paintings that have long fascinated Mr. Hockney.

Mr. Gayford has called this a characteristic Hockney thought: “apparently simple and straightforward, yet unlikely to occur to anyone else.” The insight leads Mr. Gayford to look at Mr. Hockney’s sunrise scene “No. 229” (23 April 2020) as a “cosmic stage set.” Mr. Hockney is confined to his plot of earth in Normandy, but his lockdown paintings represent space as the human experience of distance, from the trees in his garden to “the star performer, the sun, much farther than any human being has ever travelled.”

“Spring Cannot Be Cancelled” is full of such insights, and all the more enjoyable for being related in the tone of two friends enjoying a long-distance glass of wine. The dialogue, apparently simple but actually highly sophisticated, could not have occurred between any other friends.

Mr. Green is deputy U.S. editor of the Spectator.



JEAN-PIERRE GONÇALVES DE LIMA/DAVID HOCKNEY (PAINTING)

In one exchange, Mr. Hockney describes a drawing by Gustav Klimt and recalls “the way it was drawn with red and blue lines weaving around each other . . . I’ve never forgotten it.” When Mr. Gayford looks again at the drawing, he finds it “strikingly erotic.” Their differing responses, Mr. Gayford suggests, show the artist’s “utterly matter-of-fact attitude to sex.” Probably so, for Mr. Hockney is a Yorkshireman, and his faux-naïf wonder at the world contends with the pragmatic

potential of the iPad and adapted it to his method, just as Mr. Hockney’s reed-pen drawings adapt something of van Gogh’s method. The spacious, horizontally-striated marks in the skies of Mr. Hockney’s Normandy sketches evoke the reed-penmanship of van Gogh. But van Gogh’s strokes have the weight of a Flemish woodcut engraving, while Mr. Hockney’s have the lighter, shallower line of his own lithographic prints.

Mr. Gayford spots that this lightness endows Mr. Hockney’s