

GARDEN NOTES

ORVIETO

The gardens at Orvieto were established by John Findlay on a steep rocky hillside with very few pockets of good soil. It was only through a continuing program of soil formation with the addition of leaf compost, straw, paper, organic garden waste – and of course his own prodigious efforts – that he has been able to produce (under considerable logistical difficulties) the rich fertile soil on which the trees and shrubs flourish today.

The basic design has largely been determined by a succession of additions to the garden surrounding his original house (1987) fronting onto Summit Rd. In 1996 John built his new residence at the top of his original block. By purchasing the cottage next door, he was able to link its existing driveway to this by forming a level terrace, giving him access to Summit Rd. A long hedge of *Lonicera nitida* separates the formal turntable terraces from the informal contour garden below. In August 2001 the new block to the northwest was added, thus allowing his home to occupy a more central location in relation to the garden and the creation of a bowl shaped terrace beyond.

Entry to the garden is made through a portal of Roman Cypresses, birches and flowering apples up the steep main drive, and from here a woodland path leads off to the left through a screed of birches underplanted with rhododendrons and into the open, up steps through the 'alpine garden'. Here a subtle tapestry of mat plants, prostrate herbs, small creepers and dwarf conifers tumble down the hillside amongst natural rock outcrops. Their contrasting shapes, textures, and hues suggest an open mountainside ambiance.

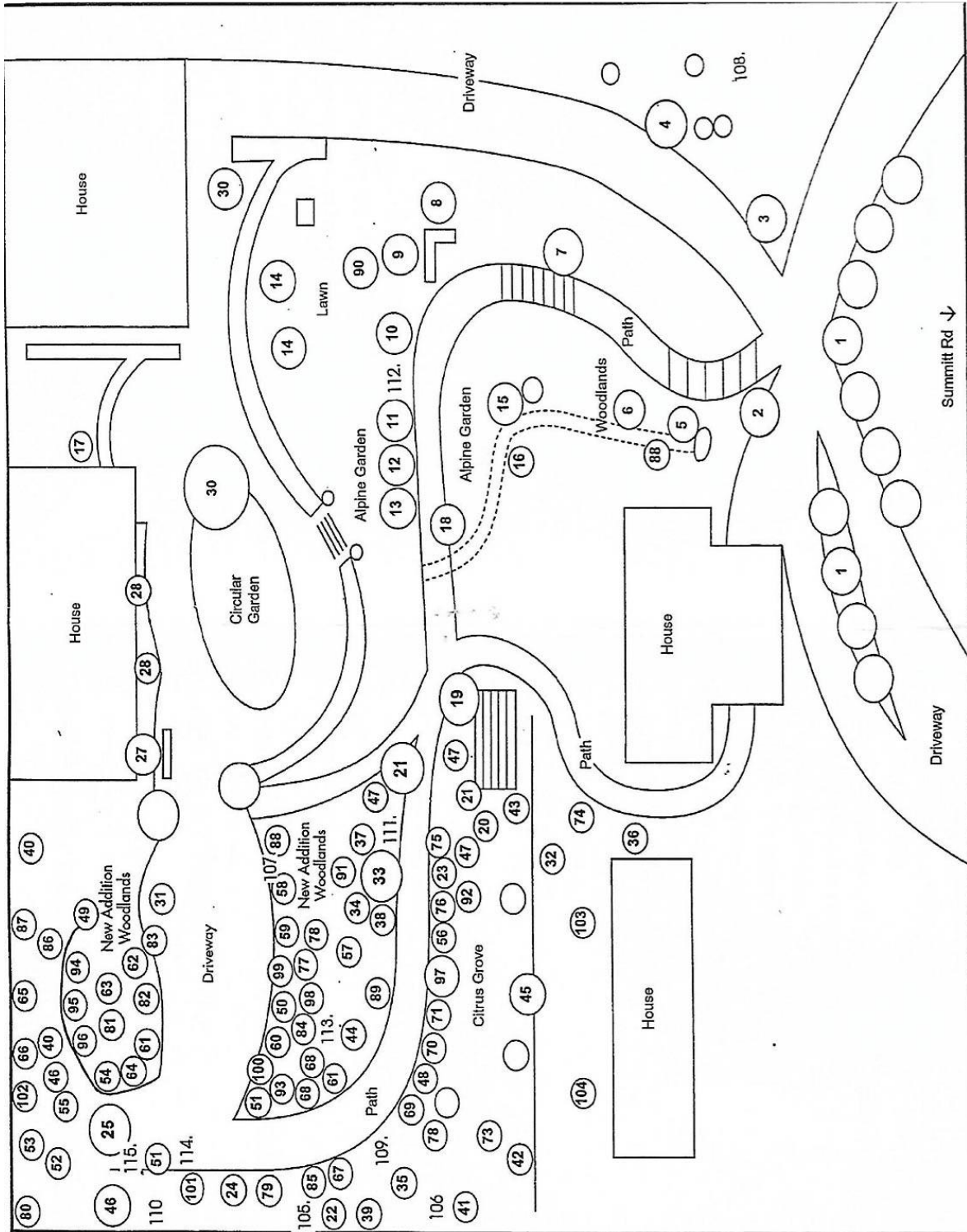
From here there is a splendid panorama extending from the north face of Mt Dandenong to the Lilydale Lake to the right. Behind the seat and beyond the light veil of a *Pinus patula* (9) is a replica bust of Michelangelo's David under the canopy of two noble Lebanese Cedars (28). The contour path now rises gently, passing on the right a screen of Japanese Larch (11), magnolias and American and Chinese Dogwoods.

To the left, a mountain rill weaves its stony course through ferns and ornamental grasses. Soon the hedge of *Lonicera nitida* is encountered with its revelment of toscanite spalls (rock) taken from the hillside. On reaching a fork, we follow the left-hand path along the contour, passing a dining area below on the left which is sheltered by a pergola covered with *Vitis coignetiae* (20), then through a screen of magnolias into the new north-west garden. A grass walk arches gently uphill to the right past new plantings of lilac species and varieties, spiraeas, deutzias and dwarf conifers on the bank to the right and a screen of olives and citrus down to the left. After passing a bed of rhododendrons, we turn right onto the bowl shaped terrace and from here to the turntable terrace with its fine views over the surrounding countryside.

Refreshments may be enjoyed on the upstairs verandah of the house.

Thank you for coming.

*Note: The map of the present garden is marked with numbers showing the various locations of the main trees and shrubs in the garden and the recommended route which will allow the easiest access and ascent up the hill.



Orvieto is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people. Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional custodians of this land and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

**These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:
www.opengardensvictoria.org.au**

Open Gardens Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes the benefits of gardens and gardening. We assist garden owners to open their private gardens to the public. Surplus OGV funds are allocated to various charities and also through our Giving Program that supports horticultural, educational and community projects.