



Patio of the Cypresses

Next to this low, sheltered garden is a square, open terrace with a fountain in the center. Up a flight, the terrace continues, with alternating diagonal walks in a square and tiny fountain plazas, to the group of buildings where we first entered the garden. The building with the loggia at the far end of the long pool casts a sheltering wing in front of the *Patio of the Cypresses*, which is also embraced by walls against the hill. Its designers made skilled use of very small changes in level to create a paradoxical place, a garden in full view that seems to be submerged in another world. A peninsula, inaccessible to humans because of the thick planting, emerges from a square pool with a fountain in it. Around it is a brick terrace, dry except for the mist from the jets, which surprises us by being just a few inches *below* the level of the surrounding pool, symbolically engulfed and remote, the brick terrace of a distant kingdom.

Above the Patio of the Cypresses are three more terraces bounded by a diagonal stair ascending toward *Sultana's Mirador*. The farther stair, in the axonometric, is particularly celebrated for its railings, whose tops are channels down which water courses, in splashing counterpoint to the jets in the center of three circular landings. The water channels are simple, without the refinements of surface that mark later Italian water gardens, where balustrades sport channels carved with shells, to curl and splash the water that runs in them. But in the dusty heat of an Andalusian summer, the stairway is a cool delight.

Vaux-le-Vicomte



The chateau at Vaux-le-Vicomte

The garden at Vaux-le-Vicomte, south of Paris, figures prominently in the history of empire, as it does in the history of gardens. Its message, in the former realm, is of vanity punished; Nicholas Fouquet, the treasurer to Louis XIV, secured the services of the young landscape architect André Le Nôtre to lay out a splendid garden. At its inauguration, Fouquet proudly invited his king, who sensed that too much French money had been lavished on the premises and ordered Fouquet imprisoned. He then hired Le Nôtre for a string of subsequent triumphs, including Versailles.

In the history of garden design, Vaux-le-Vicomte has a more central place. It marks a profound revolution in attitude, for here, for the first time, the pattern garden, previously cut off from a hostile world by a clear and definite edge, plunges through that edge and invades nature, while it eludes containment. At Vaux the canal is placed *across* the axis, so it vanishes out of the manicured garden into wild and uncontrolled nature, which had for so long seemed too hostile to penetrate but which seemed at last, in the confident seventeenth century, ready for human engagement.

The moated chateau at Vaux is squeezed into the far third of its rectangular island. A bridge leads to the spacious forecourt, which occupies the first two-thirds of the island. The forecourt seems generous, but the house's jumble of roofs pushing against its central dome speaks still of medieval jostling and crowding. On the mainland side of the bridge is a square court, quartered, with walks to the right and left leading to other

courts flanked by pavilions strung together with colonnades. Opposite the bridge, just behind a wall from the square court, is a big roundish place into which a number of roads lead, in the "goose-foot" pattern characteristic of roads in French forests.

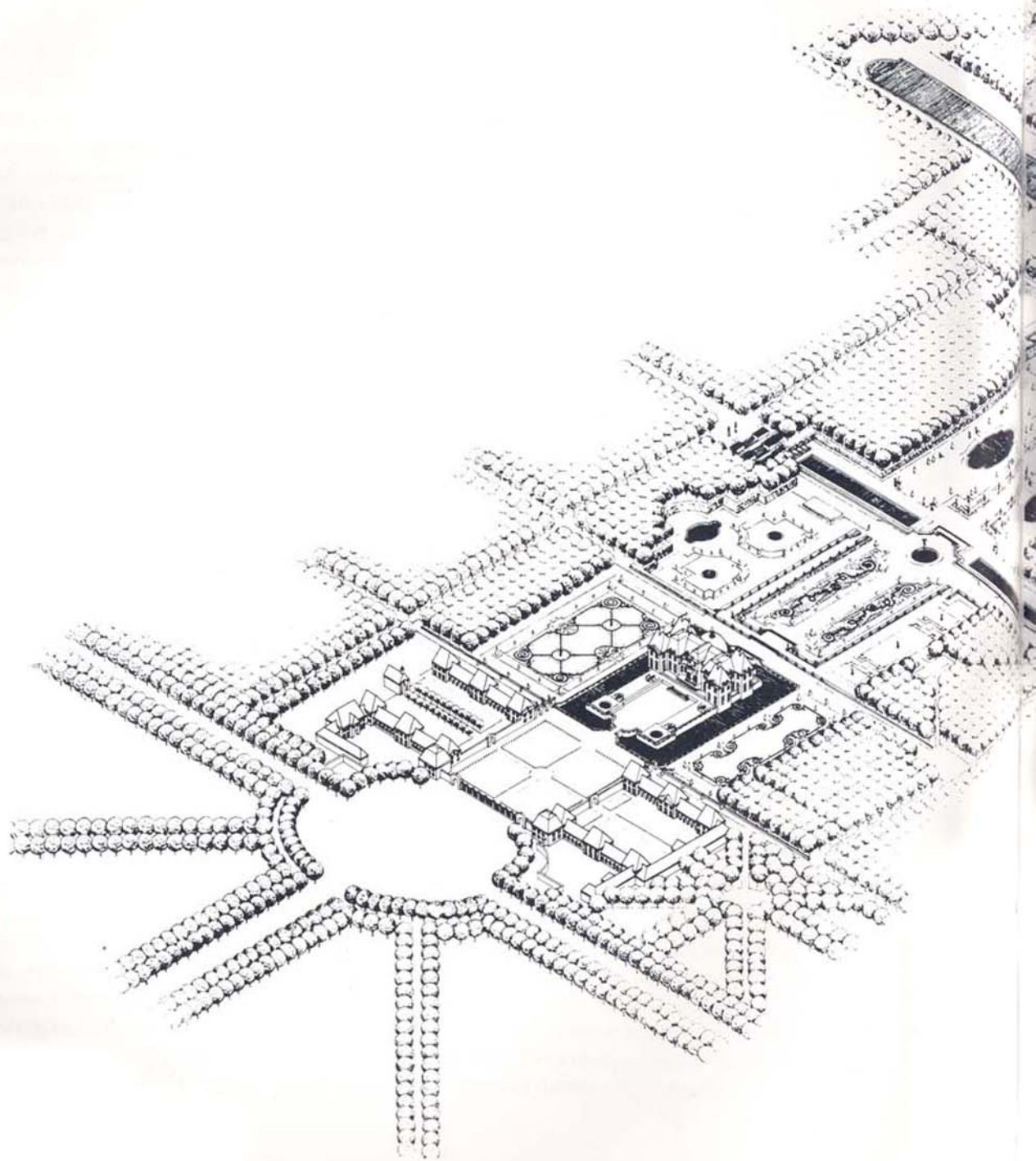
To the right and left of the château are patterned parterres. The one on the left, twice as long as it is wide, is laid out in two squares, each quartered diagonally by a pair of walks. There is a circle in the center of each square, and an almost circular spiral or shell at every corner, decoratively elaborated. To the right of the château a much narrower parterre, undivided, has planting beds at its edges to form three connecting panels of grass.

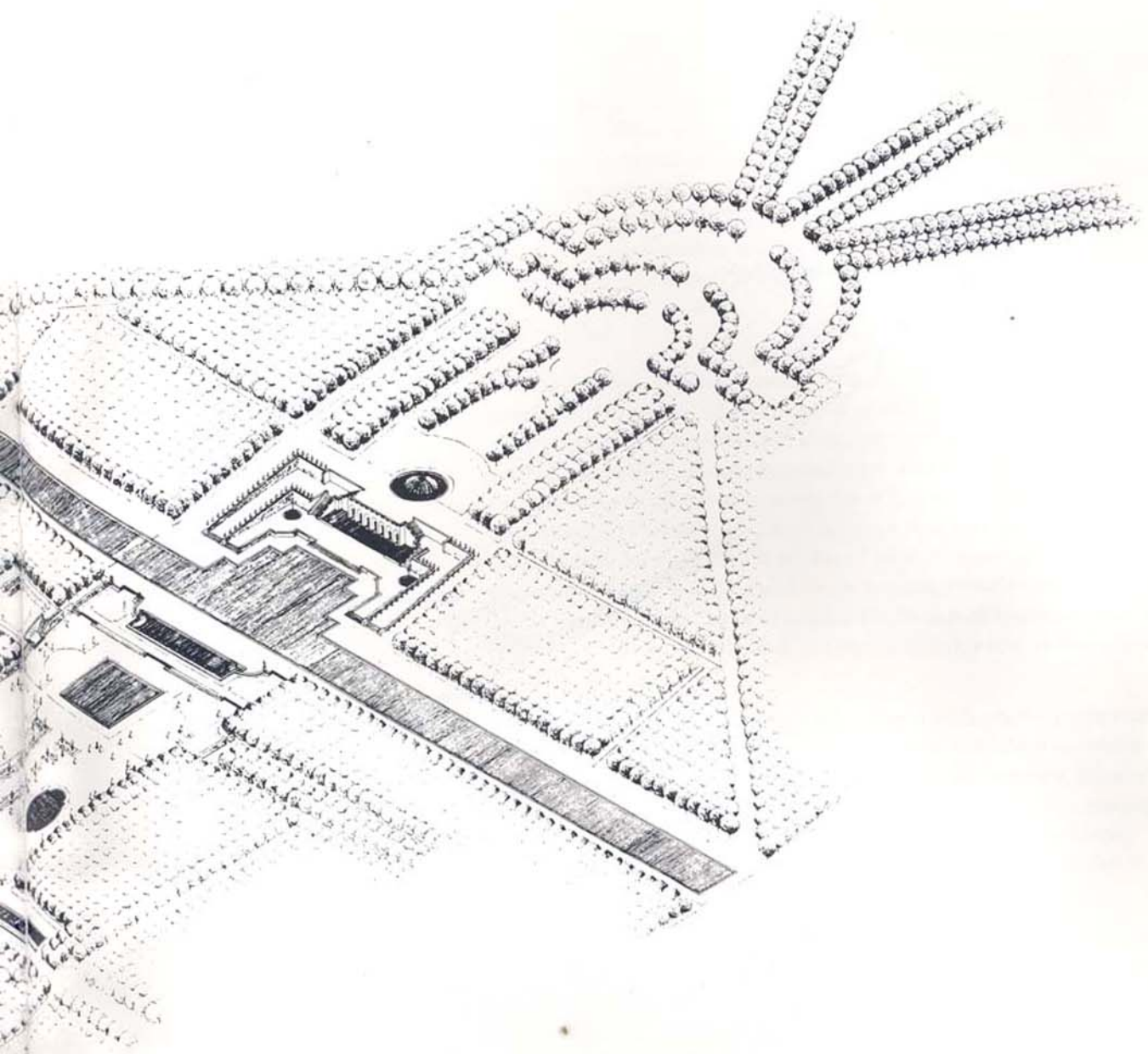
Most of the garden, however, lies beyond the château and slightly below it, past a transverse promenade. The building's domed front connects with this promenade—across a bridge over the moat, then down a stair. Subsequent flights step down to a fanciful split parterre (with a wide walk along the center) leading from the house to a circular fountain basin. Just past the fountain is a first cross canal, which doesn't extend past the patterned garden. Past it on the main axis lies a large, strikingly simple parterre, with a square basin of water on axis and a pair of elliptical basins flanking. Here the land begins to rise away from the house and to the left. Its slope is gentle, but it creates, on so large a site, a considerable difference in elevation. To the left of the square basin is a high square of lawn, a particularly attractive place flanked by rows of pleached trees, reached by a flight of stairs that climb along the wall supporting the raised plot.

Along the main axis past the square basin are enormously wide shallow steps, then a wall and statues, some water, then the breakthrough canal, extending out of sight (until the viewer arrives at its bank, whereupon its ends finally become visible). There is a view across the canal to long ramps, fountains, steps, basins, an arcaded grotto, and beyond that a dome of water balancing the dome of the château at the other end of the long axis. Trees extend the axis some more, then form a concentric set of spaces that receive the "goose feet" of roads radiating into the forest.

It is all vast, straight, linear, simple, formal, strong, and generous, a pattern that speaks of power, over nature and over men. It uses finite formal geometries to bring us to the brink of infinity. The strengths it hints at would be developed at Versailles, in gardens richer in detail and far vaster than these, but never clearer, nor more effective.

What was it like to inhabit such a place? There seem to be two opposite answers. The first, more respectable, is that inhabitation can include actions that are for show, that are mannered, formal, ritualistic. A formal setting, then, is appropriate for formal behavior—with, in the case of Vaux-le-Vicomte, the suggestion via the large canal that there is some escape from it (if not the exit that was arranged for poor M. Fouquet). A series of formal gestures in the landscape, then, support prescribed formal gestures among inhabitants in prescribed formal dress.



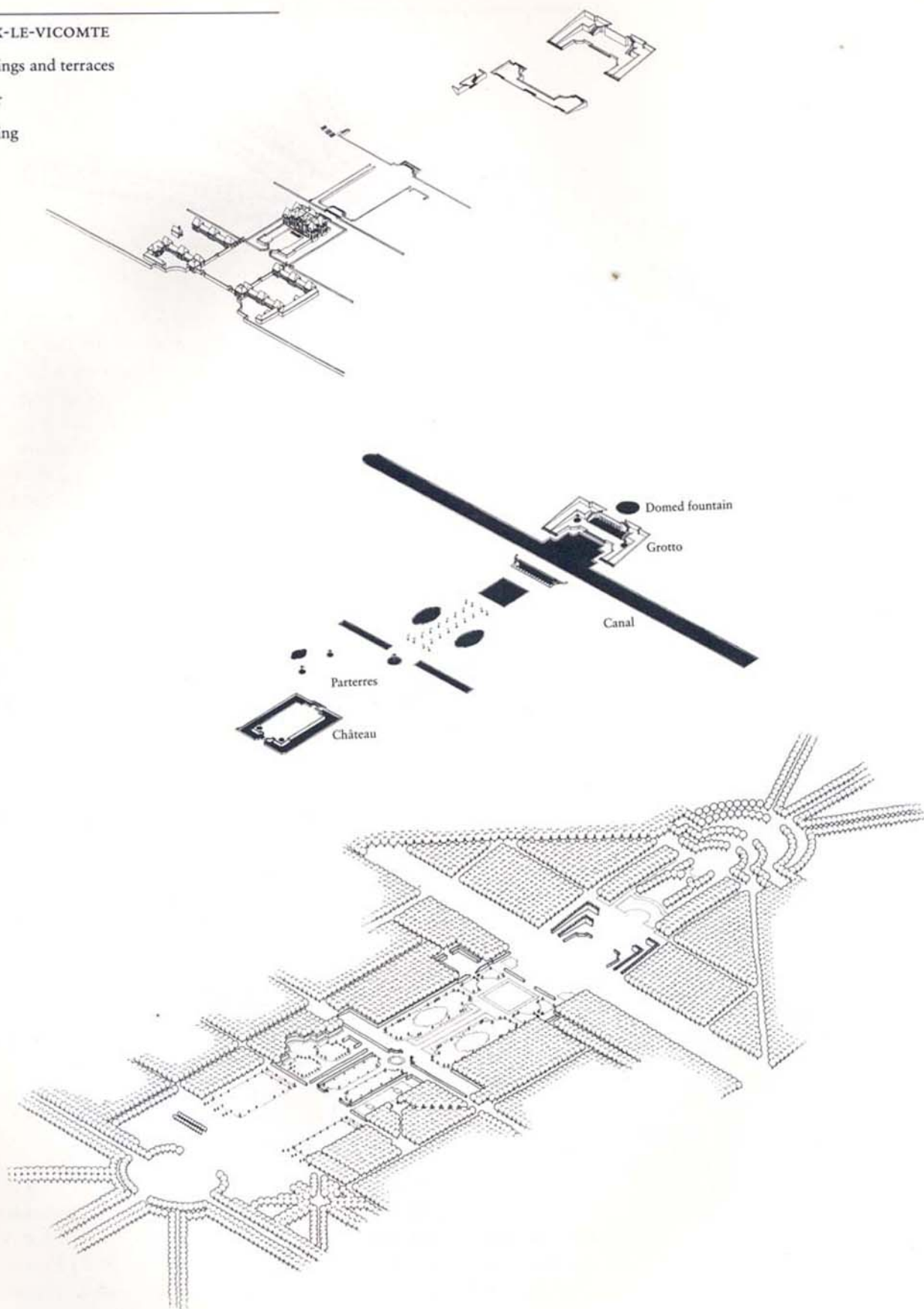


VAUX-LE-VICOMTE

· Buildings and terraces

· Water

· Planting



The opposite answer, one with even more interesting implications, has been suggested to us by the architect Jean-Paul Carlhian. He notes that, in the centuries of their origins, formal symmetrical spaces were inhabited in an altogether casual manner: objects on elaborate symmetrical mantel-pieces were never matched and symmetrical, furniture grouping was straightforwardly functional and ad hoc, not formal at all. The formal order of the architecture (and the garden), that is to say, freed the inhabitants from formal manners and left them ready to inhabit their symmetrical spaces as they chose.

Studley Royal

The Mughul and Moorish paradises we have explored form symmetrical patterns in the sunlight where the water sparkles, and Le Nôtre's gardens glorify the gilded reign of the Sun King, but Studley Royal is a northern garden, a place of greens and browns, misty distances, and the silver reflections of a pale sky in quiet water. It was laid out in a wooded valley near Ripon, in Yorkshire, by John Aislable, a character out of the Brönte sisters' world. He had been Chancellor of the Exchequer (in the early eighteenth century) but was disgraced by the bursting of the South Sea bubble and imprisoned in the Tower of London for "infamous foolhardihood and corruption." He was not the first, nor would he be the last, to find solace in cultivating his garden.

Like Ryoan-ji and the Alhambra, Studley Royal contrasts the rough with the perfectly finished and craggy irregularity with meticulous symmetry. Ryoan-ji does this by arranging stones upon a perfect rectangle of smooth, white sand, and the Alhambra by jamming glittering, crystalline, rectangular courtyards in a rough, stony husk. Studley Royal does it by placing symmetrical patterns of water and shaven lawn among wild hills and shattered ruins.

The site is an L-shaped stretch of the valley of the tiny River Skell, where it narrows between steep hills. When in the valley you can't see what is around the corner, which allowed Aislable to create a dramatic surprise. Studley Royal is, in fact, two gardens: the first along the upper stroke of the L, and the second along the lower. It is a green palindrome; you can follow it in either direction and it works.

At the lower end is a weir that creates a large, roughly circular lake. There is a path around the shore, and an obelisk with water jets once stood at the center. One side of the lake is formed by the high, straight stone wall of a second dam, which stretches across the mouth of the valley. In the center of the dam is a stepped, semicircular cascade, and square, pyramid-roofed "fishing lodges" with fine Palladian windows stand symmetrically on either shore. Apparently these were the work of Colen Campbell.

This geometry suggests a water axis leading back into the valley, but it is not possible to confirm this expectation immediately. The path to the fishing lodges and cascade enters from the east, runs straight along the top of the wall, and crosses to the western shore by stepping stones. When you reach the stepping stones, you indeed discover that a long, straight canal