NAUMKEAG: A GARDEN RENAISSANCE

As we approach the 75th anniversary of the renowned Blue Steps, Naumkeag’s intricately detailed, finely crafted gardens are in need of polish: plants are aging, views are diminished, and harsh New England weather has taken its toll on this beautiful National Historic Landmark. Over the last decade, The Trustees have worked to restore, either fully or partially, several garden areas, including the Peony Terrace, Chinese Temple, and Evergreen Garden. But, given the years of decay, we must increase our pace of restoration and make a deep and swift investment to restore Naumkeag’s gardens to their former brilliance.

The Naumkeag Garden restoration will encompass 16 projects that are divided over five phases. Carefully planned and lovingly executed, this work will rejuvenate this very special place, igniting public recognition, visitation, and programs that are designed to celebrate both the garden restoration in process and its final completion. Naumkeag’s renaissance will be a celebration of art and family, a rebirth as inspiring as its original creation.
BLUE STEPS & RUNNEL 1938

Steele’s most recognized work, The Blue Steps were designed in response to Mabel Choate’s desire for an easier path from the top lawn to her cut flower garden. The rhythmic sweep of the delicate white handrails and the dramatic upsurge of birch trunks wrapped between layers of clipped evergreen hedges combine in a fluid climax of fine garden art.

We will recover the creative brilliance of the Blue Steps through the repair of the fountain water system and the repointing and refreshment of the masonry, which is showing signs of wear and decay. The masses of birches and the clipped evergreen hedges will be replaced, resetting this signature garden feature to Steele’s original vision.
ROSE GARDEN  1953–55

One of the last garden areas to be completed, Steele’s Rose Garden unfolds in fanciful rose-graveled paths peppered with masses of floribunda roses. It’s best viewed from above, especially from Miss Choate’s second floor balcony.

Here, we will plant new roses, dress the gravel paths, recreate the robust plantings within the north beds, restore the metal fencing on top of the retaining wall, and repair masonry walls and steps.

CUTTING GARDEN

In Miss Choate’s day, three long beds of cutting flowers, which changed with the seasons, swept across the grassy lawn that now sits at the bottom of the Blue Steps. We will model the restoration of these beds on our successful “pick-your-own” flower fields at Long Hill and Stevens-Coolidge Place, with some of Miss Choate’s favorites as the star varieties.
LINDEN WALK & RONDE POINTE 1890; 1940

Created after a trip to the wooded walks of Germany, the Linden Walk pulls visitors into the cool shade for a sheltered stroll. Fletcher Steele designed the Ronde Pointe (French for “Roundabout”) as a central hub for small theatrical entertainments; the swirling coils of the South Lawn spin from the Pointe like waves circling a tide pool.

We will bring light and definition to this intimate allée by managing the over-mature forest and planting young Lindens. The beauty of the restored Ronde Pointe bench, the Diana Robing statue, the allée fountain, and the captured views along the walk will reawaken the beauty of this garden for visitors who travel this woodland path.
SOUTH LAWN 1933–35
Sweeping dramatically away from the Afternoon Garden, the South Lawn’s swinging curves and slopes were inspired by the silhouetted mountains beyond. The 200-year-old oak anchoring the tumultuous composition was the Choates’ favored picnic spot.

New plant material and restored hedges will freshen and define this space. Tumbling walls will be restored, as will the cedar posts that define the lawn’s sweeping edges.

TEennis Court 
& Pavilion 1884–86
This busy family playground hosted tennis matches in its day, and will be renovated for tented events.

The lattice-work pavilion over the viewing bench will be rebuilt as one of Naumkeag’s most breathtaking resting spots. By adding infrastructure (water, electricity) here, we will be able to support a growing private event enterprise to bolster Naumkeag’s operations.
AFTERNOON GARDEN 1926–28

Miss Choate called this fanciful garden – her first collaboration with Steele – her “joy and delight.” Its 17 vibrantly colored Venetian poles gave definition to the garden boundaries without interrupting its sweeping mountain views, while pots of colorful hybrid fuschias surrounded playful fountains and the intricately woven parterre.

To recover its full beauty, this space will require a complete restoration of its structural elements: Rebuilding the walls, restoring sections of the grape arbor, installing new water systems, and repairing the missing wall fountain are among the needed repairs. Defining features such as the weathered Venetian poles, the glass pool, planters, and original seating will also be restored.
CHINESE TEMPLE GARDEN 1936–55

A seasoned world traveler, Miss Choate drew upon her journeys for ideas and inspiration. When architect Ralph Adams Cram suggested that she needed a space to house her collection of Chinese art, Steele obliged with the Chinese Temple Garden, which sits atop an old viewing platform that once looked out over the Choates’ 1894–cut flower garden. Several colors of red ochre were tested before the temple’s signature color was achieved. When the circular Moon Gate was added in 1955, Miss Choate and Steele felt the Naumkeag gardens were truly complete.

The signature features of the Chinese garden – the water runnels, plantings, sculpture, and moss groundcover – will be brought back to reinvigorate this unique area. Like the Afternoon Garden, the extensive crumbling garden walls must be rebuilt – both for the integrity of the garden and for the safety of our visitors.
TOP LAWN, PERUGINO VIEW, GREAT SEAT  1932–34
With its sweeping views from the Top Lawn, the “Great Seat,” anchored with Korean sculptures and English lead box cisterns, is the perfect spot to take in a Berkshires sunset. The Perugino View’s plantings bring into focus distant features of the surrounding fields and hills.
A mix of projects will refresh this central, popular part of the gardens.

PEONY TERRACES  1935
Three rows of terraces with dry laid stonework housed Miss Choate’s collection of oriental tree peonies.
Vegetation that surround the terraces above, below, and to the side will be replaced, refreshing over-mature cedars, a hedge of lilacs, and a lovely tripetal magnolia.
AGRICULTURAL FIELDS, ORCHARD, & BARNS 1953–55

Naumkeag was once a working farm that supplied food for the family’s homes in Stockbridge and New York City. The farming operation included a dairy and large fields for growing vegetables. An orchard filled the hillside above the pasture. Today only a few apples and a peach tree remain.

Restoring active agriculture using the lower fields and barn would invigorate the property, expand the visitor experience, and bring back a critical historic use of the landscape.
GREENHOUSES & VEGETABLE TERRACES

A large complex including a central greenhouse, cold frames, and planting beds was an active part of Naumkeag, supplying plant material for the gardens, vegetables for eating, and a place for wintering delicate plant material. The greenhouse collapsed under heavy snow in 1972. Below the greenhouse, two levels of vegetable and flower gardens provided food and additional flowers for the household.

Rebuilding the greenhouse and reestablishing the vegetable terraces will supply plant materials for Naumkeag’s garden beds as well as food and flowers for visitors.
PROJECTS BY PHASE

PHASE 1 DEC 2012–AUG 2013
Infrastructure, Electrical & Water Systems
Evergreen Garden Fountain & Sculpture
Blue Steps & Runnell
Linden Walk
Ronde Point
South Lawn (incl Oak Lawn & Pagoda)

PHASE 2 SEPT 2013–JUNE 2014
Afternoon Garden
Peony Terraces

PHASE 3 JULY–DEC 2014
Rose Garden
Top Lawn, Perugino View, Great Seat
Service Court
Greenhouse

PHASE 4 DEC 2014–JUNE 2015
Top Drive & Waves
Plantings below Peony Terrace
Chinese Temple Garden
Tennis Court & Pavilion

PHASE 5 JULY 2015–JULY 2016
Orchard & Lower Drive
Ag Fields, Vegetable Terraces & Barns