

# Janet Jack

The architect and landscape architect tells **Anne de Verteuil** about her life in landscape



**“OUR HOUSE, WHICH MY HUSBAND AND I DESIGNED 50 YEARS AGO, HAS BEEN A CONSTANT DELIGHT”**

**What was your first recollection of being outside in a garden or wild space?**

I was a city child and being outside meant crossing a main road with trams bearing down on one. WWII and the Blitz sent London children away and I had to leave my parents and go, aged five, to my great aunt and uncle on a market garden in Cumberland where we had views from the living room of Skiddaw and soft purple hills in the distance. On my sixth birthday in June, on a brilliantly hot day, Uncle Jim took us by pony and trap to Bassenthwaite Lake and my birthday treat, a rice pudding, was placed to cool in the shallow water over smooth brown pebbles at the edge of the lake. We had walked from the trap through the fire-break in the forest, through the breathtaking flora with bees and other insects. The rose-bay willow herb and soft young grasses were perfect and the scene remains in my memory.

**What aspect of your past has influenced your present?**

Being trained at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in Bedford Square where we had a modern architectural education, world-class tutors and visiting lecturers. From schoolgirl to architect in five years.

**What or who has been your most unexpected source of inspiration?**

I saw some of the work of Professor Sorenson of Copenhagen. His work was wise, serene and three dimensional. He used few materials – grass steps, wide shallow steps and spiral forms cut into the land-form. I fell in love with Danish landscape architecture.

**Which one book would you pass on to your grandchildren?**

A book made for me and my brother by my Aunt Enid and two of her cousins. She was a versatile watercolourist, and the book is filled with their illustrated poems. ‘Pilgrimage’, by our cousin Eric, was about a fairy boat, beautifully illustrated by a watercolour with sails of sycamore leaves. That book demonstrates the extended family that we all had then.

**What one object sums up the way you look at the world?**

Our house, which my husband and I designed 50 years ago, has been a constant delight. It has wooded hillside views, and sunshine floods in from all sides. It is simply and economically built and uses the orientation of the site.

**What’s on your mood board?**

The wonders of the cosmos. Symbols of Darwinism. The beauty of nature.

**What caused your sharpest learning curve?**

Becoming a mother.

**What has been the high point of your life?**

Being married to Bill.

**And the low?**

Personally, losing my parents in a car crash when I was 16. Professionally, working for a local authority architects’ department for six months.

**If you were left to wander for eternity in one garden or space, where would it be?**

Highgate Cemetery, west side.

**Why will we remember you?**

In a small way, for improving the built environment.

**The restoration of Janet Jack’s original 1970s design for Alexandra Road Park in Camden is now nearing completion.**