

# PÜCKLER'S MUSKAU PARK

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*Stiftung Fürst-Pückler-Park Bad Muskau*

On May 1, 1815, Count Hermann Pückler-Muskau—he was made a prince seven years later—issued a proclamation to the citizens of Muskau. It was his plan, he informed his subjects, to “satisfy one of his favorite inclinations,” namely his desire to create a gigantic landscape garden. Pückler’s proclamation, which caused much consternation among the citizenry, can be taken as the starting point of his career as a theorist and practitioner of landscape garden design. Over the course of the next decades, a new chapter in the history of landscape gardening was written in Muskau.

Several different influences come together in Pückler’s landscape garden in Muskau. The most decisive were his journeys to England, the Romantic tendencies of the time, certain personal experiences, and the location’s natural characteristics. In Muskau Park, Pückler directly adapted gardening elements of the Regency-era gardens shaped by Humphry Repton. Pückler also in part followed the example of England’s first gentlemen, the prince regent who later became King George IV. The parks and buildings the future monarch had built, for example, in Windsor made a strong impression on Pückler. Another source of inspiration was the Regency architect John Nash, whom Pückler met in London. Among Nash’s innovations were his use of ornamental shrubs at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, his designs for the shorelines of lakes (as for instance in Regent’s and St. James’s Parks), and the cottages in Blaise Hamlet near Bristol.

The pivotal moment of revelation for Pückler occurred when he saw the cultural landscape at Richmond Hill in the valley of the Thames (Plate 4, page 183). With its medley of mansions, parks, gardens, farms, and dwellings, Richmond Hill prompted Pückler to go beyond landscaping a medium-sized park and to attempt to represent an idealized social microcosm within the framework of the park’s design. Muskau Park owes its uniqueness not only to this unusual objective but also to the ingenious combination of the natural lay of the land with artificial garden and park elements. The Garden Prince’s natural-philosophical convictions were in harmony with his restrained designs that idealized nature.

The realization of Pückler’s ambitious vision for Muskau Park proceeded in fits and starts as a result of swings in both his mood and his finances. Many of the projects planned for the park were never carried

out. The central castle designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, for example, was not built (Color plate 5, page 183). Characteristically, Pückler's plans reached completion only in his mind. In his book *Andeutungen über Landschaftsgärtnerei* (Hints on Landscape Gardening, 1834), Pückler blended a general how-to-book on gardening with an idealized description of Muskau Park. Theory does not entirely match practice: the landscape park presented in the book as a perfect model deviated considerably from the actual park. After finishing this book, Pückler left Muskau for a six-year journey through the countries of the Mediterranean. On his return, he offended his divorced wife, the owner of the estate, not only by bringing back a young female African slave but also by his impatient and underhanded attempt to sell the Muskau estate. The sale finally took place in 1845.

The history of the preservation of Pückler's innovative park design began only a few years after the sale of the estate to Prince Frederic of the Netherlands in 1846. Eduard Petzold, a legendary gardener from Muskau whom Pückler had recommended, oversaw the development of the park from 1853 to 1878. Following Pückler's principles, he carried out the first the basic clearings of the woods as well as all other necessary work so that the park's original concept remained unchanged. During the second half of the nineteenth century, another important step in this direction was the replacement of wooden structures in the park, such as bridges and pavilions, with more solidly constructed structures. Prince Frederick provided the considerable sums necessary to complete and preserve Muskau Park.

Following the death of Prince Frederick, the Arnim family became the owners of the Muskau estate. The preservation and care of the renowned landscape park in the years from 1883 to 1945 are to be credited to the Arnims. It was during the Arnim family's ownership of Muskau that American landscape architects such as Charles Eliot, Samuel Parsons, and Thomas Sears visited Muskau (Figure 1).

I believe that they saw a stronger aesthetic and social harmony of town and park, citizens and aristocrats in Muskau than Pückler had originally intended. He encircled the town with his greenswards in order to create—through the strategic and cleverly restrained use of space—the greatest possible aesthetic effect, which was meant to legitimize his family's claim to natural dominance in the Neisse River valley. Arrogantly, Pückler had virtually erased the town from the park whenever it suited him. The American landscape architects who came to Muskau after Pückler's death apparently failed to recognize the actual intentions of the plan and saw in Muskau's early system of greenery a model for progressively planned recreational spaces in urban America. Pückler's *Andeu-*



Figure 1: Thomas Sears, photograph of Muskau castle. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, Thomas Sears Collection.

*tungen*, published in English translation in 1917, also contributed to this misunderstanding. In the *Andeutungen*, Pückler presents himself as a property owner whose social standing dictated social involvement.

The Second World War was a twofold catastrophe for Muskau Park. First, the park was the scene of extensive fighting shortly before the end of the war. Much of the town and the park's structures were destroyed, and bullets and shrapnel caused long-term damage to many trees. Secondly, at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences the Allies set the Oder and Neisse Rivers as the future German-Polish border. Muskau Park was, consequently, divided in half. The Neisse, once a connective element in the park, became an almost unbridgeable division.

The situation of the eastern portion of Pückler's park in the period 1945–1989 can be summarized very concisely. Quite understandably in light of the immense problems of the postwar era and the state of German-Polish relations, no one in Poland gave any thought to preserving a little known cultural monument created by a German prince. The eastern portion of the park was assigned to the Department of Forestry. The historic spatial composition gradually disappeared as the result of increasing natural succession, which was accelerated by the

reforestation of open spaces. Whereas the park's old trees were respected with a certain professional awe, even if they were not cared for in particular, the two most important park structures on the Polish side, the English House and the Mausoleum, were torn down in the 1970s. The construction of border installations along the Neisse resulted in further alterations in the park's appearance. Aside from these isolated changes, however, Muskau Park remained largely untouched as it returned to the wild.

On the German side of the Neisse, the future of the park was very uncertain in 1945. The Muskau estate was appropriated by the socialist authorities immediately after the war. Preserving the country's aristocratic heritage was not high on the socialists' list of priorities, but the park's advocates eventually succeeded in persuading the authorities to follow the Soviet model and turn the park into a modern cultural heritage park. The park administration established in the 1950s as a part of Muskau's municipal government struggled to preserve the artistic outline of the western section of the park. In some areas, they succeeded surprisingly well given the difficult economic situation and the lack of personnel. They were not able, however, to restore or rebuild the structures damaged or destroyed during the war, with the exception of the so-called Old Castle.

During the 1970s, great effort was put into plans for the preservation of the German portion of the park. Those plans were, by today's standards, inadequate, and some of the measures carried out in the 1970s had to be rectified later on, in some cases already in the 1980s. In recent years, we have finally finished addressing the faulty decisions of the 1970s.

German-Polish cooperation on the restoration of Muskau Park began cautiously in 1988 with a meeting of preservationists from the two countries. This positive development received an unexpected boost from the political changes that transformed Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. Poland and united Germany have embarked on an unprecedented international collaboration to restore a cultural monument. Three phases in this collaboration can be discerned.

The first phase goes back to 1991–92. On October 30, 1991—Pückler's birthday—the re-erection of the Pückler Stone, a massive boulder Pückler had placed at the highest point in the park, was festively celebrated. Many trees had to be felled to restore the views of the hilltop, and the boulder itself, which had been moved for use elsewhere, had to be returned to the site Pückler had chosen for it. Since then, the Pückler Stone has stood as a symbol of German-Polish cooperation in Muskau Park. In the months following the dedication ceremony, German and Polish authorities established administrative structures for each half of the park. The Polish part was virtually wrestled away from the Forestry Department and turned over to the Ministry of Culture. The state of

Saxony took over responsibility for the German side from the local government.

The second phase began in 1998–99. After the initial energy behind the collaboration waned somewhat, new impetus came from several simultaneous developments toward the end of the 1990s. In 1998, German and Polish authorities applied to have Muskau Park named a UNESCO World Heritage site. The two sides also established an innovative cross-border program to create jobs in the park for young Poles and Germans.

The most important restoration projects in the years following 1998 were the re-creation of Pückler's system of roads and paths and the clearing of the vistas on the Polish side of Muskau Park (Plate 6, page 184). These projects have been indispensable for making it possible for us to understand and enjoy Pückler's aesthetic intentions. Only now, after years of effort to reverse decades of neglect, can we experience the close spatial interlocking of the two halves of the park along the Neisse River. The significance of the natural topography and thus the monumental gesture of Pückler's creation can be experienced again in its entirety.

On the German side, priority was given to landscaping the pleasure ground and the three flower gardens according to the zoning principle that Pückler had applied (Plate 7, page 185). At considerable expense, extensive renovations were carried out on a number of buildings, such as the Orangerie, and the New Castle was rebuilt.

Once the aesthetic connections between the two halves of the park became apparent again as a consequence of the Polish restoration measures, park officials set their hopes on rebuilding at least one of the two bridges across the Neisse that Pückler had designed. A decision was made in favor of the so-called double bridge, two bridges that connect across an island in the river. It is not possible here to recount the multitude of political and administrative hurdles we faced in trying to realize this project. It seems a miracle that the bridge was actually built across the former EU border. Construction began in 1999 and was completed in 2003, but the bridge first went into use on May 1, 2004, when Poland became a member state of the EU.

The third phase of the German-Polish collaboration in Muskau Park began in 2004, and it has seen successes that previously would not have been thought possible. In addition to the opening of the double bridge, the year 2004 also brought Muskau Park's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site. A particularly fascinating aspect of the park's restoration is the way it has coincided with political developments since 1990. The cautious aesthetic interlocking that occurred in Muskau Park when the park's spaces reopened began during the early post-Cold War thaw. The gradual expansion of the vistas and the construction of the

bridge led to the reunification of the landscape garden at the time of the EU's eastward expansion. It is therefore legitimate to see the restoration of Muskau Park as a political act of monument preservation because, first, there are political connotations in vistas and bridges across the border and, secondly, the work in the park has contributed a great deal to understanding between Germans and Poles.

The decisive question for the future is whether we will be able to complement the aesthetic and spatial reunification of the park with the establishment of a single joint German-Polish administration to maintain it. Exciting work lies ahead in Bad Muskau.