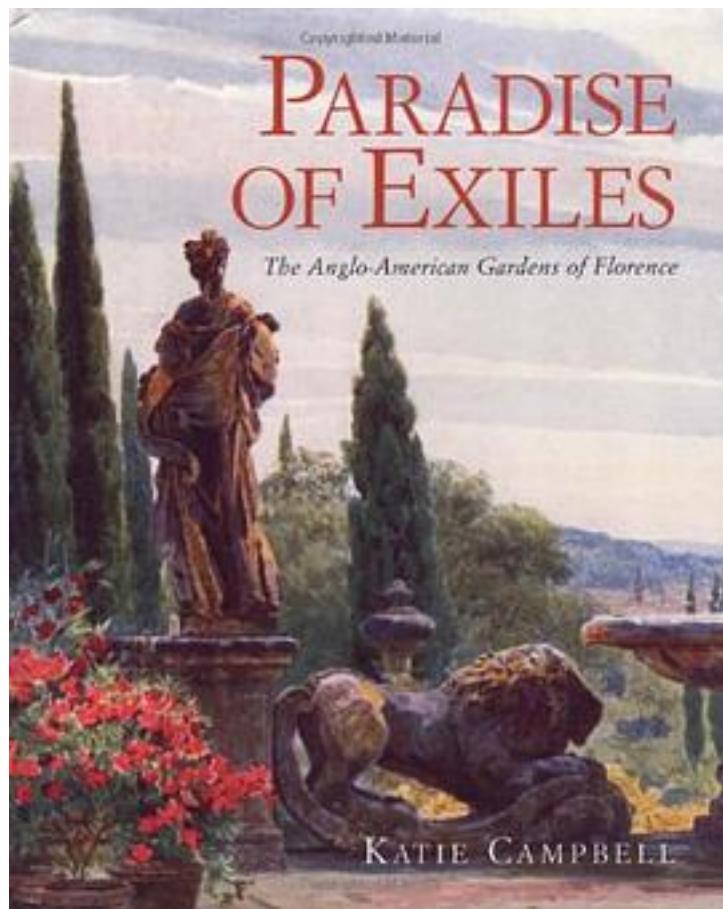


Paradise of Exiles



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In the final years of the nineteenth century the crumbling villas abandoned on the hills above Florence proved irresistible to an eccentric colony of English and American expatriates. After a brilliant introduction this entertaining book features some twenty of these characters, among them Bernard Berenson at I Tatti; the 'cad' Sir Arthur Acton

and his fabulously wealthy wife at La Pietra; the bereaved philosopher Charles Strong whose Rockefeller in-laws financed his villa retreat; the cross-dressing English essayist Violet Paget - known to the world as Vernon Lee; the beautiful Serbian Princess Jeanne Ghika who lived in seclusion with her American companion Miss Blood; the eccentric English romance writer known as Ouida; the much-married American heiress Mabel Dodge Luhan and the misanthropic aristocrat Sir George Sitwell. Art and history formed the main interests of the community with horticulture a close second. The Anglo-Florentines injected new life into Tuscany's decrepit gardens, touring the countryside for inspiration and trawling old libraries for treatises and manuals. Some preferred an anglicised version and smothered their walls with scented climbers, replaced gravel terraces with emerald lawns and stuffed box parterres with bright bedding plants and their orchards with exotic shrubs. Literary reference abounds throughout this book with Henry James leading the way, but it is the old guide books - Elgood's Italian Gardens, Latham's The Gardens of Italy and books like Georgina Graham's My Tuscan Villa which provide so much evocative material.

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