

Garden detail in the context of renovation processes

The implementation of renovation activities in a historical garden space bears, in every case, a strong mark of subjectivity, difficult to separate from the entire conservation process.¹ The designers' creativity is favoured, to a certain extent, by the state of permanent doctrinal fluidity which cannot be found in the world of, for instance, painting conservation. Commonly known academic interpretations, failing to keep up with the times or consistently ignoring the need to adapt to them in many aspects, have become a set of used phrases distorting the essence of the actions observed by the recipients.

Renovation, historical matter, reconstruction, faithfulness to the historical record, authenticity – these are probably the terms most frequently used to describe projects and phenomena that often contradict the very definition of these concepts. Under their catchy sound lies the phenomenon of the so-called retroversion, popular and very dangerous to conservation activities.² In the case of garden heritage, the roots of this phenomenon seem to lie in traditions earlier than the architecture of post-Modernism.

In the post-war Poland, conservation doctrines, including those concerning activities carried out in historical gardens and large areas of the historical landscape, were determined – to put it most generally – by the country's difficulties and the ideological specificity of that period. The then-crystallising doctrinal assumptions were formulated by specialists whose approach was closer to creation and redefinition than to the conservative pragmatism characteristic of art conservators.³

The Wilanów garden, where Gerard Ciołek entered as a novice in the field of garden conservation in 1942, was not free from retroversive measures in terms of design and renovation either.⁴ To this day, in the space administered by the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów, we find

ALEKSANDRA AND AUGUST POTOCKI'S SUITE OF RUSTIC GARDEN FURNITURE: REINTRODUCTION IN THE WILANÓW GARDEN SPACE

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1 J. Sales, *Shades of Green – My Life as the National Trust's Head of Gardens. Negotiating Change – Care, Repair, Renewal* (London, 2018), p. 58.

2 Ł. Przybylak, 'Modele działań realizacyjnych i pielęgnacyjnych wdrażanych w ogrodzie wilanowskim w odpowiedzi na współczesne wyzwania rewolucyjne ogrodów historycznych', *Ochrona Zabytków*, vol. 72, 2019, no. 2 (275), p. 94.

3 D. Sikora, 'Zarys historii ochrony i konserwacji zabytków sztuki ogrodowej w Polsce', *Ochrona Zabytków*, vol. 69, 2016, no. 1 (268), p. 112.

4 G. Ciołek, 'Ogród w Wilanowie – badania i zagadnienia konserwatorskie', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki i Kultury*, vol. 9, 1947, p. 86.



traces of abusive retroversion⁵ and of the visual impression made by the entire object being prioritised over the presence of a historically justified detail. The danger of retroversion as a design trend lies in applying full interpretative freedom to historical ornamentation and to the technology of execution with regard to both the entire space and its detail.

Artistic re-interpretations of the surroundings of historical objects, as well as the strong dissonance between the design guidelines and the actual state of the garden, are still very evident in the recent conservation projects in Poland. Even in multimillion engineering and conservation investments, the use of shop-bought urban furniture, visually dominant forms of lighting, or historic-style decorations with forms and manufacturing technologies detached from the local context can blight the authenticity of a place.⁶ While designers of the 1950s and 1960s could be reproached for over-interpreting the history of garden art in terms of historic style, which often led to the destruction of authentic relics of older times,⁷ they should be praised for the consistency of their designs, inclusive of the forms of the small-scale architectural features.⁸ In this way, these designers implemented the idea of a garden as the so-called *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where attention is paid to each element and each material contributing to the overall reception. The strength of the garden detail lies in the fact that regardless of the scale of the renovation project and its costs, it can influence the achievement of authenticity, a quality so greatly valued in the world of conservation, and crown – or ruin – the work.⁹

5 E.g. the reinterpretation of the route of the walking path system in Wilanów's Southern Landscape Park, known from the so-called *Planta Jeneralna*, dated 1790–1792.

6 The renovation of the former palace garden in Lubartów (Lubelskie Voivodeship) carried out in 2019–2020 is, unfortunately, an excellent example of the extent to which inadequately selected small architecture forms, even revivalist ones, can distort historical spatial values the renovation is intended to expose.

7 For example, the project of the renovation of the Saxon Garden (Ogród Saski) in Warsaw with variants by Alina Scholtz and Romuald Gutt from 1947–1949, kept in the collections of the Museum of Warsaw (signature MHW 8688/PI, MHW 8697/PI, MHW 8699/PI). A good illustration of subjective assessment of the value of relics of the past, as well as the creative approach in the garden heritage renovation, is Gerard Ciołek's project from 1950–1951 for the garden at the Palace of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers (today, the Presidential Palace). The projects are stored in the collection of the National Heritage Institute (Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa) as part of the so-called Ciołek Files. Ciołek's project involved the removal of original elements of furnishings and architecture of the palace garden (including the nineteenth-century orangery and camellia pavilion).

8 In the landscape of Warsaw, the Central Cultural Park is a perfect example of the project coherence implemented following the idea of 'from the general to the detailed'. The whole park complex was based on the tradition of geometric, single-axis terraced gardens. The project by Alina Scholtz, developed subsequently by Zygmunt Stepiński and Longin Majdecki, included an impressive amount of detail and garden equipment elements maintained in a historic revival style, which in this case determined the mood and perception of the place.

9 Ł. Przybylak, 'Ogrody królewskie w Wilanowie i ich rola w utrzymaniu historycznych wartości ogrodniczych współczesnej Warszawy', *Teka Komisji Urbanistyki i Architektury Oddziału PAN w Krakowie*, vol. 47, 2019, p. 314.

In addition to decorative elements, the category of garden detail, crucial for the perception of the authenticity of a garden space, contains a wide array of the small-scale garden architecture, which also includes outdoor furniture. In the hierarchy of the value of museum exhibits formulated by art historians and curators, garden furniture does not rank high on collection lists, often lying deposited in the deepest recesses of storage spaces. Rarely displayed in permanent or temporary exhibitions, garden furniture either provides an unnamed background for other exhibits or is only a carrier of a decorative narrative that fits into the exhibition scenario.

The value of garden furniture as a work of applied art is considered negligible mostly because it was mass produced and made of low-quality materials.¹⁰ This applies primarily to nineteenth-century design, the universality of which still influences the contemporary catalogue offer of small-scale architecture and garden furniture. The great popularity of standard designs for historical-garden and urban-space architecture and furniture, narrowed down by contemporary producers, has become a scourge of today's projects for the conservation and renovation of historical greenery. It should also be emphasised that the unduly harsh assessment of the value of garden design, and the marginalisation of its role when it comes to financial outlay, obscure the centuries-old artistic and technical factors of humankind's civilisational achievements as recorded in these objects.

Archaeological research carried out on the premises of the palace and garden complex at Wilanów, together with enquiry into the iconographic archives, the resources of which are constantly being expanded, made it possible to embark on the discussion of issues of garden renovation connected with the recreation and display of garden detail.¹¹ The project of returning the surroundings of the palace to their original Baroque style, boldly considered by Gerard Ciołek as early as the 1950s, eclipsed the interest in the nineteenth-century garden legacy of the Wilanów residence resulting from the Potocki family's patronage.¹² For over ten years, however, the staff of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów has pursued a nineteenth century-oriented directions in research and design. Among the numerous successes in this field, the reconstruction of the Charlottenburg eagle from

10 A. Feliks, 'Meble ogrodowe – obiekty muzealne', in: *Popołudnie w ogrodzie – wystawa zabytkowych mebli plenerowych*, ed. M. Buchholz-Todorska (Sopot, 2005), p. 21.

11 A. Golembnik, 'Pałac i ogrody w Wilanowie – badania archeologiczne Krajowego Ośrodka Badań i Dokumentacji Zabytków w sezonie 2003', *Monument – Studia i Materiały Krajowego Ośrodka Badań i Dokumentacji Zabytków*, vol. 1, 2004, pp. 135–60. The Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów conducts a social action 'Once upon a Time at Wilanów', encouraging people to provide copies of photographs taken on the premises of the Wilanów palace and park complex.

12 Ł. Przybylak, 'Dekoracyjne formy XIX-wiecznych kompozycji roślinnych w procesie rewaloryzacji założenia pałacowo-ogrodowego w Wilanowie', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 24, 2017, p. 295.

the Northern Landscape Park, the hanging garden vases, and the ceramic tiles from the flower-bed borders is noteworthy, as are works on the reconstruction of the historical rustic garden furniture.¹³

The European artistic and technological context of rustic garden furniture vis-à-vis the Wilanów environment

The history of rustic garden furniture deserves an in-depth study and a separate presentation. However, the following outline is necessary for a fuller understanding of the value that reconstructed garden furniture adds to the perception of the surroundings of the Wilanów palace. The beginnings of the trend which today is associated with chairs and benches made of natural tree branches or materials resembling hardened plant shoots, must be linked with Italian Renaissance gardens. Their artificial grottoes full of natural curiosities: semi-precious stones, animal bones, antlers, shells, and corals, became a pliable material in the hands of artists. In the seventeenth century, such objects were used for forming sinister mascarons, but also free-standing spatial forms, such as candelabra or furniture. Other places to search for the origins of deliberate rusticity in garden space arrangements are the Villa Borghese in Rome or the Villa Gamberaia near Florence.¹⁴ The latter includes the so-called rustic office (*il gabinetto rustico*), which is a profusely decorated garden-architectural interior. Its rusticity is based on a large amount of volcanic tuff, used as cladding on retaining walls, and on small-scale garden architecture. Oversized shells, plants, marine organisms, as well as anatomical parts of other animals, also inspired the fancy shapes of the European Rococo ornamental art. As the eighteenth-century art evolved, it is the characteristic decorative motif of *rocaille* that became the dominant theme in the construction of large-scale utility objects, including outdoor ones.¹⁵ That peculiar transfer of enlarged natural forms: from dark grottoes and palace interiors full of Rococo splendour into the space of gardens and parks, seems to be best illustrated by the ‘shell seat’ created by the British writer Horace Walpole (1717–1797). In 1756, on the premises of his estate at Strawberry Hill, he erected a garden bench with a wide and high backrest in the form of a large scallop shell (Fig. 1). Slightly smaller seats in the form of seashells featured in garden furniture appeared in the third edition of Thomas Chippendale’s catalogue *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director* from 1762.¹⁶

13 Ibid., pp. 297–98.

14 M. Siewniak, A. Mitkowska, *Tezaurus sztuki ogrodowej* (Warszawa, 1998), p. 226.

15 W. Szolginia, *Ilustrowana encyklopedia dla wszystkich – architektura i budownictwo* (Warszawa, 1991), p. 335.

16 J. Gloag, *A Short Dictionary of Furniture* (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 265; T. Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director* (London, 1762), plate XXIV.

Suites of this type gained great popularity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, becoming a mandatory element of the furnishings of the residences of the time. They most often decorated garden caves and pavilions, or the *sala terrena* halls in palaces, which were frequently used on hot summer days. A suite commonly called the grotto furniture can also be found in the collection of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów.¹⁷ Although furniture shaped like seashells

17 A. Feliks, 'Meble grotowe – niepraktyczne a piękne hybrydy', in: *Popołudnie w ogrodzie*, pp. 75–76.



Fig. 1

Sketch of Horace Walpole's shell armchair at Strawberry Hill House



Fig. 2

Sketch of a rustic armchair

and animals definitely attracts attention, it failed to become as popular in garden art as pieces modelled on natural tree branches. This paradox was influenced by many factors, the most important of which seems to be the concept of the picturesque, which determined the development of garden art in Europe from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth century. It is assumed that the wider audience saw a seat made of intertwined branches and roots for the first time in the catalogue *New Book of Chinese Designs* published in 1755 (Fig. 2).¹⁸ Yet this was far from being a publishing premiere of the rustic style as an artistic means of decorating a residence. The style debuted in 1752 in the publication *A New Book of Ornaments* by Matthias Lock and Henry Copland.¹⁹ However, it would be futile to look for an image of rustic furniture in that work. Outdoor furniture appeared relatively late among the architectural and garden decorations stylised as rural decoration, which seems only to confirm the frequent rule of progress ‘from the general to the detailed’. Its makers strove to obtain a visual impression that a given piece was a work of nature, but its production was not the easiest. Numerous subsequent publications and templates for decorating the surroundings of residences give the impression that pictorial representations of garden architecture in rustic style followed their own rules, completely disregarding material and purely technical limitations. As a result, most of these pieces remained but utopian artistic visions. Not only furniture, but also gazebos, pavilions, and even bridges in a rustic guise were to be, on the one hand, an alternative to a wide range of garden buildings in the popular Gothic and oriental style, and on the other – their contrasting complement. The essence of that style of garden art was a cosmopolitan world placed in a natural landscape, a chance for a journey through time and space, defined through artistic creations of buildings and garden equipment. Walking from an ancient temple to an oriental gazebo, from there to see a European antique; does this not sound like the path, well known to the visitors and employees of the Wilanów museum, from the portico of the eastern gable of the Orangery through the Chinese Gazebo to the Roman Bridge on the northern dyke? Stanisław Kostka Potocki and his heirs knew exactly what artefacts they needed to use and where to place them to create a classic work of nineteenth-century garden art. Because of the aforementioned technical limitations, imposed by the natural construction material with its short lifespan, rustic furniture and garden equipment made of natural branches and roots was a decorative touch rather than a frequent detail in the space of gardens and landscape parks.

18 M. Darly, G. Edwards, *A New Book of Chinese Designs Calculated to Improve the Present Taste etc.* (London, 1754), p. 86. See also M. Heckscher, ‘Eighteenth-century rustic furniture designs’, *Furniture History*, vol. 11, 1975, p. 59.

19 M. Lock, H. Copland, *A New Book of Ornaments with Twelve Leaves* (London, 1752).

However, the fascination with naturalism in creating elements of garden architecture did not submit to technological limitations; this fact was also influenced by the still popular ‘landscape’ style in garden art, which was then undergoing an evolution. As a result, despite the technological achievements of nineteenth-century industry, the object of desire was natural, imperfect and non-durable rustic garden furniture. Obviously, an important factor in the popularity of natural furniture was the comfort of use, even though dishonest craftsmen often reduced it. Here is what James Shirley Hibberd, the most famous British gardening publicist of the Victorian era, wrote about it in 1870:

Rustic furniture is often poorly made, and of the worst materials. In purchasing expensive materials of this class it is necessary to guard against obtaining timber in which dry rot has commenced, though as to ‘guarding against’ this contingency is no easy matter. Until within the past ten years or so, manufacturers in the eastern part of London made use of cheap oak timber, the produce for the most part of the pollard oaks of Epping Forest. This soon began to decay within by dry rot, which seldom gave any outward sign, so that a rustic structure in which the process had long been active, would preserve its respectable appearance until the final collapse came, when it would subside into a wreck, and, to the owner’s surprise, be found to have long before consisted of only an outer shell of varnish and paint, and a mass of mere dust within. Those portions of the forest from which the treacherous timber was obtained are now enclosed and cultivated; but in many another district a similarly bad material may be in use to the injury of purchasers and the discouragement of taste in gardening.²⁰

The dynamic development of the metallurgical industry fuelled by the period of the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) became the beginning of the future industrial and technological revolution, the direct result of which was also the expansion of metal into garden design. Trends and patterns in the production of decorations and garden furniture made of metal radiated around the world from Germany, Great Britain, the United States and France. The origins of the first garden furniture designed to be made of metal are associated with the work of the Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel.²¹ The form of this furniture seems to contradict popular ideas about the rustic style, as it is based on Classicist patterns. As a total creator, Schinkel, while designing the New Pavilion (*Neuer Pavillon*), built in the years 1824–1825 in the garden at the Charlottenburg Palace (Berlin, Germany), produced a set of sketches for cast-iron garden furniture to go with the building (Fig. 3). The designer treated the furniture frame as a fixed set for variable backrest ornamentation, which allowed for the personalisation of the objects depending on the location for which they were intended. The classical-style outdoor chairs of

20 S. Hibberd, *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste* (London, 1870), pp. 395–96.

21 A. Feliks, ‘Meble metalowe – tanie, trwałe meble rewolucji przemysłowej’, in: *Popołudnie w ogrodzie*, p. 47.



Fig. 3

Iron garden chair designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, c. 1825

his design have become a milestone for garden utility design in metal. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are present in the Vitra Design Museum in Germany alongside such classics as the iconic Bauhaus 'B3' chair designed by Marcel Breuer.²² Despite the mass production technology used by the royal foundries, Schinkel's garden furniture from Charlottenburg and other royal residences located in the Potsdam area were practically unavailable to a wider group of buyers.²³

The economy of the British Isles and its metallurgical industry was revived by the British-American conflict of 1812–1815. It was the Victorian United Kingdom at the height of its colonial power that became the world's technological tycoon in almost every industry and field of life. An event that unleashed the British economic potential on a global scale was the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in 1851. It became crucial also to the history of European garden art and the horticultural industry of the mid-nineteenth century, influencing their development until the early twentieth century. The exhibition brought ultimate fame to British garden mowers – patented by Edwin Badding in 1830 – and modular iron structures for the construction of hot- and greenhouses.²⁴ The abolition of glass tax in the United Kingdom by Queen Victoria in 1845, in turn, favoured the development of the glass industry.²⁵ Also during the following world exhibition, in 1862, commentators noticed the charm of garden benches decorated with casts of fern, olive and passion vine foliage.²⁶

However, in this era of pan-European delight at the benefits of mass iron production and gardening novelties coming from the British Isles, it still is worth bearing in mind what was happening in other parts of the continent. In nineteenth-century France, cement became extremely popular. Patenting reinforced concrete in 1848 opened endless possibilities of creating rustic structures that resembled thick tree branches. Thanks to the technical achievements patented by Joseph-Louis Lambot, a craft called *rusticage*, which produced the *faux-bois*, i.e. simulated wood, reached the peak of its popularity. That, along with the fashion for the *gardenesque* current, one of the variations of the

22 VITRA Design Museum Schinkel Garden Chair, inv. no. MGE-1019-1, MGE-1079. See G. Watkinson, *Bauhaus XX–XXI – dziesięć lat wcięż żywe*, trans. from German J. Czudec, from English M. Myszkiewicz, Kraków 2009, p. 24, original title: *Bauhaus twenty-21. An Ongoing Legacy / Bauhaus zwanzig-21. Ideen für ein neues Jahrhundert* (Basel, 2009).

23 Königlich Preußische Eisengießerei Sayner Hütte, Sayn, Preußen.

24 C. Ikin, *The Victorian Garden* (Oxford, 2012), p. 24.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

26 J.B. Waring, *Masterpieces of Industrial Art & Sculpture at the International Exhibition, 1862* (London, 1863), vol. 1, p. 165.



Fig. 4

View of one of the artificial cascades in the Parc des Buttes Chaumont in a 1927 photograph

English style besides its picturesque and rustic versions,²⁷ was accompanied by the *rocaillage* artisanal specialisation which had already been known in the Renaissance and Baroque era. In its nineteenth-century version, *rocaillage* consisted primarily in creating artificial rocks and garden rockeries from concrete. French private and public gardens teemed with rustic furniture and artificial grottoes made of reinforced concrete. The best-known monument praising this and other engineering achievements of the nineteenth-century Europe is the Parc des Buttes Chaumont (Fig. 4). Opened in 1867 for the world exhibition in Paris, it abounds in top-class examples of this nature-imitating craftsmanship. The French people's fondness for *rusticage* furniture is still clear today, which can be seen by visiting events like the famous Journées des Plantes gardening fair which has been organised for several years in the Chantilly palace garden. In Italy, beside wire and cast-iron furniture, garden suites made of terracotta were very much in style. Stools and tables gained sophisticated rustic forms, such as felled tree trunks, bags of flour, hay sheaves, honey barrels, and even forest mushrooms or enlarged daisies. The small size of such objects, along with appropriate craftsmanship, allowed to create the most sophisticated ceramic models and shapes (Fig. 5).

Despite the availability of so many materials for creating rustic furniture, it was the metal and the foundry industry that opened a new chapter

²⁷ J.C. Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener, and Villa Companion* (London, 1838), p. 160.



Fig. 5

Ceramic stools in the rustic part of the Villa Garzoni garden known as the 'Avenue of the Poor' (2018)

in its history. After many years of struggle with technological difficulties in creating rustic garden structures, there began an era of objects mass-produced for both private and public use. Nearly a hundred years after the publication of the first images of rustic furniture and structures, it became possible to produce them in an unlimited number and scale, in addition to the repeatability of shape and ornament unseen in the natural world. However, natural branches and tree roots were still frequently used to prepare foundry forms.²⁸ This further increased the visual authenticity of the manufactured objects. It is precisely a piece of furniture in the form of entwined tree sprigs that is considered the earliest example of rustic garden furniture which, around 1840, went into mass production and thus colonised European and American gardens.²⁹ Bench supports in the shape of intertwined vine shoots, serpentine of lignified sprigs tied with a rope as supports for garden table tops, gnarled hoops marking the edges of lawns and flowerbeds are but a small part of the metal nature-inspired forms found in the gardens of the time.³⁰

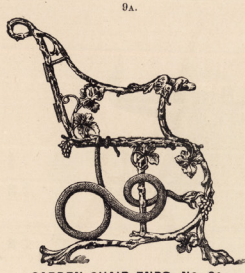
The foundry technology, combined with the influence of the Arts & Crafts movement, raised the rustic trend to a whole new level of aesthetics. Fragile, delicate plants such as grapevine, lily of the valley, water lily, ferns, blackberry shoots or nasturtiums made of cast iron became the building material of furniture and garden decorations. Captured in full bloom and in fancy shapes, they often accompanied the already

28 A. Feliks, 'Meble rustykalne – piękno natury', in: *Popołudnie w ogrodzie*, p. 66.

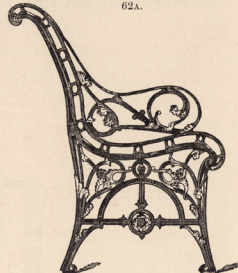
29 E.M. Snyder, 'Victory over nature: Victorian cast-iron seating furniture', *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 20, 1985, no. 4, p. 230.

30 D. Hennebo, *Gartendenkmalpflege – Grundlagen der Erhaltung historischer Gärten und Grünanlagen* (Stuttgart, 1985), p. 252.

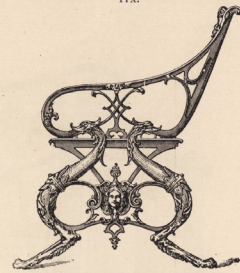
GARDEN SEAT ENDS.



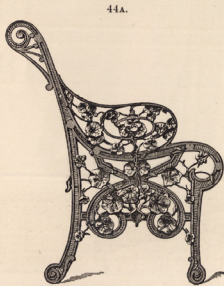
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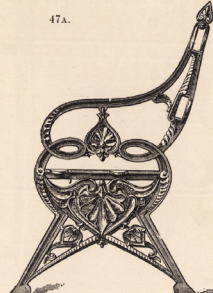
GARDEN CHAIR ENDS, No. 62A.
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Drilled, fitted with screws and painted ... 15/- "



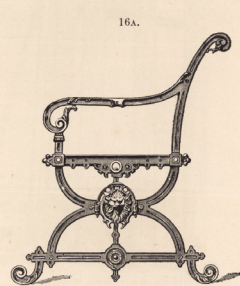
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mentioned tree sprigs and animal motifs, creating extremely sophisticated forms. The downright Darwinian evolution that can be observed in the development of the forms of cast-iron garden furniture was, to a certain extent, a result of the contemporary fascination with the material used and the desire to learn about its artistic potential.³¹ One example of an intriguing hybrid resulting from the evolution of forms and shapes is the model of a bench produced at the Coalbrookdale factory in England. Known under catalogue number 9A (and registered at the patent office on 6 April 1844), it is one of the two oldest models patented by perhaps the most famous British metal foundry.³² At two world exhibitions in London, in 1851 and 1862, the factory obtained the award 'for excellence in workmanship and artistic design of the items exhibited'³³ (Fig. 6). The 9A garden bench showed a lignified grapevine (*Vitis L.*) sprig with single leaves and clusters of grapes, bent in an arch. A hybrid

Fig. 6

Card from Coalbrookdale
Foundry catalogue

³¹ Snyder, *Victory over nature*, p. 229.

³² *The Coalbrookdale illustrated spring catalogue: comprising a selection of garden seats, garden chairs, garden rolls, garden fountains, garden edging, vases and pedestals, flower stands, park seats, tables, hand glass frames, garden seat ends* (Coalbrookdale, 1888), p. 16.

³³ Waring, *Masterpieces*, p. 165.



Fig. 7

A group of journalists relaxing in the Flower Garden at the Wilanów Palace in April 1932

beast, part serpent and part bird of prey, hung on the sprig, grasping one of the clusters with its beak. The armrest finial was shaped into the head of a hunting dog. The seat and the backrest of the bench were made of boards with a flattened crescent profile. The stability of the structure was enhanced by supports stemming out from the inner sides of the cast-iron sides of the bench and connecting in the central part of the seat. The seat supports, arranged in the shape of the letter A, also had an element to stabilise the top part of the wooden backrest. The distinctive combination of forms gave the model a colloquial name of a ‘Serpent and Grape’ (or ‘Dog and Serpent’) bench. It was the factory’s flagship model, produced until the early twentieth century.

In the nineteenth-century Warsaw, the famous bench model was documented not only at Wilanów, but also in the Royal Baths (Łazienki) and Belvedere (Belweder) parks, where it was brought by the tsarist administration of palaces and gardens.³⁴ Thanks to the sophisticated design, such benches could be found in the ceremonial areas of those residences. But after nearly 150 years of firing up the ambitions of craftsmen and the desires of consumers, rustic outdoor furniture, along with the whole trend in design and garden art, became *passé* in the space of private gardens and urban greenery. That was sealed by the return of regular style

34 Ł. Przybylak, *Analiza przekształceń przestrzeni dziedzica i tarasu wschodniego przy Belwederze w Warszawie. Dokumentacja konserwatorska*, Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, typescript (Warszawa, 2021).



Fig. 8

View of the entrance to the northern wing of the Wilanów Palace

in garden art.³⁵ Of course, as often happens, the practice did not keep up with the theory of the trend, and e.g. the ‘Serpent and Grape’ bench was still used by Marshal Józef Piłsudski in the Belvedere, and by Beata and Adam Branicki at Wilanów, in the 1930s³⁶ (Fig. 7).

Although in the west of Europe the fashion for garden rusticity was by then passing, guides recommending the introduction of rustic details as a way to decorate the surroundings of a rural estate were still issued on the Polish publishing market as late as 1917.³⁷ The *faux-bois* model of a cast iron bench was the most popular one in the garden space of the Wilanów Palace. Such benches stood in the upper garden by the palace and in the palace courtyard which served, from 1805, as a reception place offering guests a rest on its benches, in the area of the forecourt and the cour d’honneur. Heavily damaged specimens of these objects found during excavations are now stored in the Pavilion of Sculptures of the Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów. Their surviving elements allow us to identify them in the archival iconography. These benches are recognisable in photographs taken in the palace courtyard

35 H. Muthesius, *Das Englische Haus: Entwicklung, Bedingungen, Anlage, Aufbau, Einrichtung und Innenraum* (Berlin, 1907), p. 9.

36 Ł. Przybylak, *Warszawska rezydencja Prezydenta RP – Belweder – kierunek rewalizacji zieleni urządzonej w przestrzeni dziedzica oraz tarasu wschodniego. Brief konserwatorski*, Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, typescript (Warszawa, 2022).

37 K. Iwanicki, *Budownictwo wiejskie – poradnik przy wznoszeniu zabudowań na wsi* (Warszawa–Kijów, 1917), pp. 117, 120, 122.



Fig. 9

A set of rustic wooden furniture photographed in 1864 in front of a ceramic column with an eagle in the northern landscape park of the Wilanów Palace

(near the main body and wings of the building) and around the central fountain in the upper garden. The current state of research makes it difficult to verify the exact origin of each bench form, but it is highly likely that the foundry workshop was a national one (Fig. 8).

The identified rustic cast-iron furniture used in private areas and in the spaces available to the public was complemented by a suite made from natural materials. A 1864 photograph documents the rustic scenery of the northern landscape park. It shows a ceramic column with an eagle from Ernst March's legendary manufactory in Charlottenburg near Berlin (Fig. 9). This ceramic decoration was one of many that August Potocki brought to the palace garden at Wilanów in the years 1843–1858.³⁸ The secondary location of the column³⁹ as a programmatic, independent element of the spatial composition of the northern park allowed Potocki to provide it with additional elements, which was dictated, as it seems, by practical reasons.⁴⁰ The Charlottenburg decoration – situated at the end of the extension of one of the main alleys of the upper Baroque garden – stood almost halfway along the road leading from the palace to the Chinese Gazebo. As a programmatic element of the park's spatial composition, the column served as an eye-catcher: it was intended to attract the eye and encourage a person strolling around the park to discover its farther corners.⁴¹ The choice of this location for the column was consistent with the principles of landscape park compositions of the satellite/chain type, in which subsequent sections and elements of the arrangement are discovered as the visitor moves around the area.⁴² From here, they could see both the picturesque corner of the former hospital and the remote Chinese Gazebo which might be the aim of further wandering. The rustic garden furniture suite, photographed in 1864, faces south, towards the palace.⁴³ Thus pictured, the leisure suite was a vantage point

38 M. Zajac, 'Rzeźby ogrodowe z fabryk Feilnera i Marcha w kolekcji Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie – przyczynek do opracowania', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 26, 2019, p. 256.

39 Originally, the column crowned with an eagle was intended to be the central point of a small square, according to a design by Henryk Marconi from 1857 (see drawing inv. no. 570.PL_1_414_576-7_0010, Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów), placed in the extension of the longitudinal symmetry axis of the Wilanów Orangery. The square was to be situated between the edge of the slope located east of the Orangery and the columned portico of the Orangery's eastern gable.

40 Its original location was planned to be far from the northern landscape park. Extant drawings by Marconi suggest that the column was originally to stand in the axis of the columned portico of the eastern entrance to the Orangery and dominate the never constructed ceremonial stairs descending from an earthen slope formed in the second half of the eighteenth century.

41 M. Siewniak, A. Mitkowska, *Tezaurus sztuki ogrodowej* (Warszawa, 1998), p. 75.

42 Przybylak, 'Modele działań realizacyjnych', p. 117.

43 National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. DI36029, 1864, photo by Piotr Ligier.

overlooking the distant space, up to the upper garden at the palace and the neo-Gothic pump station at the Wilanów Lake and the pseudo-antique eastern gable of the Orangery. The idyllic scenery perpetuated in a frame was complemented by a wooden hunting fence, visible in the background. The fence separated a vast park clearing extending towards the village of Wilanów from the rest of the park. It suggests that in this area a stroller could encounter the living staffage, namely sheep. It is not difficult to imagine the picturesque quality of the scene: a pseudo-Classical column with an eagle contrasting with the rough, well-nigh archaic appearance of the garden furniture, with the quasi-oriental architecture in the form of the Chinese Gazebo – and probably sheep grazing nearby – visible in the distance. This is another proof of the high level of craftsmanship and artistic awareness of the nineteenth-century owners and creators of the Wilanów residence. Only a detailed study of its accounting documentation can answer the question about the exact period in which the suite appeared in Wilanów's garden space. A suggestion as to the time is also provided by one of the most popular gardening works of the early nineteenth century in Poland: *O przyozdobieniu siedlisk wiejskich – rzecz zastosowana do Polski* by Franciszek Ksawery Giżycki, published in 1829 and dealing with the decoration of, as the author carefully stated, 'village dwellings – as applied to Poland'. While it contains illustrations showing rustic garden gates and small bridges, there is no garden furniture there.⁴⁴

Other views of the northern landscape park dated to the similar period give an indication as to other elements of small-scale garden architecture made of wood and maintained in a rustic spirit.⁴⁵ The Potocki family's floating bath-house, moored near the neo-Gothic pump station, was separated from the park area available to museum visitors with a fence made of stumps of white birch (*Betula pendula*) (Fig. 10). Due to its softness and its characteristic bark, birch timber was very often used not only for fences, but also for garden furniture or railings of small bridges.

An overview of the history of design trends regarding rustic outdoor furniture allows us to see its multifaceted value. The end of the popularity of this furniture came with changes in garden art that occurred in the early twentieth century⁴⁶ along with socio-cultural changes following the First World War: above all, the consumers' desire for ergonomics and usable durability. The high popularity of garden furniture made of synthetic materials, observable from the mid-twentieth century onwards, also

44 F.K. Giżycki, *O przyozdobieniu siedlisk wiejskich – rzecz zastosowana do Polski* (Warszawa, 1829), vol. 3, Fig. 76, p. 81.

45 National Museum in Warsaw, *View of the Pump House on Wilanów Lake from the north*, inv. no. DI35979, 1864, photo by Piotr Ligier; and *View of the Pump House on Wilanów Lake and the Bath from the east*, inv. no. DI35993, photo by Piotr Ligier.

46 Muthesius, *Das Englische Haus*, p. 9.

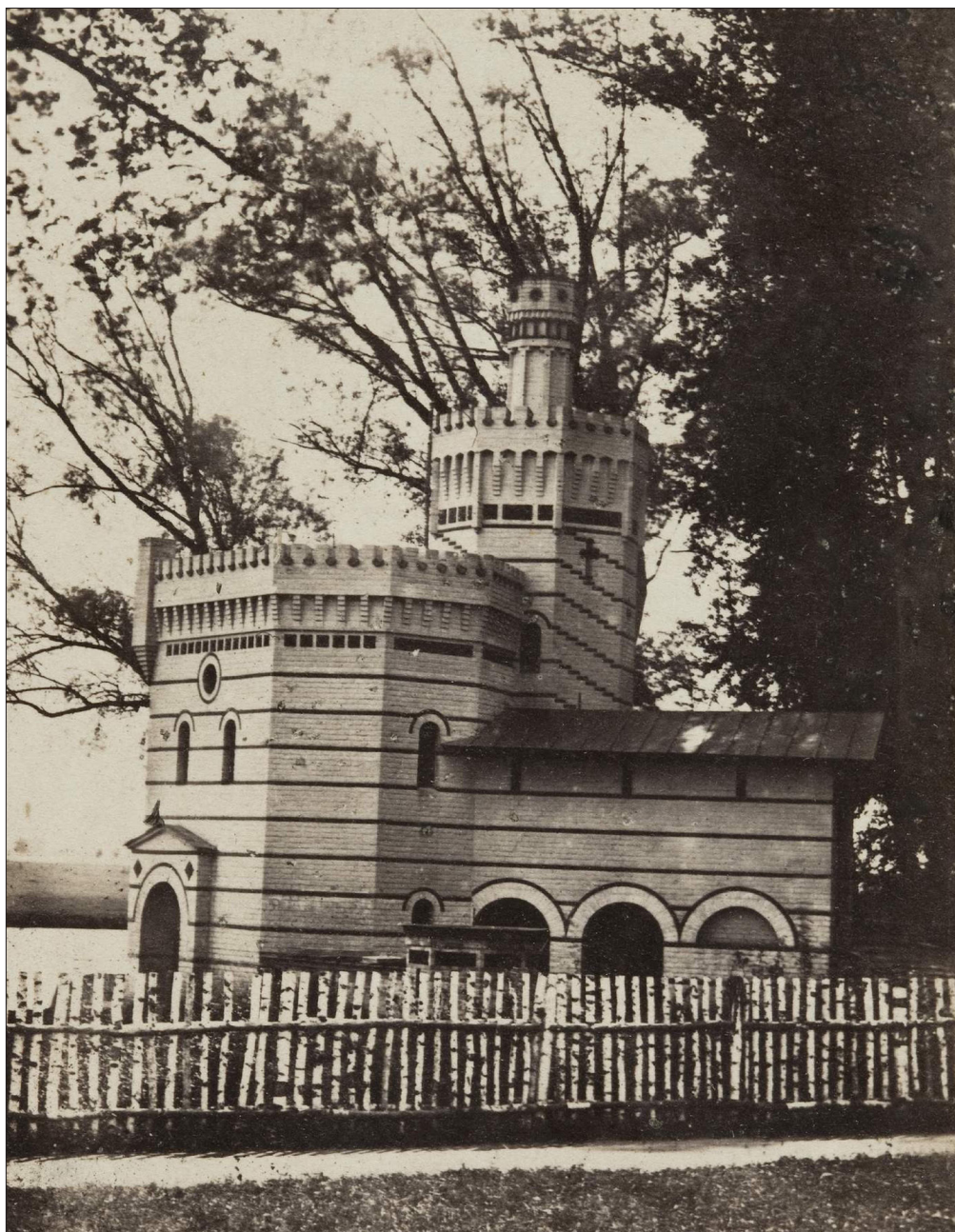


Fig. 10

View from the north of the neo-Gothic pump house on Wilanów Lake (1864)

contributed to the depreciation of the aesthetic values of its rustic predecessor. In the popular imagination, it was reduced to clumpy, roughly carved benches or sets accompanying roadside inns and beer gardens. Considering this deplorable status of garden furniture, the complete obliteration of its cultural and artistic value, and the detrimental marginalisation of its role in conservation processes, the initiatives taken by the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów are extremely reassuring.

Rustic garden furniture in the contemporary revitalisation of the Wilanów garden

The Wilanów garden, as the piece of garden art in Poland that has been undergoing revitalisation processes for the longest time, has significant, and often pioneering, achievements in the field of the reconstruction of garden detail. In the years 2020–2021, after several years of preparations related primarily to the crisis in the availability of workforce skilled in traditional crafts, the efforts of the management of the Museum's Gardening Department resulted in the reconstruction of Aleksandra and August Potocki's suite of rustic garden furniture dating from the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The suite, consisting of a table, two armchairs with armrests and a bench with a backrest, is already the third conservation project in the history of the renovation of the Wilanów garden to be aimed at returning its nineteenth-century utility equipment to its grounds. The first project of this kind was the reconstruction of the rustic cast iron bench from the Coalbrookdale foundry, conducted from 2009 to 2011. Thanks to the work undertaken at that time, historical garden furniture, which had been located in the Belvedere and Royal Baths parks in the nineteenth century, returned to the Wilanów and Warsaw spaces.⁴⁸ Reconstructed on the basis of damaged items found in the palace garden during archaeological research and an enquiry into the archives, they are currently one of the most characteristic elements of the equipment of the Wilanów garden, very much appreciated by the public. Historically documented points of exposition of a specific type of furniture are concentrated primarily around the area of the former Flower Garden (now known as the Rose Garden/Southern Garden), the southern pergola of the palace and the surroundings of the pump station at the Wilanów Lake. This furniture comes in two reconstructed colour variants: white and black, with seats of natural wood. In the future, it may be necessary to add elements stabilising the pieces. During the frequent rearrangements of garden furniture (which are needed for out-

47 Head of the Gardening Department in 2015–2021: Łukasz Przybylak; deputy head 2015–2021: Kamila Domańska (head since August 2021). See Przybylak, 'Modele działań realizacyjnych', p. 117.

48 Przybylak, *Warszawska rezydencja Prezydenta RP*.

door events in the palace garden), the lack of seat and backrest supports causes the fasteners of wooden elements to loosen, thus weakening the entire structure. In addition, the seat occasionally gets deformed under the weight of the person sitting on the bench.

The project aimed at the reconstruction of Aleksandra and August Potocki's rustic garden furniture suite commenced as a result of the implementation of a satellite model of the palace garden renovation in 2015.⁴⁹ In keeping with the original classification of garden conservation activities, the nineteenth-century column with the Charlottenburg eagle was adopted as one of the places of commencement of the renovation works. In almost every subsequent season, starting from 2016, activities shaping the plant cover and decorative elements complementing it were carried out around the ceramic column.⁵⁰ In 2018, after a detailed identification of the objects illustrated in the 1864 photograph,⁵¹ the reconstruction of the suite was added to the list of activities necessary in the respective area. The hardest part was finding a craftsman capable of producing the historical objects. The fortunate setting of the frame of the archival photograph allowed to identify the overall dimensions of two seats, a bench, and a table, making use the plinth of the ceramic column from Charlottenburg as a reference point.

In mid-2021, after a long search, the arborist and carpenter Mr. Andrzej Łukasik was commissioned with the making of the rustic furniture.⁵² For obvious reasons, the process of making the pieces cannot be referred to as their reconstruction, which is determined by the uniqueness of structural elements. The goal was, however, the most faithful visual rendering of the furniture using the largest possible size of structural elements, with structural joints being completely masked, and the appropriate protection of the furniture against the effects of weather. The subject of the commission was to recreate two chairs with armrests with a solid wooden seat (approx. height: backrest 90 cm, seat 57 × 43 cm, seat height approx. 47 cm), a bench with backrest and armrests (approx. backrest height 90 cm, seat 218 × 43 cm) and a rectangular table (approx. 170 × 70 cm, tabletop height 75 cm). A mixture of timbers was used to make the furniture, as it proved difficult to assemble parts from one tree species. The horizontal elements of the furniture and the tabletop were made of walnut (*Juglans regia*). The seats and benches were made of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). Other elements, such as chair legs, armrests and backrests, were made of the over-ground parts and roots of juniper

49 Przybylak, 'Modele działań realizacyjnych', p. 101.

50 Przybylak, 'Dekoracyjne formy XIX-wiecznych kompozycji', pp. 295–301.

51 National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. DI36029, 1864, photo by Piotr Ligier.

52 Mr. Andrzej Łukasik is a long-time employee of the NATUROVITA arborist company which performs the full range of cleaning, sanitary, and tree-care works for the Wilanów garden.



Fig. 11

Reconstructed wooden rustic table after initial assembling of the main element of the base and tops (2021)

(*Juniperus sp.*). The impressive table base consists of a single juniper rootstock (Fig. 11). All structural parts were de-barked, but it was deliberately done a little roughly. During the whole process, it was important that the restored furniture did not look like new. After de-barking and sanding, the surface of all elements was superficially scorched, which added the desired texture and patina, in addition to extending the durability of the material. In the process of creating the furniture, no metal elements were used to connect individual parts of branches and roots, which is an additional value and testifies to high craftsmanship. The structural elements were joined with wooden pegs; in the entire suite, only five carpentry screws were used: they secure the tabletop. The caps of these screws were covered with wooden overlays that made them completely invisible. After assembly, all the surfaces were covered with colourless oil. In the autumn of 2021, the suite was transported to the Wilanów museum, and in the spring of the following year, after re-oiling and spot-burning, it was placed in a historically documented location. Despite the protection against factors harmful to wood, the furniture will be treated as a seasonal object, exhibited in the garden in the period from late spring to early autumn (Fig. 12).

The result, thanks to Mr. Andrzej Łukasik's craftsmanship and the ongoing verification of the furniture creation process, resulted in another pioneering conservation project in Poland, which is among the rarer endeavours of this kind in Europe. The furniture placed in the garden will give visitors a hint of the impressions that accompanied a stroll in a nineteenth-century park. This is a unique opportunity to experience the feeling of sitting on rustic garden furniture of the era. With each passing year, the surroundings of the Wilanów column with the eagle more strongly evoke the mood of a nineteenth-century park. However, it



Fig. 12

Reconstructed set of wooden rustic garden furniture by Aleksandra and August Potocki (2022)

is impossible to fully reproduce the visual impressions of the Wilanów park as it had been the nineteenth century: if not for other reasons, due to the sanitary facilities built nearby in the 1950s. With reference to the issue of retroversion and authenticity of the place raised in the introduction, it will be necessary to correct the ground drawing of the square in this case. During the renovation works in 2009–2011, it received (similarly to the intersection of the walking alleys at the Pump Station building) a decoration of granite cubes framed in flat steel bars, which is difficult to justify.

It remains to be hoped that the remaking of the wooden rustic furniture suite once owned by August and Aleksandra Potocki will give an impulse the recreation of the last historically documented model of the rustic cast iron bench from Wilanów, the remains of which can be seen in the Sculpture Pavilion. In-depth research on the development of Polish metallurgical design in the field of production of garden furniture in the *rusticage* taste will also be interesting, especially in the context of the assortment of the Hrabia L.C. Broel-Plater steel factory in Bliżyn and the Mechanical Plant and Cast Iron Foundry in Białogon. Garden furniture in museum collections will also, hopefully, receive the attention of which it is worthy; in 2005, this was achieved by the National Museum in Warsaw, the Castle Museum in Łańcut, and the Sopot Museum. The exhibition ‘Popołudnie w ogrodzie’ [An afternoon in the garden] organised at that time according to a script by Anna Feliks from the National Museum in Warsaw, accompanied by the exhibition catalogue,⁵³ as well as an earlier exhibition entitled ‘Ogród – Forma, symbol, marzenie’ [A garden: the form, the symbol, the dream] are an invaluable source of inspiration on how to restore the universal recognition of the cultural and artistic value of gardens and their equipment; an inspiration from which other museum institutions, including the Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów, now benefit.⁵⁴

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