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Dear Baron Francis Bonaert,

I write to thank you very much for receiving us at Freyð before Easter and to apologise for our unforgivable error of arriving late and so wasting your time. We were sad not to meet your wife of the charming letters about Ireland but do hope that she recovers quickly and well. (Note : Gilda, suffering of leukaemia, was treated in an hospital, and died in 1987 of this illness)  
Please give her my best wishes.

I am very interested by the logic and subtlety of design in the garden at Freyð – the long horizontal lines echoing the lines of the river and allowing the surrounding cliffs to form the enclosing walls of the garden.  
It was interesting, also, to see its lines prolonged into the countryside through the avenues of trees, front and back.

The logic of the lower garden with its tripartite division of the design along both axes – in the long axis the division into  
a) the parterre, b) the bosquet of hedges on piloti and c) the orange garden, and in the short axis into  
a) the left hand parterre and orangerie, b) the central vista overlooking the grille between the orangerie, and c) the right hand parterre and orangerie – is very logical.

I liked the way that the Meuse and its water has given the theme of the garden design in that the parterre has its four quarters as bassins and not as broderies of box. This I think is quite unusual, though Le Notre did design a water parterre for Versailles which was never carried out.  
The same theme is carried through to the orange garden in that its design is also based on the bassins of water.

I was also interested to see that the design adhered to the classic principle that a garden shall increase in scale but decrease in complexity as it goes away from the house.

The complexity of four bassins in the garden near the house and the more elaborate arrangement of the cut grass gives way to the simpler arrangement of two bassins and simple arrangement of cut grass in the orangerie garden.

It was a joy also to note the brick vaulted roof of the orangeries, much better than a timber roof to insulate the orange trees against frost.

Also surprising is the petit bosquet which announces to the viewer from the chateau the existence of an important cross-axis, and the contrast between the intimacy of the little cabinets in the bosquets and the openness to the landscape of the rest of the design.

The design of the upper garden is such an interesting contrast to the lower one, in that it is shady, when the other is open to the light.

It is intimate with many secret rooms when the other is large and open to view. Its tripartite division is solid-void-solid, the opposite to that in the lower garden is, coming from the chateau, void-solid-void.

I am fascinated to see the principle that a garden should become gradually less architectural and more natural as it goes away from the house, despite a strict geometry.

It was observed

in that the vistas in the lower garden have wide gravel paths at the centre whereas the vistas in the upper garden have tapis verts at their centre and the gravel paths are relegated to each side,

and in the fact that the transition from the upper to the lower garden is achieved with architectural arrangement of steps, whereas the transition from the upper garden to the pavilion is by way of the more natural grass banks and ramps.

Also, of course where the level of the lower garden is flat and relates to the chateau, the level of the upper garden is inclined and follows the natural fall of the ground.

I was most interested too by :

the cross-axial view from the pavilion in the way in which the composition led the eye from the surface of the water in one bassin to another until it rested on the surface of the water in the river,

and how the vista is framed by clipped hedges in the first part and the hedges on piloti for the second part.

It was a great surprise in this part also to come on the unexpected diagonal views to the fountains of the lower garden.

I fear that your interest in the French garden is so pure that you may not be very attracted by the chapter I gave you of my book on the French influence on the Irish garden of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

and so I enclose with this letter a chapter from the companion book which shows the French influence in the classic period of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Thank you very much for giving us such an instructive visit. We learned a lot from it. Belgium is very lucky to have someone to conserve such a classic French garden.

I look forward very much to seeing Christopher Robson soon to telling him of our visit (Note : the Robson is a family whose two sons Christopher and Denis came in the late 1950 and early 1960 spending a summer month with Axel and Baudry so that English was practised. Christopher's father was an architect and so became Christopher).

Last week, a group from the International Dendrology Society was visiting Irish gardens. Among the group were 3 Belgians, including Baron and Baroness de Strycker.

I apologise once more for our extreme rudeness in being late.

Yours sincerely, Patrick Bowe.