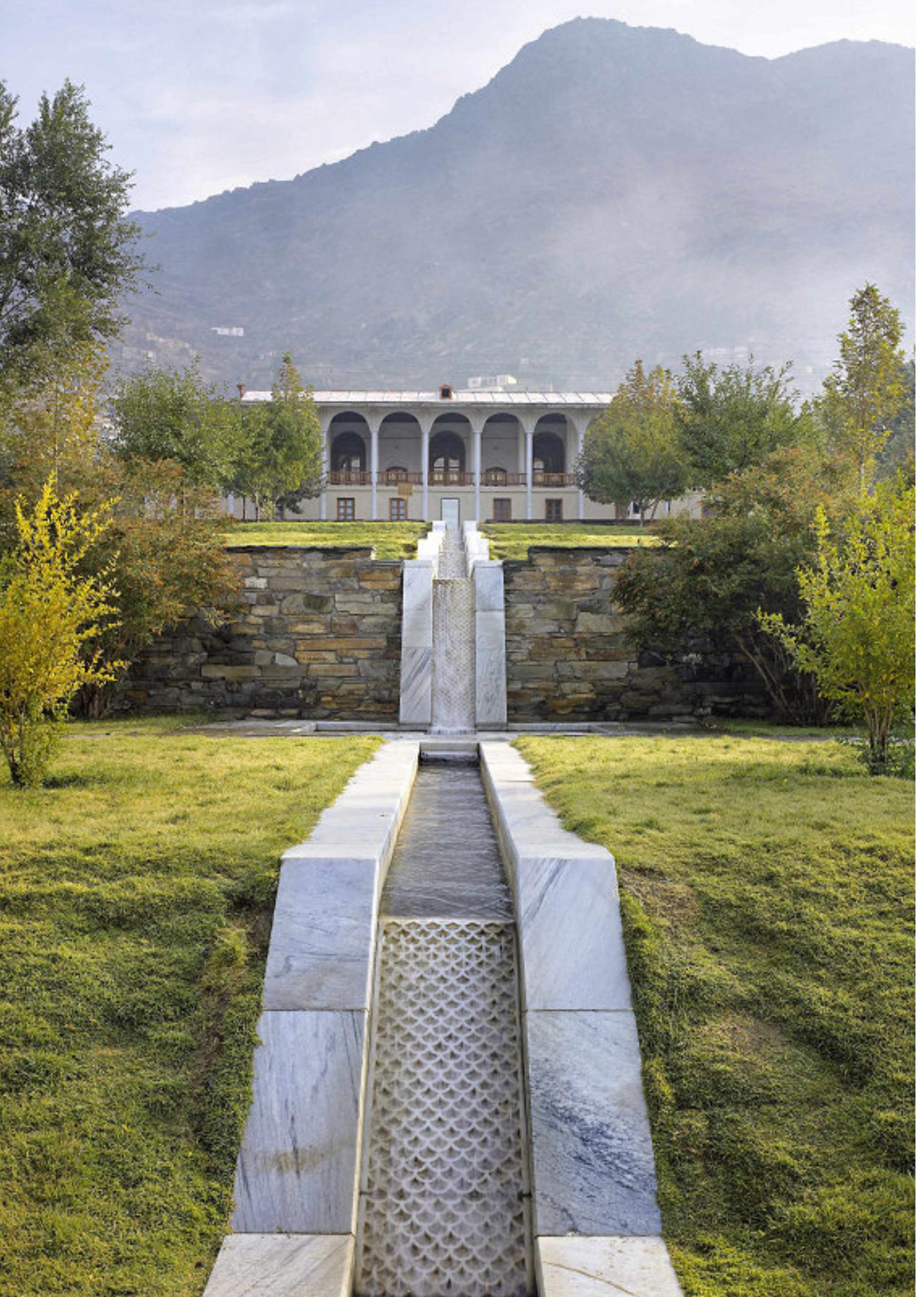




# Restoring Babur's Garden



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The Garden is situated on a hillside overlooking the Kabul River. It is completely enclosed by walls and occupies almost eleven and a half hectares of land, spread upwards over sixteen terraces. The difference in level between the lowermost part of the Garden and the uppermost terrace is approximately thirty-five metres. A large orchard with a central water channel runs down the middle, with each transition of the channel between terraces negotiated by a cascade and ponds.

Neglect and war over a period of decades resulted in extensive encroachment and destruction of the gardens. The terraces and slopes were substantially damaged, though still recognizable in profile, and the water systems and planting were virtually non-existent in any coherent form. Repair and restoration of the ground levels and grades was thus a priority, to be carried out before or in tandem with implementation of water and planting schemes.

The general policy for landscape restoration proposed:

- to follow in spirit the geometry of the Garden as it exists, intervening significantly only to restore the landscape where visible remnants or historical records of its former state were evident, as for example those found after archaeological investigations of the central axis. The major idea of the approach was to restore the shape of the terraces and slopes with sensitive grading and then implement large-scale planting with species appropriate to Mughal preferences as well as local tradition;
- in this way to create variations in planting format on a major portion of the terraces to bring the Garden back to the state of a flourishing orchard;
- to provide at the same time for use as a public garden by improving access to various areas and to restore the landscape of the central axis keeping this in mind;



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[1] The 20th-century layout was sacrificed to restore the Mughal layout of the central axis, comprising retaining walls, marble-lined water channels and waterfalls at each terrace.

[2] In his early 19th-century watercolour, James Atkinson captured the character of the Garden's central axis marked by towering *Panja Chenar* (oriental plane) trees and flowing water.

- careful grading and the creation of interesting seating places with masses of a variety of fruit trees interspersed with clusters of much larger trees such as *chenar* and walnut.

#### Spaces

The existing land profile was used as a guide to determine the grade of the slope between each terrace level. The slopes were worked out to minimize shifting or excavation of earth and yet impart a degree of precision to the terrace arrangement.

Four broad types of activity were anticipated for the open spaces of the Garden:

1. First, the area around Babur's Tomb and Mosque and the zone of upper terraces above that would attract a limited number of visitors and could be considered a quiet contemplative area.
2. Second, the 'central axis' – the heart of the Garden – which would naturally become the main attraction with ponds and channels (as depicted in the nineteenth century). It would be a busy and intensely active landscape.
3. Flanking this on either side would be shaded spaces for picnicking and outdoor relaxation in the deep shade of the orchard plantings – a traditional form of recreation typical of the region and popular today as well. Orchards and large shade trees characterize pictorial records not only of Bagh-e Babur but also of other gardens of the period. The landscape in this third zone was designed to evoke these scenes.
4. The entrance areas of large public spaces are often special places of transition – from the outside to the inside – where people pause or wait, or congregate on ceremonial occasions. Two distinct entrance zones of this kind were designed: one for the public at the western end, from the riverside road, and the other for occasional ceremonial use, at the existing south-eastern point of entry.

#### Water

The central channel (now buried) may have been the main irrigation source for both sides of the Garden; it is difficult to tell because the present levels of the terraces in the northern half

of the Garden do not encourage this hypothesis: they are higher than the level at which the channel is buried. However, the local ground slopes may have changed over the years.

While addressing the repair or restoration of water systems, conservation policies for historic gardens usually distinguish between water elements for visual effect and those needed for irrigation. Often it is not possible to restore the open irrigation channels to their rightful role and they are then recreated for appearance, with pumping systems to recycle the water; the irrigation needs of the garden being served more efficiently by a concealed network below ground.

At Bagh-e Babur archaeological excavations have established the original levels of the central water channel. Together with its pools and cascades, this channel was the Garden's main attraction. Over the years it has been significantly altered and its remnants are buried at various levels below the current land profile. In the early twentieth century an elaborate series of ornate European-style fountain pools was constructed over it, but these also were destroyed during the war.

Images, archival records and very detailed measurements of the archaeological remains of the central channel obtained from investigative excavations carried out during the project helped establish a substantively correct profile for the representation of its dimensions and character. The archaeological remains were kept protected and intact underneath.

Irrigation water is brought to each orchard area through a conventional underground piped system for efficiency and also to reduce loss by evaporation, which is inevitable with open channels. Most of the irrigation system is thus concealed, but certain specific lengths of open channels and basins have also been incorporated in the broad tradition of Mughal and Persian garden irrigation practice, together with well-defined circular depressions to hold the water at the bases of trees.

#### Planting

In keeping with the image agreed on by most scholars – that of lush foliage in organic abundance over flowing water channels and brimming pools – it was possible in Bagh-e Babur to undertake large-scale orchard-style planting, much as depicted



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in miniature painting. This was viable here thanks to the circumstances of history and the inherent simplicity of the layout, an option not often feasible in other Mughal gardens because their usage, and hence spaces, is too strongly established in the mode of public gardens to accept major alteration.

On the subject of orchard planting in gardens, and since such examples are not well known, there is an interesting parallel between a minor, very late Mughal garden (at Pinjore, near Chandigarh, India) and Bagh-e Babur. It, too, is laid out in terraces on either side of a central axis with a water channel, cascades and ponds, the terraces being occupied today by dense mango and guava orchards.

The tree species suggested at Bagh-e Babur have been selected from those that are either native or naturalized in the Kabul region, or mentioned in the historical literature about Mughal gardens generally, and include some, especially *arghawan* or Judas trees, that are associated with Babur.

Large stately trees impart substance and structure to the Garden, recalling images where the spaces of a garden are seen against a background of *chenar* or other big trees; fruit trees in an orchard planting provide vegetal masses that complement the enclosed open spaces, adding colour through seasonal variation and blossom; smaller shrubs, the *arghawan* for instance, add variety and a change in scale.

Near the central axis, three zones of planting have been envisaged: the outermost, next to the boundary walls, consists

of walnut and ash, large trees planted in clumps, not rows, to allow the walls to be seen. Next comes a dense orchard zone with larger fruit trees such as mulberry (Toot), fig and apricot; between this and the central area is the third zone of sparser orchard planting with gaps and spaces for picnics, with smaller fruit trees and *arghawan* shrubs. In contrast, the extensive open area of the central axis is marked on either side with specimens of *chenar* planted at appropriate intervals, with banks of spectacular Afghani roses on some terraces.

#### List of Plants

The trees proposed in the planting scheme for Bagh-e Babur were chosen from three sections:

1. Large trees for shade and foliage, including large fruit trees:
  - chenar* (*Platanus orientalis*)
  - walnut (*Juglans*)
  - ash (*Fraxinus*)
2. Medium to large fruit trees:
  - mulberry (*Morus*)
  - zard alu* (*Prunus*)
3. Small to medium fruit trees:
  - fig (*Ficus carica*)
  - alu balu* (*Prunus*)
  - badam* (*Amygdalus*)
 together with small trees and shrubs such as:
  - arghawan* (*Cercis siliquastrum*).