

soil. This apparent contradiction not only begs comparison with the discrimination inflicted upon Americans of Japanese descent; it also raises a broader question about the development of complex identities among Italian Americans. For instance, how did an ethnic community, many of whose members and leaders had identified support for Mussolini and his regime as important factors of their distinctiveness during the interwar years, so rapidly turn on the dictator and rally in defense of the United States? In the same way, *Fighting Paisanos* lets stand without explanation or further analysis references to Italy as “home,” remarks of the deep feeling of connection with a country never before experienced in person, along with repeated declarations of personal fulfillment for having played a role in the liberation of Italy from Fascism. Unfortunately, the film does not attempt to make a distinction between these two sets of reactions, nor does it call attention to one of the men’s Jewishness, especially in light of this history.

In the end, the greatest shortcoming of *Fighting Paisanos* is that it reduces the clearly noteworthy actions of Giannobile, Melone, Soria, and Baldino to little more than a simple chronological account of the Allied Italian campaign. Still lucid and articulate, the four “fighting *paesani*” deserve better.

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Terra Sogna Terra.

By Lucia Grillo.

Calabrisella Films, 2010.

45 minutes. DVD format, color.

My Backyard, Your Backyard.

By Sandra Pires.

Produced by Itsowel/Why Documentaries, 2012.

30 minutes. Multimedia. Web series.

The Italian Garden Project.

By Mary Menniti.

Website. www.theitaliangardenproject.com/, 2013–Present.

Accessed March 15, 2015–May 25, 2015.

On one of my first trips back to Italy after I had migrated to Australia I bought seeds for *cavolo nero* (black cabbage), which, in the days before kale became a trendy superfood, I could not buy anywhere in Sydney. I planted the seeds in my backyard and watched the seedlings grow. And grow some more, because in Sydney’s subtropical climate *il cavolo nero* grew to be the size of a palm tree.

I tell this story because it illustrates well how gardening practices are adapted in new and unexpected ways in the process of their relocation from Italy to other countries. The love and care with which fig trees are ingeniously wrapped up for

winter in Pennsylvania (as explained in a video tutorial in *The Italian Garden Project*), for instance, or indeed the significance of planting fig trees as a sign of prosperity (in *Terra Sogna Terra*) has no equivalent in Australia. Here the “Italian backyard is actually very Australian” (as someone says in the first episode of *My Backyard, Your Backyard*), tomato sauce is bottled in Victoria Bitter beer bottles, and a milder and more humid climate creates a different set of problems in the *yarda* behind the *fenza* in the suburban Italian Australian vegetable gardens (from the English *yard* and *fence*, as explained in *My Backyard, Your Backyard*).

Gardens, however, remain an important site of cultural and environmental engagement in the histories of the Italian diaspora. Gardening offers the possibility to keep traditional cultural practices alive and to re-create familiar sensory landscapes in environments that are everything but familiar. Perhaps more important, cultivating *l'orto* (a vegetable garden) also encourages resilience, self-sufficiency, a more sustainable approach to food consumption, and well-being.

These themes run through three video and multimedia documentaries on Italian gardens, two from the United States—Lucia Grillo’s documentary film *Terra Sogna Terra* and Mary Menniti’s website *The Italian Garden Project*—and one from Australia, *My Backyard, Your Backyard*, a web series, available also in DVD format, produced by the Italian Social Welfare Organisation of Wollongong (ITSOWEL) and directed by Sandra Pires. The three projects are vastly different in terms of resources, media, and narrative style. Considered together they form a continuum from the intimate portraits of multiple generations of gardeners in New York in Grillo’s feature-length documentary, to the celebration of Italian gardens and their place in multicultural Australia in the seven episodes of *My Backyard, Your Backyard*, to the ongoing website *The Italian Garden Project*, whose scope is both preserving and documenting the knowledge and stories of sixteen Italian gardeners and their *orti* and demonstrating their relevance to contemporary everyday life.

All three projects engage with forms of intergenerational learning, and they all start from the desire to document the knowledge and practices of largely elderly and first-generation Italian immigrant gardeners. The stories of the garden are the stories of migration itself, and they often start in a rural past in Italy, where many of the storytellers learned how to cultivate plants, as farmers or as *mezzadri* (sharecroppers). Or, in the case of second generations, the garden is a site for both remembrance of relatives as well as production and sharing.

What makes these projects stand out is that the desire to document the life of Italian diaspora gardens is not simply archival. The narratives presented in and around these gardens are not motivated by a wish to preserve gardening as a form of intangible cultural heritage. On the contrary, there is a recognition that, first, as an intangible cultural heritage, gardening is constantly reinvented in the interaction with new environments. Second, there is a wealth of experiential and hands-on knowledge to be gained that can be put into practice for the enhancement of present and future gardens and kitchens. A bit like sharing garden produce with family, friends, and neighbors—of which there are many examples in the three works—these documentaries set out to share the joy, passion, and importance of growing one’s own food and giving it to others. “I want to share this love I have for growing with other people, so maybe they can start cultivating,” as a young woman in *Terra Sogna Terra* explains.

This collective aspect of gardening is also stressed by some stylistic traits in *Terra Sogna Terra*, where often the protagonists remain unidentified in the course of the film; and, although they narrate a personal story, what they communicate is a shared experience, as in the case of the young woman quoted above. In this work, Lucia Grillo interviews Italian Americans from Francavilla Angitola (Vibo Valentia province, Calabria), the hometown of her own family, the members of which are also interviewed in the documentary. The film takes place in gardens, all of which, with the exception of one mainly ornamental garden, are well-tended *orti*, including a rich container garden producing an abundance of tomatoes, eggplants, basil, figs, and peppers. The oral histories with Italian Americans are set against this abundance and revolve around the difference between working the land in Italy and in New York. Taken together the unnamed individuals' stories create a choral narrative of food production and migration. The filmmakers talk to a man who was sent to war by Mussolini, became a prisoner of war, and later immigrated to the United States. One interviewee had to move from Calabria to Northern Italy, and another explains how the government in Italy "took everything." Yet another interviewee worked for a *padrone* who took a fifth of everything that was cultivated.

The documentary is not simply a memoir of a community of immigrant gardeners; it also has an environmental message in the promotion of a short supply chain—so short, in fact, that it is from plant to plate. An interviewee, for instance, stresses how the connection with the land enables one to grow *il vero cibo* (the true/real food)—to pick a tomato, season it with oil and salt, and eat it. Another one is critical of contemporary forms of consumption and notices that the new generations will not survive unless they change. Two young women offer a counterpoint, connecting their gardening to sensory experiences and memories of fresh food during visits to relatives in Italy, to Italian American traditions such as the planting of a fig tree in a new house, and to a general awareness of food production, given that, as they explain, they buy what they don't produce through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

A similar message is promoted by *The Italian Garden Project*, which sees Italian American backyards as sites of traditional knowledge and self-sufficiency that can help people to live in a more sustainable way, as the opening page's video "Welcome to The Italian Garden Project" states through a voice-over narrator: "During these times of increasing global economic and environmental uncertainty, when questions about the wisdom of being unable to provide for our most basic needs loom even larger, what these gardeners have to teach us becomes ever more relevant." The project was founded, researched, developed, and is maintained by Mary Menniti, whose grandfather was a first-generation pre-World War II immigrant to Pennsylvania from a village near Caserta (Campania). The project is a multimedia site developed on a blog platform and as such the individual items are ordered chronologically. Possibly to overcome the difficulty of searching items in a chronological order, in addition to blog posts (grouped under the menu "Overview"), it is also possible to find specific items under different menus. These include a section on upcoming events, news clips, image galleries, profiles, and stories of the gardeners who take part in the project, as well as a section detailing visits to the Macchione family's garden from spring to autumn.

The Italian Garden Project contains a wealth of articles, photographs, and videos about topics ranging from making sausages and prosciutto to visiting a Portuguese

chestnut farm in California in search of the perfect chestnut, or from how to properly care for pole beans and fig trees, braiding onions and garlic, to making chamomile tea. The website includes stories of people and plants and the visual recording of a garden captured in different seasons through a series of visits. This part of the project was made possible through a partnership with the Village Garden Club of Sewickley, Pennsylvania, to document a traditional Italian American vegetable garden for the Smithsonian Institute's Archives of American Gardens. The focus, however, is not simply to document and preserve gardening as cultural heritage but also to share specific practices that, thanks to locavore food trends and growing awareness about food safety and the impact of conventional agriculture on the environment, are becoming relevant again. Rain harvesting, composting, no waste and recycling, seed saving and exchanging, companion planting, and chicken coops are documented and explained.

My Backyard, Your Backyard, unlike the previous two projects, was developed wholly by an organization, the Italian Social Welfare Organisation of Wollongong, and received government support, which made possible a transmedia approach to the narrative (unfortunately at the time of this writing the project website was under maintenance). *My Backyard, Your Backyard*, is a web series, a Facebook page, a YouTube collection on the ISOTWEL channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/ITSOWEL2011>), and a DVD comprising seven stories connected with Italian gardeners in Wollongong, a richly multiethnic city in Southeast Australia. The YouTube channel and the DVD collect the seven stories in the form of short films. These vary from a reconstruction of childhood memories of a father's garden shot with actors, to long interviews led by the interviewees, to short documentaries on thematic narratives. The Facebook page extended the life of the project to include other contributors, still images, posts about gardening, and updates on the project from 2011 to 2014.

If *Terra Sogna Terra* and *The Italian Garden Project's* main focus is on the garden as a productive space, in *My Backyard, Your Backyard*, *la yarda* is also a site of social and cultural exchange. Whereas the U.S.-based projects concentrate on stories about gardens, the Australian program is all about the gardeners. The first story, for instance, is a memoir written by Enri Parolin that uses the garden to evoke the narrator's father, Pietro Parolin, and childhood memories connected with the cultivation of the *orto*, the visits of friends, the sharing of produce, the banter, the division of space and labor between husband in the *orto* and the wife in the flower garden, and the inevitable comparisons among gardeners as to who grows the best tomatoes. Similarly, in the second episode we meet four sisters, two of whom, Vincenzina Ciccarelli and Lina Mormile, we learn are so passionate about their vegetables that "they would make their bed in their garden." There is not a consensus among the siblings on who is the best gardener, and there are strong suspicions that Lina, who produces the most beautiful and flavorful artichokes, has a secret growing ingredient. This secret is later revealed to be chicken manure and tender care. Pasquale Braccia's story on the making of tomato sauce, an end-of-summer ritual among the first generation of Italian Australians, is a vignette on family life, including the patriarch who has to "make sure the women are doing their job," as the narrator notes. Because of suburban architecture, the backyard is also a liminal space, and the fence between backyards is the place of intercultural encounters and ongoing exchanges with neighbors from other cultural backgrounds, as it unfolds in the story of Frank Mastroianni and Fred Smith. In another case, a perfectly

tended flower, vegetable garden, and orchard is the backdrop for a couple, Alfonso and Anna Zarrella, to tell their story of courtship and to reveal that spending three quarters of their life in the garden, growing food and fruit, and sharing it is their recipe for a happy and healthy life. In pure Australian multicultural spirit, the series closes with kids from a local school visiting and commenting on the Italian backyards and then giving a tour of their own school vegetable garden to the Italian gardeners.

Looked at together or singularly, the three projects articulate how the domestic garden in the histories of Italian migration is one of the main sites of engagement with the diversity of new natural and social environments. *Terra Sogna Terra*, *The Italian Garden Project*, and *My Backyard, Your Backyard* do the very important job of documenting and distributing both the cultural and social histories of Italian diaspora gardens and of recognizing that there is a lot to learn about self-sufficiency, reliance, and a more sustainable way to live from these gardeners and their edible landscapes.

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