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The House and Garden: The Emergence of a Dream

Editor's note: This essay is a portion of a summary written for the formation of a Conservancy on the north coast of the island of Maui in 2010. It is intended to answer practical questions about the Merwins' house, land, and gardens. Mr. Merwin shares his plan with *KR* readers, "happy that it is of wider interest."

It is a great gift of fortune to have been allowed to live, as I have done for a great part of my life, in a place that I loved to begin with, and in a house that I myself designed and worked at building. I do not mean to suggest that I organized every aspect of its process and that I alone did every bit of the construction. My friend and neighbor, Kenny Kohler, looked over my drawings and helped to get the work rolling. Another friend, the marine architect Don Stoddard, made the working blueprints from my own detailed drawings. Kenny found a mason, a plumber, an electrician, and a roofer, when the time came for each of them. I had been making sketches and then drawings for the house here since the day I signed the escrow papers for the first three-acre bit of land, but it was a couple of years after that before Kenny and I were able to start putting up the corner posts and laying the floor beams. There were spells of enforced idleness, too, when I ran

completely out of money, which is another story. When I think of the sketches I made, during those first years, I remember that I have been making drawings for houses to live in since I was a small child.

The small valley of Peahi Stream is on the north coast of the island of Maui. It is often referred to as the “windward” coast in the weather forecasts: it is the rainy coast, with sea cliffs rather than beaches. The weather pattern and the paucity of beaches spared it from development until recent years. The north coast cliffs face out into the trade winds, which we love, and which bring—however unevenly—the blessed rain. I had come to Maui, after some months in Honolulu, in order to study with Robert Aitken, a Zen teacher whom I had met on O‘ahu. For several months I lived in a couple of rooms above an out-building, up among the banana trees beside Robert and Anne Aitken’s house, until I found somewhere of my own to rent a few miles away. There were not as many houses in “upcountry” Maui then as there are now. The road that led past the Aitkens’ house had been unpaved until earlier that year. It was very quiet and seemed to be part of an earlier time, and I loved that, imagining that it would stay that way.

The house I found to rent had been knocked together by one of the many “rough carpenters” who were trying to improvise a livelihood around Maui in those days. They had come to Maui, many of them, in their twenties, as surfers. The house they had built was as makeshift as their lives. Their former residence, a truck-camper shell, sat out in the long grass between the house and the neighboring pasture. The house was built out of odds and ends of material salvaged from buildings that were being demolished somewhere else. The roof was made of corrugated metal and must have been the first one the builders had ever laid, because they had set all the nails in the valleys of the already-rusted metal sheets so that when it rained, water flowed in through all the nail holes. The winter rains began just as I moved in, and it was a very rainy winter. Before long I was living out of plastic bags kept up on chairs. The house had a glorious view of the whole isthmus of central Maui, with the sea on both sides, and the west Maui mountain, Pu‘u Eke, with its peak hidden in clouds, beyond them. I made friends along the road, but I kept looking for somewhere else.

Then a friend told me of a bit of land out on the coast with a small cabin on it. I was told it was out in the wilds, like a bit of frontier country. My friend said the cabin was where three of the native

Hawaiian activists had hidden after they left the bombed island of Kaho‘olawe, which they had occupied in defiance of the U.S. Navy, which had been using the island for bombing practice. The present owner wanted to sell the place, and I went to look.

It was down a rough dirt road that looked like one of the cane truck roads through the sugar and pineapple fields. It wound its way toward the ocean. A mile below the main road, which had only recently been paved that far out from town, as I was threading my way across potholes and over rocks, I heard plovers sailing overhead in pairs. I was hearing the same clear, rising notes that they called to each other on their long migration flights at night over the sea. That sound was the first thing about the place that caught me, like the note of a bell. I passed only two buildings, set back from the dirt track, on the way down. One of them looked like an old caboose with a tiny upper room perched on top of it, and there was another a short distance beyond that, half-hidden over a ridge.

The directions I was following led me to a pair of tree-trunk fence posts set back from the road like gate posts, on the left, and no gate. No fence either. There were no fences along that road. I drove in between the two posts to where the ruts stopped, a few steps from the cabin. There were no trees, except for a few scraggly guavas, hardly more than bushes. Beyond the cabin was a long slope covered with dry grass. Along its lower edge were some small trees that I would come to know as Christmasberries—an imported weed tree—and below them the tops of larger trees. The wind blowing across the ridge behind me framed the silence. I learned later that, in state assessments of agricultural land, the land there had been pronounced wasteland, ruined beyond agricultural use, after little more than a century of abusive exploitation. Until the early nineteenth century there had been a forest there, its dominant tree the Hawaiian koa (*Acacia koa*) accompanied by ‘ohias (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) and other native trees and shrubs, including, perhaps, native palms of the genus *Pritchardia*. On this coast they would have been the very beautiful *Pritchardia arecina*, which grow now in small numbers in the high forests of the eastern end of the island. The land here had been deforested as early as the 1840s, some trees cut for firewood for the whaling ships that put in at the harbor of Lahaina on the south side of the island, and for the new population of American and European settlers

there. The deforestation had been hastened in order to provide pasture for cattle, but the wild grasses that grew up here provided poor grazing. When sugarcane planting began in midcentury, the first big planters, in heated competition with each other, planted cane fields wherever they thought sugar would grow, and competed furiously for all available water along the north coast. In the course of their diversion of every stream and runoff along the coast to irrigate their cane fields in the central plain, the water of the stream here—Peahi Stream—had been cut off completely.

The planters had plowed the land for sugar wherever they could, far beyond the central isthmus. But the yield out along the coast proved not to pay for the growing, and the fields were abandoned. The plowing had accelerated the erosion begun by the cutting of the trees. Then the land reverted to poor pasture for some years, and in the early twentieth century, a group of hopeful speculators who had watched the introduction of large-scale pineapple growing, decided to go in for it themselves, and they pooled their resources and bought most of the valley, intending to grow pineapple on the slopes. For some reason hard to imagine, they plowed the slopes vertically—up and down—which of course greatly accelerated the erosion. In the winter rains the land lost what little topsoil had survived the earlier abuses, the speculators gave up the whole business, and the land stood idle for decades. Wasteland. The building of the road to Hana in the 1920s further sealed off the upper sources of the Peahi Stream. In the 1970s the slopes were divided on a map and sections put up for sale. They were still classified as “agricultural land.”

The section on which the cabin stood consisted of slightly over three acres. It was not hard to see that the soil was poor. If I had known to look for them, I would have been able to see the up-and-down corduroy ridges in the dry, waving grass across the valley, a testament of the most recent land abuse. But the condition of the soil did not, in itself, daunt me. I had long dreamed of having a chance, one day, to try to restore a bit of the earth’s surface that had been abused by human “improvement.” I loved the wind-swept ridge, empty of the sounds of machines, just as it was, with its tawny, dry grass waving in the wind of late summer. The rough road behind me, and the one along the top of the ridge on the other side of the valley, led down to end at the sea cliff a quarter of a mile away. I had not yet seen that the

road on which I had come ended on a headland, overlooking a large bay, with a shore of boulders and a hill behind that on which the second-largest *heiau* (Hawaiian temple platform and compound) in the islands, wholly unexcavated, was hidden under mango trees.

I was captivated by the sense of distance along the coast. From in front of the cabin there was only one other building to be seen: a barn-red house halfway down the opposite slope. Out beyond the sea cliffs the ocean extended without a break all the way to Alaska. That was the destination, every spring, of the migrating plovers that flashed above me far ahead of their call-notes. From the cabin on that first day, I followed the ghost of a path down through the waist-high grass. It curved to the left and then swung to lead down under the mango trees. When I stepped into their shade, I seemed at once to be in another world. The sound of the wind was suddenly muted and far away. The air was cooler, and from somewhere I could not see among the trees I was startled to hear the voice of a thrush singing, at that hour of the day. It was the *omao*, known as the “Hawaiian thrush,” though, in fact, it was a foreigner, just as I was. It was also called, more accurately, the Chinese thrush, and also the Laughing thrush. There are few members of the thrush family, whatever their species, that are not great singers (the American robin is a notable exception) and the *omao*, like the nightingale, never repeats itself but sings variations from an inexhaustible source. I stood still and listened, looking along the valley in the shade of the mango trees as the thrush went on singing, and then I stepped down the slope and walked over to the rocky stream bed itself. I stood there hearing the thrush and wanting to stay there.

No story, though, begins at the beginning. The beginning does not belong to knowledge. I have been asked fairly often how I came to care about living things that are not human—for all that is commonly referred to as “nature.” There is a suggestion, sometimes, that a sympathy of that kind is somehow eccentric. Such use of the word “nature” seems to refer to something apart from “us.” Yet the sympathy seems to me natural, even if the overt first impulse of living organisms is rarely generous. I cannot remember a time when I did not feel that attraction, that delight in lives that were not human. I have a vivid recollection of one moment of it when I must have been hardly

more than two years old. I was walking with my mother along the sidewalk on New York Avenue outside our house in Union City, New Jersey. Sidewalks then were commonly made of flagstones. Right outside our own picket fence I saw, between two flagstones, tender new shoots of grass so young that the light passed through them. It must have been spring. I bent down to look, and I asked my mother where the grass was coming from. I remember my happiness, the sense of reassurance I felt when she told me that the earth was right under there.

When I first saw farmland and woods as a child, I wanted to be there, to get out of the car or the train and be surrounded by what I saw. My mother read the words from picture books to my younger sister and me before we could read, and there was one book in particular that I kept returning to on my own, because of its subject. It was a book about Indians living in the woods, and there were watercolors of the woodlands and of their life there that drew me back with a kind of longing. There were few words on the first pages. I looked at them again and again, and with my mother's help I managed to learn to recognize the letters for "man," then "an Indian man," and then where he was and what he was doing, and it was as though it were coming to life in front of me. I was learning to read in order to know about people who did not read or write but who lived all the time in the woods. I said that was what I wanted to do. The wish of a child, but it stayed with me all through my childhood.

Before I was nine, we went as a family for visits to a woman who had become a close friend of my mother's. She lived with her two boys, one a year older and the other a year younger than I was, on her parents' farm on a back road between Moscow and Madisonville, Pennsylvania, and the days there were a revelation to me. I daydreamed about them when we left. Then when I was nine we moved to Scranton, Pennsylvania, and there were more visits to the farm and hikes with friends on West Mountain, which began to be the mountain not far from the end of Washburn Street, where we lived. And the first summer we were there, somebody in my father's church (my father was a Presbyterian minister) arranged for us to spend the summer, or the heart of it, in a small, homemade cottage *in the woods* beside a lake that was near the foot of Elk Mountain. I could scarcely believe we were really going to be living there. A friend had driven us

up there in an open truck, and as he bumped down the dirt lane under the tall trees, crows cawed in the branches high above us and I remember tears suddenly running down my face at the sound. I hoped nobody saw it. I felt that way about the place as long as we went there.

Years later—fourteen years, but a whole age later—I came upon an abandoned farmhouse, half covered with brambles, on a ridge overlooking the upper valley of the Dordogne River in southwest France. The house sat below another dirt road, this one just outside a very small hamlet. I learned from one of its elders there who owned the deserted house, and I went to call on her. The view of the ridges beyond the valley, as I realized, reminded me of the ridges and the landscape of western Pennsylvania that I had loved as a child.

A maiden aunt who was close to my mother had come to live with us after she had retired from her life as a schoolteacher. I was ten years old at the time. She was a stately, dignified, self-possessed woman with recognizable authority and with magnificent white hair piled on top of her head. She tutored me in arithmetic—my weak subject—and she and I took our fox terrier for walks in the afternoon, out to the cemetery and back. I chattered to her, looking up, as we walked. She and my father were never really in tune, and she moved away to Florida later that same winter, exchanging letters regularly with my mother until she died five or six years later. My mother was her executor, and she learned—to everyone's surprise—that my Aunt Margaret had left all her worldly goods to me. They consisted of one steamer trunk full of clothes—and a few bits of jewelry, of no monetary value, but a few of them, my mother said, had belonged to older women in the family whom she remembered. And there was a sum of money that, after funeral expenses and various fees had been taken care of, amounted to something over eight hundred dollars. I was still a minor, and my mother put the money into treasury bonds in my name. By the time I went to see the woman who owned the deserted farmhouse outside the small village in France, the sum had grown to twelve hundred dollars. My fortune. I never thought seriously that it would allow me to buy a house of any kind, but it seemed to permit me to ask the woman whether she would sell the house. After some tears, she asked me what I wanted it for. She said she did not want to sell it just so somebody could sell it again to make money

from it. Would I live in it, she asked, as though that were unimaginable. I said I was not a businessperson and would not want to buy a house except to live in. Then I asked her how much she would sell it for, if I wanted it to live in. She said she had once agreed to sell it to an English woman, but that was before the war and the woman had never come back. If she sold it to me, it would be for the same price she had agreed on earlier, she said, and I asked how much that was. The sum she named in francs translated to just twelve hundred dollars, and I put out my hand. My life there, for large parts of the year over many years, was a lifetime education to me and was formative in my feelings about living, if not exactly in the woods, in a completely rural place that was rooted in tradition, and to live there as a someone who belonged there. I am sure the farmhouses of that part of the world, which I came to know and love, formed part of my notion of the kind of house in which I would want to live. I did not have any particular one in mind, however, when I came to start making sketches for a house to live in.

Those years helped form another influence that would eventually have a part in my hopes for living here. Above the old farmhouse in the village there was what had once been the house *potager*, its vegetable garden, and I set to work to turn it into a kitchen garden again. Every house in the village that was still inhabited had its vegetable garden, most of them, though not all, tended by women. The men dug them over in the early winter and left them for the frost to break down the stiff limestone clay soil. I learned from my neighbors everything they would tell me, and I was happy to accept offshoots of sorrel and raspberry canes—whatever they wanted to share.

I read old French garden manuals culled from secondhand bookstores, and modern instructions for growing vegetables and fruit. In reading the latter I ignored the directions for use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. One of the first people I had met when I came to the region was a venerable Englishman who had been an agronomist in a village across the valley, a pioneer in the English movement for organic agriculture and gardening. His way of living and gardening prompted me to I read everything I could find about that movement and the publications of its American counterpart. I could recognize at once the relation between their vision and the perspectives of ecology as a whole. I turned the land there into a registered bird sanctuary. A

southern French peasant village, before the days of chemicals and machinery, was an incomparable place to be reading about such things and learning the rudiments of gardening. There was an inexhaustible supply of manure from farm animals and of cut grass and straw for mulches and compost, and in the early spring one neighbor would bring his team of yoked cows and a plow, through the garden doorway, and plow the whole garden for me.

Whatever I may have learned there, along with the love of a *place*—not merely a piece of property—was part of me when I looked out across the valley of Peahi Stream years later. My own parents, like many Americans of their generation, had never talked about the past. My questions about it as a child were never really answered at the time. But in that village almost everything that was done seemed to be rooted in the immediate or immemorial past, and I found the sense of coherent continuity profoundly satisfying. The language spoken in the village was not even French, but a rustic remnant of Occitan, bearing the same relation to the language of the troubadours that Appalachian English bears to that of Shakespeare.

One practical detail of their lives proved extremely useful when I began to consider building a house on the land in Peahi. It had to do with a supply of water. The French peasant village was situated along the edge of a high limestone plateau, known as a *causse*, where there were few springs, no wells, no public water supply until after I first was there. The peasants had evolved a sophisticated system of water catchment to store whatever rain fell on the tile—or the still older stone—roofs of their houses and barns. Gutters along the eaves led the water to downpipes emptying into cisterns built, always, *under* the buildings, to keep the sun off them and keep the water cool. When the water of the Peahi stream had been cut off by the planters, in the late nineteenth century, the Hawaiians were forced to leave the valley. There was no source of water anywhere on either side of the valley, and occasionally I would see a neighbor's old pickup lurching up the road, loaded with an array of metal garbage cans and other containers, on the way to a public source of potable water miles away. In my first sketches for a garage, up near the road, and for a house, part way down the slope, I planned a large water cistern under each building and I wanted the house, at least—whose cistern would supply the drinking water—to have a tile roof. Not the baked terra cotta tiles of

southern Europe, but here in the middle of the Pacific the green, glazed tiles of Oriental houses in the islands and around the Pacific rim.

I hoped to build the house itself halfway down the slope rather than up along the ridge, which I was told repeatedly would be the most convenient place for it. It would also, of course, be the dustiest, most exposed and windy, most noisy and public place, but the prime advantage of building up there, as I was told again and again, was that it would be accessible to motor vehicles. I did not, in fact, want it to be exposed either to the prevailing winds or to motor vehicles driving right to the front door, however convenient that would be. As I thought about it, I realized that the idol of the world of terminal acceleration had never been my guide. Convenience, I believe, never comes gratis, and invasion is always part of the price. None of the places that I had loved in my life had been notable for their convenience, and in fact the feeling of (relative) remoteness along this coast when I first came to it was one of its deep attractions for me.

Another influence on the setting of the house I wanted, as I thought about it, came from my reading. A few years earlier in a book by John Blofeld, I was captivated by his account of his wanderings in the mountains of China in the 1930s and earlier. He was drawn then to find what he could of the ancient Taoist and Buddhist monasteries, as they were then. He described the mountains themselves, known to us from centuries of great Chinese paintings, and the forest paths, the great beauty of the steep, forested landscape that was still there. He wrote of following a path through the forest and finding that it seemed to grow more and more beautiful as he went, and then noticing that it had been—almost unnoticeably—cared for. Fallen brush had been cleared away, and there were flat, worn stones set irregularly in the path itself as though they had occurred there naturally. Then, at a turn in the path, he would be taken by surprise by the sight, just over the edge of a slope, of an earthen wall and tiled roofs just visible above it, all looking as though they had always been there and had grown out of the mountain. He had come to a temple compound, or a monastery. What he was describing sounded to me like an ideal, and I hoped to have a house set among trees and visible only as one actually arrived there on foot. I am perfectly aware that such an ideal is far from most contemporary assumptions about what to do with land. Visitors

arriving here for the first time, unless what they see first is its inconvenience, sometimes say, as they come in the gate, that it seems like somewhere with a clear character of its own—that of a place apart. What they are referring to may be partly because, on the day I signed the escrow papers for the first bit of land, I planted the first trees—they were eighteen inches high then—up along the road.

The garage was built first, up near the road. The cement cistern under one end of its roof was intended to supply the house by gravity. There were places for two cars. The drive did not lead past the garage, and there was no turnaround space. That was intended as a security measure. The house is relatively isolated. There have been break-ins along the road since I was first here. I thought that not being able to turn around easily might help to deter prospective profiteers, and I think that is still so.

I wanted to disturb the land as little as possible and to make as small a “footprint” of cement as possible. No bulldozer was used at all in preparing the site for the house. The storeroom section of the garage has a cement floor, and the upper end of the house is anchored to a stem wall set into the ground. Apart from those, only the two cisterns—the one under the garage roof and the one under the house itself—seal the ground under concrete.

I mentioned earlier that I had come to Maui, in the first place, principally in order to spend some time learning about Zen practice under the guidance of Robert Aitken, whose Maui Zendo was on a back road along the north coast of the island. That, and a growing fondness for Maui, had kept me here. My attraction to the image of the Chinese mountain temples and monasteries, in John Blofeld’s account, and how they appeared to have grown out of their surroundings without intruding upon them, came from the same part of my own temperament. It seemed that I had been searching for something of the kind all my life. That desire influenced the site I chose for the house, and then its design and floor plan.

Although I began with a naïve aspiration to restore a few acres of pure Hawaiian rainforest, the first trees I planted here were not indigenous to Hawaii. No native trees would grow in the parched, wind-swept conditions and the leached-out soil, as they were then, up along the ridge. I planted *Cassuarinas*, known locally as “ironwoods,”

beautiful trees that look like tall, weeping pines, and were named, by the seventeenth-century botanist Rumphius for the Cassowary bird with its long, graceful wings. But the whole genus has acquired a bad name in Hawaii because the first species planted here was aggressively invasive, sending up outriders from its running surface roots. I was careful to plant species that had no such intrusive habits and were especially graceful. Even in the conditions here they grew rapidly, and within a few years they began to form a microclimate, as they shaded the ground, added humus with their fallen needles, held the water after heavy rains, and put nitrogen back into the soil—they are one of very few genera besides the legumes that can do that. They broke the wind with a lovely sound, the long limbs swaying. No one seemed to know, at the beginning, that they were vulnerable to termites, and eventually they began to be infested and to drop large limbs. Now they are being replaced, in the habitat they improved, by young palms.

The conditions of the land here discouraged the possibility of restoring Hawaiian native flora. There was a forest here in the early nineteenth century with its dominant tree, the beautiful *Acacia koa*, and we planted many seedling koas, but very few of them survived. The disturbance of the soil, apparently, had been too great. It had been leached out and was unwelcoming to what had once grown there. It must have lost a whole society of soil organisms and forms of life in which the native trees and plants had once grown, and now instead there were insects and plant ailments that had not existed until that land was deforested. Of the few koas we planted that survived and prospered, almost every one was killed suddenly by imported weevils or diseases. Some other native species have not done well here either, but the first indigenous palms I planted here in soil carefully amended with rotted manure and seaweed, which settled in and grew and allowed some hope, were Hawaiian palms. As they grew, and I began to learn about them, I came to realize that palms, which grow in extremely diverse conditions all around the world, are endangered, like so many other living things everywhere, by human takeover of their habitats, and that I wanted to try to see what palms would grow here in circumstances that, on the one hand, were not totally artificial, and on the other, might resemble, insofar as possible, those from which they had come. I had planted the first palms here very soon after I had signed the deed for the land in 1977.

The ones I cared about most were the Hawaiian *Pritchardias*, acquired from a friend a couple of miles away who had a small nursery of indigenous plants. They were a few years old, in three-gallon pots, when I bought them from him. I began corresponding with palm growers and botanical gardeners in other parts of the tropics, and learned, from reading, how to grow palms from seed, which I did with a success that varied with the freshness of the seeds, among other things.

It was an exciting time, and the palms I managed to grow, and the emerging garden, added to our attachment to our life here. Then three years after Paula had first come here, the two parcels of land adjoining ours, on the side away from the sea, suddenly became available to us. They belonged to two elderly women over on O'ahu, one of whom — with the parcel nearer to us — we had already approached and had visited several times. She had encouraged us, but said she would not sell the land as long as her husband was alive. After he died, she and the woman who owned the plot next to hers were ready to sell. Their combined two plots amounted to over fifteen acres and contained the whole of the upper bed of Peahi Stream. The women knew that we did not want the land for development but to preserve it from that and to try to make a kind of botanical sanctuary there. They were less interested in acquiring the highest possible price than in immediate cash, and they agreed to sell to us for a figure that was remarkably low even at that time. An old friend of mine, only a few months earlier, had left me a sum of money, to my surprise, and a friend of Paula's, an older woman who had been a kind of godmother of hers for many years, gave her a sum, too, and we combined them to pay cash for those two parcels of land. It was a piece of fortune that came to us like a blessing.

With no irrigation system, I have relied upon planting palms as far as possible, in rainy periods, digging holes as large as possible and filling them with mixes of compost and organic fertilizers and watering them by hand for a while when the rains stop. It is not an ideal way of doing it, and in periods of drought I lose some recent plantings. I tend to plant palms younger than I believe is usual in professional botanical gardens, where they have watering systems and a staff of gardeners. Keeping palms in the nursery until they are larger and

older increases a risk of ailments and ant damage and requires much larger holes, more water after planting, and tends to be a greater shock to the tree than it is when they are set in the ground sooner. In between twenty-five or thirty years I have planted about 850 species of palms, and at least four or five times that many actual trees. I have had no map. I have not been able to visit every planting regularly, nor to water them all by hand. Some have been lost to drought. Labels have been lost. But I would guess that well over seven hundred species, and more than three quarters of all the palms that I have set in the ground, have survived. They grow slowly in this poor soil, but some of the older ones, planted in the early eighties, are tall and stately now, and many of them are flowering and dropping viable seed. Many endangered species are growing here, and one species in particular, the *Hyophorbe indica* from Reunion Island, was listed as extinct when Inge Hoffinan sent me a few seeds in the 1980s. One remaining tree of the species had been found in the botanical garden on that island, and it had provided those seeds. I managed to grow several trees and eventually began sending the seeds to a palm nursery on the Big Island for distribution, and they are available to tropical gardeners now. During rainy spells I try to plant at least one palm every day. Many have grown out of recognition. I welcomed Chipper Wichman's statement, at Kahanu Garden here on Maui, that once the Conservancy is in existence he wants the National Tropical Botanical Garden, of which he is the present director, to redocument and map the palms here, and there have been other welcome offers to help record the palms.

I hope to be able to go on planting palms on this land for a long time, and I regard what has been done here so far as just a beginning. The upland areas beyond the streambed and on the western side of the valley have scarcely been planted at all, and I hope—we both hope—that the whole of this land can eventually become a palm garden, a palm forest and sanctuary. Just being here, with the garden, the “palm forest,” all around us, day after day, I think has taught me a great deal. In my own lifetime I have seen the role of a garden, the very idea of a garden, not merely altered but reversed. Gardens, from the beginning (as the etymology of the word suggests), existed as enclaves designed and maintained to keep *out* the wilderness, to guard what was inside for human use or pleasure. Once it became possible for

human beings to destroy environments anywhere on earth, the situation was turned around, and anyone who wanted to protect and save any remaining bit of the natural environment was acting in the role of a gardener — one whose purpose, at this point, was to keep encroaching human exploitation and disturbance *out*. The model for this garden has always been the forest itself, even though I know that the word “reforestation” is generally meaningless, and that only a forest knows how to grow a forest.

I hope that the planting of palms will continue to fill parts of the land that have not been planted up until now. I hope that a future head gardener will have something of the same desire that I have had: to try to grow as many species as possible of the world’s palms, wherever they can be acquired. That is an abiding part of our hope that a Conservancy will want and will be able to save this bit of the Peahi streambed — what we have made here for those who come after us.