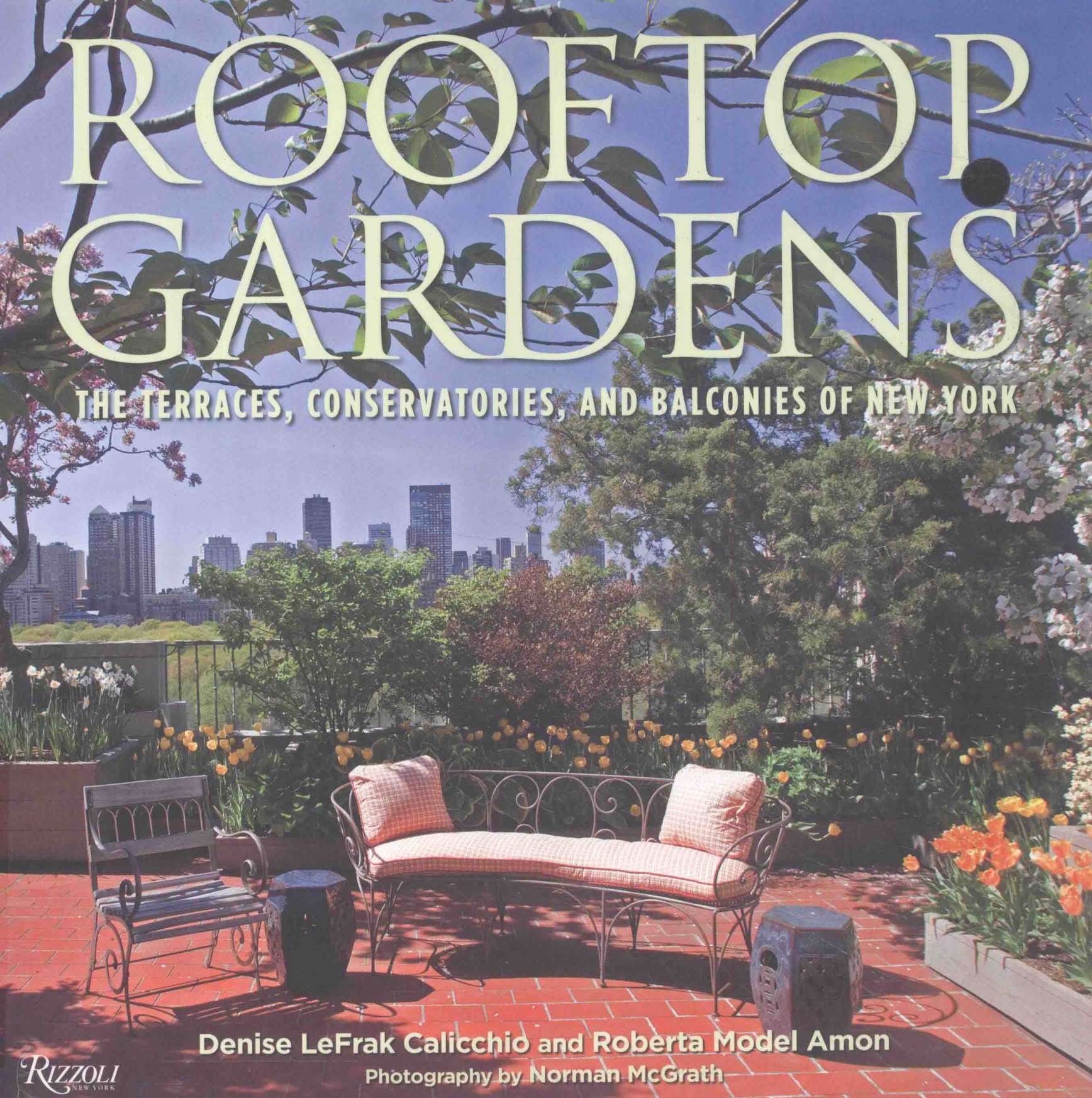


ROOFTOP GARDENS

THE TERRACES, CONSERVATORIES, AND BALCONIES OF NEW YORK



Denise LeFrak Calicchio and Roberta Model Amon

Photography by Norman McGrath

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ROOFTOP GARDENS





Foreword

by Evelyn H. Lauder

The romance of having a city garden is a love affair hard to relinquish. The contrast between the noise of the city streets and the calmness of the sky's proximity, as well as seeing breathtaking views and inhaling fragrant blossoms, keeps the affection alive.

Our romance with our rooftop garden began in 1988. When my husband, Leonard, our sons, and I first took a real look at the penthouse apartment available in our building, nothing had prepared us for the glory we witnessed 150 feet above the street. The sky was a rich blue that autumn day, and the sun was intensely bright, illuminating the view of Central Park. The terrace had been lovingly planted and cared for by the seller since the 1950s—with mature vines, many hydrangeas, rhododendrons, privet, trees, and perennials. We agreed to the purchase there and then. To this day, many of the original plantings are still in place and, of course, have been added to over the years.

Every morning, either before or after exercise, I put on a beaten-up old straw hat and grab my leather gloves and ratchet pruner to gather roses or zinnias for our breakfast table and sink top. Sometimes I even find some ripe *fraises du bois* ready for enjoyment. In summer we harvest the eggplant, zucchini, and tomatoes carefully planted by Phebe, our horticulturist. Imagine us bringing ratatouille to the country for dinner.

In autumn, Phebe plants hundreds of bulbs, which emerge in spring to thrill the soul and surprise the eye. It is then that the garden is most colorful—white from lilacs, azaleas, bridal veil bushes, and tulips; pink from the blossoms of the crabapples; lavender from the wisteria; yellow, white, and orange from narcissus. Even the blue grape hyacinths offer a contrast to the bouquet of colors. It is then that the garden comes alive again after its restful sleep.

A rooftop garden is not anything like gardening in the ground. Tree roots need yearly pruning or they will become “pot bound” in the limited space of the planter boxes. Wind and heat from the sun dry out the soil faster than they would if the plants were in “real” gardens, and consequently much more water is required.

The good news is that there are no groundhogs, squirrels, or deer to chew away at the plants.

A rooftop garden is not like any other garden in the world.

A feeling of euphoria engulfs everyone stepping out the door and over the threshold to a world of light, color, fragrance, and loveliness. Roberta Model Amon, Denise LeFrak Calicchio, and Norman McGrath have brought you over that threshold.





Introduction

Sky-High Gardens

by *Dominique Browning*

Who hasn't walked through the streets of New York City, craning a neck to get a glimpse of penthouse life, and wondered at the profusion of plant life sprouting and spilling down the limestone facades of the buildings? You may be walking down a street that hasn't an inch of green life on it, but you can glance skyward and see pine trees etching a line against the cerulean blue, or tall, blowsy grasses with billowing puffs of seed swaying in the breezes, or perennials throwing off sprays of riotously colorful blooms, or the pale bark of birch trees glowing in the moonlight. Life, in other words, thrives at all strata of our built world. Plants cling to skyscrapers, matching their strength against gusts of wind and hail, and caring not a whit that they defy growing zones, much less gravity. These are the stalwart residents of New York's rooftop gardens.

Most of us mere mortals have never had the chance to ride the thermals in the city's stratosphere, gazing down at the terraces below—which is why a book like this is such a treasure. We get glimpses, from street level, of tufts and sprigs and branches and anything else that overhangs. But the photographs included here send us soaring to dizzying heights. We can wander through serene gardens that evoke the Zen peacefulness of Japanese teahouses, or be buoyed by the romantic allure of English borders whose colors change through the seasons. We are introduced to fascinating ideas of what it means to make a garden and what it takes to transport the gardener: sometimes it is a piece of art—a vivid, zany sculpture—as much as a gracefully bowed tree that defines the terraced landscape. Terrace gardens come in all shapes and sizes.

Terrace gardeners must work against nature, which makes their creations all the more remarkable. It is a demanding sort of gardening. The winds that ricochet off the concrete canyons are brutally desiccating. The sunshine, pouring down all day long, burns unrelentingly. Rain is unreliable and brings down the soot of the city's furnaces and engines; and of course the soil is necessarily thin, lest the roof beneath cave in under the weight. Yet the people who plant and tend these terraces are as determinedly cossetting of them as any gardener in the oasis of a park or suburban backyard—perhaps even more so. City life can be harsh and dirty, unremittingly loud, and distracting. For those who love gardens—who need to go to the ground to create a refuge—and find respite in even the tiniest corner of nature, the rooftop

garden is a treat indeed, and it is what makes the terrace gardener persevere.

There was a time in New York City when a designer dreamed of connecting a series of terrace gardens by means of parapets and bridges that would link buildings throughout midtown, starting at Rockefeller Center. That never happened, though ultimately the rooftops of some of those buildings were beautifully landscaped. One can only imagine what such a floating park might have looked like—and be amazed at the possibility. Best of all, *Rooftop Gardens* offers us a chance to leap tall buildings with the turn of a page. We share with the hawks of Central Park their bird's-eye view of the mysterious celestial treasures being tended high up in the air.



ROOFTOP GARDEN as *Sanctuary*

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A photograph of a garden retreat. In the foreground, a rustic wooden bench with a thick, gnarled frame sits on a brick-paved path. To the right of the bench, two white stone balusters stand near a brick wall. A large, leafy tree trunk is visible on the right side of the frame. In the background, a trellis structure is covered in dense green vines, with a brick building visible behind it. The overall scene is lush and green, suggesting a peaceful outdoor space.

A respite from the trials of a busy life: a fantasy enclosure or leafy retreat