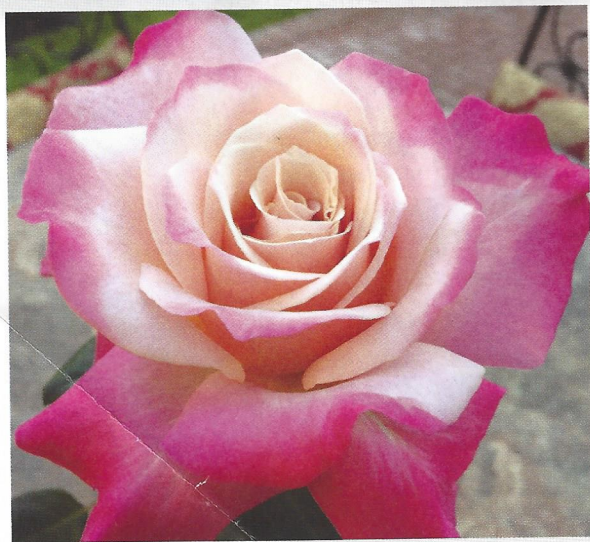




# Rose Rescue



THE HUNTINGTON  
LIBRARY, ART MUSEUM  
& BOTANICAL GARDENS  
SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA

by *Tom Carruth*

DESIGNED BY MYRON HUNT, the Huntington Rose Garden was originally planted by William Hertrich in 1908 for the private enjoyment of Henry and Arabella Huntington. The garden was intended primarily for bouquets, providing copious quantities of cut blooms for the large elaborate floral arrangements favored in their home. Household





OPPOSITE PAGE , TOP TO BOTTOM: 'Wild Ginger', 'Almondeen'. LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: 'Amber Queen', 'Girona'. BELOW: 'Friendship'. All photos Tom Carruth.



records indicate that in one year alone more than 30,000 flowers were used in these massive bouquets, 9,700 of which were roses.

After the Huntington's passed in the mid-1920s, the three-acre Rose Garden was more of a display and test garden, like many other public rose gardens. In 1973, the then Rose Curator, John McGregor, set about to replant the Rose Garden as a collection much like our renowned collection of cactus and succulents in the

Desert Garden. John's concept was to plant the garden in a way that represented the history of the rose, giving much more emphasis to species and old roses. Even with three acres, it was quite a task to incorporate all the rich history of the rose.

The modern rose beds were planted chronologically by decade. But by the mid-80s, space limitations forced us to start replanting in the same beds and most of the chronological beds were eventually eroded. Curator Clair Martin did his best in the face of constant funding limitations to preserve some of the historical planting concept. But it was an uphill battle. The tea/china section is relatively intact and most of the old garden roses are in one long bed. The Southernmost section of the garden still contains several older hybrid varieties from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.





The garden now includes more than 2,500 individual plants and more than 1,280 different cultivars from all over the world. The preponderance of the collection spans the 19<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, a time when the rose reached a pinnacle of popularity. Yet some of the irreplaceable plants were barely hanging on to life. And a lot of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century varieties were missing entirely.

I retired from Weeks Roses on my 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in early 2012 to accept the job as Curator of the Huntington Rose Collection after Clair Martin's retirement in 2010. My first time to volunteer for the magnificent Huntington Spring Plant Sale was 1978. It became an annual event because of my plant obsession. During those years, I had seen the Rose



Garden go through several changes. With the news release that the Huntington had been bequeathed more than \$100 million dollars specifically for the garden, I felt it was a good time to step in and turn the Rose Collection into what it deserved to be.

Inventory and the general health of the plants were the first projects on the burner. Once we began to see a little light at the end of the those tunnels, I could turn my attention to rescuing the failing irreplaceable varieties and beefing up the missing key varieties in the collection, many of which were no longer commercially available, mostly mid-20th century. I was particularly keen on finding varieties which were major contributors to the genetics of the modern roses of today.

We contracted with my old employer, Weeks Roses, to send budwood of the weak plants to be rebudded as husky two-year old field grown plants and returned to the collection. That started in 2013. You could not just bud one plant in a huge field. We had to bud 10 each to avoid them getting lost completely during harvest and grading. Some of the extras went to the local Pacific Rose Society Annual Bareroot Auction. Many were potted up for sale at our Spring Plant Sale, making roses a big portion of the income.

Please don't get the idea that Weeks Roses, or any other producer, is willing to provide this service to everyone. It is a tedious and troublesome chore. I had to pull a lot of favors on my dance card... and likely couldn't have succeeded without the help of my former assistant, now Director of Research at Weeks, Christian Bedard.

Over the years, we have now rescued and replanted more than 340 varieties to the collection, varieties like 'Grey Pearl', 'Faberge', 'Tiki' and 'Mission Bells'. The rescue effort has slowed some now because the general health is much better. But you never know when a plant will suddenly begin to fail.



OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: 'Jacob's Ladder' spring 2020 and 'La Jolla'. ABOVE, TOP TO BOTTOM: 'Mrs Sam McGredy', 'Silverado'. All photos Tom Carruth.





ABOVE: Huntington Rose Garden in Spring 2005. Photo Tom Carruth.

Now to the other side of the collection coin, finding those key missing mid-century varieties and restoring them to the garden. I cut budwood from local public rose gardens, with their permission. Descanso Gardens particularly had an abundance of candidates. I scoured lists from collector's nurseries like Burlington Roses, Antique Rose Emporium, Roses Unlimited, Rose Petals Nursery and others. Forgive me if I neglected to mention your nursery. A few of those varieties include 'Almondeen', 'Amber Queen' and 'Wild Ginger'.

Good rose friends, Chris Greenwood, Gregg Lowery of Vintage Gardens, Tom Bonfigli, Eleanor Ackerman and Stephen Rulo were also happy to share from their own collections or near-by sources. More than 450 varieties have been added to the collection from this effort. A few of those varieties include 'Friendship', 'La Jolla', 'Girona', 'Mrs. Sam McGredy' and 'Silverado'.

You never know when a source will suddenly turn up. I'm still on the lookout for more. By answering an email about a failing garden in Northern California, I unexpectedly discovered a source for the old 'Dr. A.J. Verhage' (Golden Wave), a major genetic contributor to

many yellows. He will be coming to the collection next spring. 'Helen Trauble' continues to elude me.

In striking up a conversation at a lecture, I found a source for 'Jacob's Ladder', one of my own varieties I thought was extinct. Turns out it was in the back garden of a neighbor only four blocks from my home, the late Rev. Colin Brown. He was so proud of 'his' plant and would come visit it frequently. His plant provided big sprays of brilliant red blooms for his memorial service and burial last year.

Beyond being a beautiful place to linger, the garden represents an extensive assemblage enjoyed by thousands of visitors each year, except this year. Our collection is unusual amongst rose gardens by the sheer number of varieties. Each variety in the collection is labeled with its name, class, and date of introduction, offering a wonderful resource for rose fanciers... and a fanciful resource for rose wanderers. The spring bloom begins in April and extends beyond Thanksgiving, thanks to Southern California's mild climate. When times improve, please come visit.