

## Stephen and Adrienne's garden

*By Angela Morgan. Words in italics and photos are Stephen's (unless otherwise acknowledged).*

As many members of the Sydney Heritage Roses group know, Stephen and Adrienne Abrahams' garden is out of town at South Maroota, on the way to Wiseman's Ferry. They have kindly opened their large shed to enable us to receive our delivery of Neutrog products, which benefits our group financially, and enables us to fill up our own more modestly sized sheds with our choice of fertilisers, mulches and soil tonics. We have tantalising glimpses of the garden as we drive through, but there is rarely time to linger. Our group has visited Stephen and Adrienne's garden in the past, but for those who missed out and for all of us to enjoy again, here is an opportunity to discover a little more about this garden and its roses.

The garden is spaced over about three acres, within a property of twenty-one acres. The property is on a wooded hillside, with some areas that are flat and meadow-like, a northeast aspect, and many eucalypts and other established native trees. Native animals and birds abound.

Stephen's interest in heritage roses comes from his mother, Wilga, *'who had an extensive rose garden in the 1960-70's, her passion being repeat flowering Heritage roses. Encouragement from my wife, Adrienne, greatly helped.'*

In 1973 Wilga Abrahams planted a small heritage rose garden at Grossman House in Maitland. In 2018, the garden being in poor maintenance, Stephen undertook the ongoing care of the roses. *'It is a mix of Noisettes, Bourbons and Musks, and the 20 roses are healthy and stable.'*

Indeed they are. I visited this garden with our Sydney group, and I still have a vivid memory of **Cornelia** in full bounteous bloom.

Those of us who went to the working bee at the late Helen Carroll's former garden in Pymble, when we were offered all of the heritage roses and other plants which were growing there, will remember Stephen and his keen eye for treasures for Wilga's garden. Unfortunately both **Stanwell Perpetual** and **Mutabilis** didn't survive at Grossman House. Two other roses from Helen's garden, **Albertine** and **Else Poulsen**, are now flourishing out at South Maroota.

**Else Poulsen** propagates well from cuttings, and from the rose in Helen's garden Stephen has propagated several which are now thriving in various gardens. Glennis has one, as does Sue Ballinger, but the first one propagated went not to a member but to Helen's son Andrew, in memory of his mother's garden and her love of heritage roses.

Stephen first learned about HRIA from Judyth McLeod, who had a rambling nursery full of treasures at Bowen Mountain. His first heritage rose purchases were **Zéphirine Drouhin** and **Reine Victoria**, one of Wilga's favourites.

**What is it you like about heritage roses?** *'I like the structure of Heritage roses, especially their framework, whether they be shrubs or climbers. Of course, there are the wide varieties of scent, ethereal colours, and interesting histories. I guess I like any rose which is of quality, including scented Hybrid Teas such as **Mr Lincoln**, as well as many David Austin types. His shrub, **Comte de Champagne** is hard to beat. Some Hybrid Teas have great structure, such as **Elina**, and **Heaven Scent**, most however really do appear as a bunch of sticks, as they say.'*

**Since those first two, which other heritage roses have you acquired?** *'I have concentrated mostly on repeat flowering types, hence there are Noisettes, Bourbons, Teas.*

*Noisette varieties include **Rêve d'Or**, **Duchesse d'Auerstaedt**, **Lamarque**, **Blush Noisette**, **Madame Alfred Carrière** and **Elie Beauvillian**.*

*Teas include **Peace 1902**, **G. Nabonnand**, **Marie van Houtte**, **Madam Antoine Mari**, **Lady Hillingdon**, **Cl Devoniensis** (monstrous), **Sombreuil**, **Monsieur Tillier** (up to 15 feet tall), **Madame Lambard** and **Maman Cochet**. We also have a vigorous **E. Veyrat Hermanos**, which remains the only rose that we dead head the buds, before its inevitable balling! Occasionally the flowers open and they are stunning. Perhaps I should move it.'*



**Rêve d'Or** with pink **Cicely Lascelles** (Climbing Hybrid Tea, Alister Clark 1932)

The description of **E. Veyrat Hermanos** from *HelpMeFind* indicates that it is a climbing tea of carmine pink and apricot yellow blend, with a strong sweet fragrance. It has large, semi-double to double flowers, and blooms in flushes throughout the season. Height up to three metres.

It sounds lovely, what a shame it balls. With that height description I'm not surprised it's vigorous!

'Bourbons include **Madame Isaac Pereire**, **Reine Victoria** and its sport **Madame Pierre Oger**, **Souvenir de la Malmaison**, and **Kathleen Harrop**.

There are many more, including **Else Poulsen**, bred 1924, the neatest and most floriferous rose in the garden. There are several Hybrid Musks, including the parent **Trier**.' (See below)

I was wondering what Stephen meant by 'the parent **Trier**.' From the reference section in *HelpMeFind*:

Botanica's Roses Book (Dec 1998) Page(s) 603:

**Trier** Rambler. Description... small, almost single, creamy yellow flowers with a rosy flush... In England, the Reverend Joseph Pemberton crossed 'Trier' with a series of other roses to create a group of Modern Shrubs called the Hybrid Musks ...

Other roses in the garden:

'**Fimbriata** (light pink Hybrid Rugosa, 1890), found buried at the back of a nursery, **Königin von Dänemark** (medium pink Alba, 1816) with its scent of myrrh, and the small species climber *Rosa moschata*, which flowers at the height of summer.

Twenty-two years ago, my wife purchased a \$1 plant at a hardware store, planted it, and it never flowered. Fifteen years later I moved it and did not winter prune it. The rose subsequently flowered to the most exquisite moss flower, which has been identified as **James Mitchell**. Probably our most interesting rose.'



(Left) **James Mitchell**. Moss. France, 1861. Deep pink, lilac shading. Strong fragrance. Once-blooming spring or summer. Height: up to 150cm. Width: up to 120cm. very disease resistant. (Information from *HelpMeFind*)

**How many of your roses have survived over time?**

'Most of the roses remain, they being about 15 years planted. The Teas and Noisettes do best. We don't water, or spray, they are basically on their own apart from pruning and some fertilising. Consequently, we have some good years, and some not so good.'

**What about favourites?**

'My favourite group is probably the Noisettes, along with Teas. Unfortunately, they require room, unsuited to small urban yards. Hopefully there remain enough like-minded people with some space for them to continue. One sees **Crépuscule** about in gardens quite often. Sometimes it seems to rival **Iceberg** in popularity, and while common, both are excellent roses, and maybe a positive sign for the future?

Favourite rose, is easy ... **Rêve d'Or**. Easy to look after, prune or not. Strong Tea scent, strong flowering flushes, several times. Attractive flowers with different colour tones. **Rêve d'Or** was also an important parent, including the recently bred **Adie**, which produces the best flower in our garden!'





'Recently bred **Adie**' (see below) ... What's this? I looked up [HelpMeFind](#) once more:

(Left) **Adie**. Noisette. Pink blend, lighter reverse. Strong fragrance. Medium to large, very full (41+ petals), borne mostly solitary bloom form. Blooms in flushes throughout the season. Tall, upright. Medium glossy dark green foliage. Height of 300 cm. **Sunny Boy** x **Rêve d'Or**. Dr Stephen Abrahams (2012).

Congratulations Stephen! It's a gorgeous rose. **Adie** is a diminutive of Adrienne...

Stephen reports that he has 'amateurly bred some roses, especially using the Hybrid musk rose **Trier**. Our best plants

include **Adie**, a **Rêve d'Or** seedling, and **Wilga**, which is a **Trier** seedling, and suspiciously similar to **Cornelia**, though with more scent. It confirms to me a possible parentage of **Cornelia** which is recorded as unknown.'

Not surprisingly, *Reve d'Or* is an Earth-Kind rose, one of only two climbers in that group.'

### An Earth-Kind rose? What is an Earth-Kind rose?

I had to Google this one, although the name gives it away. Roses which receive the label **Earth-Kind®** are those which thrive in a wide variety of situations and soil types, and which are the most naturally pest and disease resistant, including resisting fungal disease. Planting **Earth-Kind®** roses reduces the need to spray chemicals or use fertilizers in our gardens. Once they are established, these roses are also resistant to heat and drought. Plants are rigorously tested before the label can be applied.

When we are not in the middle of another La Niña, resilience in the face of heat and drought will be fantastic!

**Earth-Kind®** roses include heritage roses such as **Cécile Brunner**, **Comtesse De Labarthe** (often sold as **Duchesse de Brabant**), **Else Poulsen**, **Ducher**, **Mutabilis**, **New Dawn**, **Madame Antoine Mari**, **Souvenir de St Anne's** and **Rêve d'Or**.

### From where did you source your roses?

'My plants came from Judyth McLeod. A wonderful rosarian.

Other sources include Green E Roses, and the occasional striking from other plants.'

### Do you have any other rose related interests?

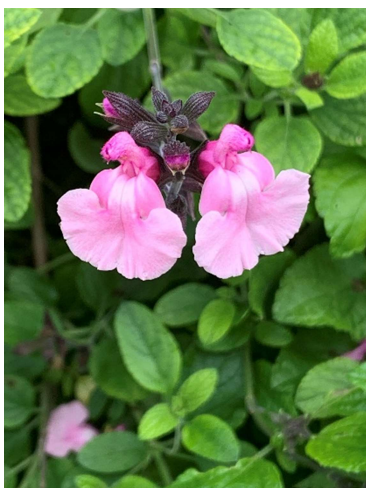
'My other rose related passions have included the collection of first edition rose books, from which one learns much. Often what to do, and sometimes by default what not to do. Despite having many significant books, dating back to 1820, the one book that impressed me most, belongs here in Australia. "Tea Roses, Old Roses for Warm Gardens."

I also work a lot with steel, and design and build structures to support the different types of roses. It helps being a rose grower who can weld, rather than the other way around.'

### Some practical observations from Stephen's experience:

'Water and sun are good. Do not plant large rose plants too close together. Do not stress about disease (rare in this group anyway). Don't plant under gum trees.

There are 600 varieties of *Salvia*, all of which accompany roses very well and are easy to reproduce.'



(Left) Just one example – a low growing soft pink salvia. (Photo by Angela)

Stephen and Adrienne use their knowledge of salvias to lovely effect in the garden they have designed to showcase Adrienne's David Austin roses.

Just for context, I have to admit that I have had very poor results trying to grow David Austin roses in my garden. I tried several in the early days when David Austin roses first burst onto the rose scene, looking so lush and pretty, full of old-fashioned fragrance and with those wonderful names from Chaucer and Shakespeare. The results of my efforts were indeed so poor that I dismissed these roses altogether, and happily became a heritage rose purist... they are so tough and vigorous they thrived no matter what I did, or didn't do.

Oh my goodness, what a revelation David Austin roses are in this garden. They are superb!





**Comte de Champagne**, with **Teasing Georgia** growing tall on the pillar behind.

Adrienne and Stephen have designed a series of four circular gardens, one for each season, with roses in colours to match the season. Within each circle the garden is divided into three sections, one large bed and two smaller ones. At the back in the centre of each large bed Stephen has built an arch, and within is a statue depicting the season.

The summer garden has a colour theme of yellow and white, the female figure holding a sheaf of wheat, showing the bounty of the summer harvest. Two white **Winchester Cathedral** roses frame the arch, while soft yellows fill the bed – **Comte de Champagne**, **Windemere** and **Crocus Rose**.

Descriptions of these three roses give some idea of their delightful combined effect. **Comte de Champagne** – rich yellow fading to soft yellow to champagne pink, **Windermere** – cream with touches of apricot and pink, **Crocus Rose** - soft apricot fading to cream. At each corner of the large bed is a pillar rose, contained within Stephen's sturdy and decorative structures. **Teasing Georgia** is on the left, very vigorous (Stephen calls it a thug) and to the right **The Pilgrim**, both roses full-petalled, cream and yellow, both filling their pillars to capacity.

The two smaller beds within the circle continue the colour scheme of yellow and white roses, the rich yellow of **Molineux** and apricot shades of **Jude the Obscure**. Small-growing salvias in soft pastel colours provide contrast.

The air is filled with the mixed fragrance of all these roses.



Autumn's colours are pastels, with contrast from blue and purple clematis which share the arch with the warm apricot blooms of **Leander**, (left) which Stephen finds has two huge flushes a year and is a strong and excellent rose.

They all look excellent to me!

Other roses in the Autumn beds are the soft pinks of **St Cecilia**, **Tamora** and **Königin von Dänemark**.

Winter is red! With pinks to soften...**Brother Cadafel** on the arch, **Anne Bolyn** and dark crimson **Falstaff** filling the beds, rich crimson **Prospero** on the pillars.

Last is Spring, in pink. The vigorous **Mayor of Casterbridge**, **Gertrude Jekyll**, **Heritage**, **Wildeva** (another

vigorous grower, as perhaps it should be with that name), and **Radio Times**, big, bushy and highly scented. **Eglantine** and clematis on the arch.

All is not perfection in paradise however, unfortunately. Not long before I visited, wallaby attack overnight had caused lots of damage in some of the beds. Stephen has now worked out how to stop the wallabies from strolling in, by gating the entrance to each circle, and fortunately the local wallabies don't simply leap the fences. Possums seem to have concentrated on the lower section of the garden, on the heritage roses growing along the fence in particular.



There is so much to see in this garden. A bank below the house is filled with a mix of flowering gums, shrubs, and roses, designed by Adrienne. Here is the rose **Adie**, next to some steps. Here too is **Vick's Caprice** (pink Hybrid Perpetual, 1889). (Right)

Back at the house beside the drive Stephen showed me what he meant by saying that **Elina**, a modern hybrid tea, is not just a few bare sticks. A tall bush full of healthy dark green foliage, it towers above us both. Stephen gathers the long-stemmed cream blossoms in bunches of twelve at a time to take inside.

**And Stephen's plea from the heart:** *'If anyone has a remedy for stopping brush tailed possums along a rose fence, then they are doing better than me.*

Thank you, Stephen and Adrienne, for sharing the story your garden and your roses with us. We thank you too for accepting delivery, storage, and pick up of all our Neutrog products, never mixing up anyone's orders (miraculous!), and helping us all load our treasure into our cars.



**Ghislaine de Féligonde** (Hybrid Multiflora, 1916), on a possum-free fence!

For references, see the *HelpMeFind* (HMF) website <[www.helpmefind.com/rose/plants.php](http://www.helpmefind.com/rose/plants.php)>

### **Addendum**

This article was published in the November 2022 Sydney Group Newsletter. In June 2023 Stephen and Adrienne re-located to Maitland, in the NSW Hunter Valley.

**Stephen provided the following update in March 2025:** We have established a nice rose garden in the front yard. Original plants I took from South Maroota, and which have settled in well, include **Duke of Edinburgh** (Hybrid Perpetual), **James Mitchell** (Moss), **Adie** (Noisette) and Species roses, including *Rosa pendulina* and *R. forrestiana*. Cuttings were taken of **Cornelia**, **Else Poulsen**, and **Rêve d'Or**; these are now full-size roses and part of the rose garden. Two plants were moved to Grossman House, including my **Jacques Cartier** and another cutting from Helen's **Else Poulsen**.

The other old rose was **Mr Lincoln** which was from my former father in law which he acquired in 1964, and has had roughly 6 moves! It is doing fine here, possibly its last resting spot.

I am also advising and helping National Trust with the roses of Miss Traill's house in Bathurst. They have one treasure which is a 120-year-old example of **Souvenir de Mme Léonie Viennot** growing over a trellis, worth checking out if in Bathurst.