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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No. 28

February 2000

Study Group Leader/Editor: Diana SnapeTreasurer/Membership: Peter Gamham

Dear Members,

It was good to see the gardens and/or garden designs of a number of GDSG members illustrated in *The New Native Garden: Designing with Australian Plants* by Paul Urquhart, reviewed on page 14.1 think the work of five of our professional designers was featured and also six gardens of members. Congratulations to all these members on their contributions. This reminded me of the significant and important part we can each play in showing what can be achieved in our gardens when we use Australian plants in design. Garden visits, as in the Open Garden Scheme or more local occasions, are always valuable but are restricted to one weekend or just one day in a year and only for those people who are able to visit. Otherwise photographs are essential to record the ever-changing scenes within our gardens - if you don't take photos yourself, you could find a friend who does. The editorial committee has started work on our GDSG book and already we're beginning to look for high quality photos (slides or prints) to illustrate many aspects of garden design. Please keep this in mind when visiting other gardens too and remember to record details of location, garden owner &/or designer and time of year, in your own garden, aim to achieve vistas from a number of different viewpoints which will give pleasure to the gardener or garden visitor, as well as looking good in photos.

NEXT MEETINGS

Please see details of these meetings in text (pages 18 & 19)

MELBOURNE: Sunday February 6 at Tony & Joy Roberts'

NE VIC: Sunday February 27 at Barbara Buchanan's

SYDNEY: please contact Jo Hambrett

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CORRESPONDENCE extracts

"I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed all the articles in the last GDSG Newsletter. I'm just distracted at present - there is a Crimson Rosella in full colour about 2m from me through the window feeding on grasses and seeds in the garden bed at the base of my 'fun tree'(there is a welcome swallow using this at present). I came up to Mt Clay this morning and in between showers inspected my plantings of the last 12 months. I have planted up the rockery - even have a Siurt's Desert Pea flowering, plus *Epacris longiflora* and a few others.

Saw some lovely birds on my long walk and the flowers were great too:- lots of different orchids, grasses, lillies, daisies, including *craspedias* and *olearias*, *pimeleas*, *brunonias* (just starting), *goodenias*, *correas*, *wahlenbergias*, *lomandras*; *triggers* (*stylidium*s) everywhere; *Xanthorrhoea minor* is flowering too.

I'm heading off to Tasmania for 3 weeks, with a pretty busy schedule organized. Earlier today I spent two hours digging out *pittosporum* - what a job - there are heaps more to get out but I reckon there are 300 less after the effort today. Back home I should get the *secateurs* busy on the finished and finishing *callistemons* before I go as with this wonderful rain over the past few weeks one can almost hear the growth occurring in the garden!" **Cherree Densley** Vic

The lists of plants Cherree reported from Mt Clay has been somewhat abbreviated and I didn't even start on the birdlist I hope we'll hear about the Tasmanian trip later. DS

"A garden that looks as if it belongs to its environment. Exactly which environment? I can only write about southern Australian; an Australian garden in the north should look rather different - would there be any common threads? What is common to a beach garden, suburban or bush garden? Most of our gardens are

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shrub gardens but do they have to be? Most have shade, I think that is vital, most also have 'soft' hardware, rocks and logs and sleepers and gravel paths instead of stone or brick walls, terraces, balustrades, steps and paths, also urns, statues and fountains. Would these make a garden non-Australian? I have been struggling to come to a definition and all I can really say is a garden of Australian plants. Even this has problems with the rainforest plants looking 'un-Australian' down here. In an old RHS Journal an article shows Mediterranean gardens which look very Australian and use some Australian plants.

*Many of our colourful shrubs have fine leaves which give a distinctive look; lavenders, rosemary, some sages can give the same effect. Our gum trees are unmistakable. We tend not to prune in straight lines but I do not think such pruning should necessarily disqualify if we are serious about wanting to have our plants used in all garden styles, formal etc.. I am coming to think that there is no Australian garden style, just gardens in various styles made using Australian plants." **Barbara Buchanan** Vic*

I agree with Barbara that there can be no single, uniform Australian style. However I think we can define an Australian garden as one which has a distinctive Australian character, largely because its most dominant and conspicuous plants are Australian (and probably a majority of its plants overall.) This applies particularly to the trees. The character would vary because it depends a lot on the 'spirit of place' and there are many, very different, 'places' in Australia. Just as an English garden can be cottage, picturesque, formal, or other styles, an Australian garden can have the different styles we looked at in our classification scheme (NL2-2 and revised in NL9-13). For example a naturalistic garden could be a grasslands g., a grassy woodland g., a heathland g., a coastal g., or one of many other styles based on the type of landscape which influenced it. Apart from the plants used in an Australian garden, we could refer to the way water, rocks and mulch are used; application of ecological principles, presence of wildlife, and other factors. We can certainly picture a formal Australian garden in which Australian plants are used in an innovative way. (It might be worthwhile reproducing the earlier classification scheme in the next NL for the interest of more recent members. Please let me know if you'd like to see it.) DS

"Following the December meeting, I like the suggestion of the Garden Design Study Group preparing a course for APS members as a whole (although if we don't get swamped with registrations we could always extend it to the public at large). It could be for one or two weekends or two Saturdays of hands-on landscaping, starting with a day of lectures on basic design principles and then a second day of practical work, possibly breaking into little groups. The Gardiner's Creek project would be a starting point, and then we could do one concentrating on a small garden as one would find in a unit, or revamping a garden or something to that effect. Even a weekend on rejuvenation would be good.

*Which does bring me to something else. Do you have, or do you know who might have, information on trees and plants that damage building structures. At ASGAP in Qld we had a speaker Nielsen who spoke on plants that affect Qld buildings (both Australian and non-Australian plants). At home here we have an easement at the back of our block which I suspect holds the sewage drains. In our ignorance in early days we planted trees on this easement - two eucalypts and our gorgeous Banksia serrata. The banksia is huge but I am beginning to wonder if there is a danger that the roots will invade the sewage pipes. Your comments would be most welcome." **Nicky Rose** Vic*

The GDSG hasn't organized a weekend in Victoria since September 1997 (when the GDSG hosted the APS Victoria Regional Meeting in Melbourne), so 2000 would be a good time for another one. (Previous weekends were held at Myrree in September 1994 and Warrnambool in March 1996.) Ideally planning would start at the first meeting this year, in February.

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Fortunately eucalypt roots do not invade sewage pipes as readily as roots of many exotic trees do. I have not heard of root problems with banksias and I found no mention of it (with either banksias or eucalypts) in the Encyclopaedia. On the other hand a lot depends on the condition of underground pipes - if they are at all cracked the roots of any trees are likely to be attracted. Do other members have or know of general information available on trees with roots that damage building structures? DS

"I have been to South America. I have had the most wonderful time walking in the cloud forest in Peru where bromeliads, fuchsias, snapdragons and begonias are the natives. Also in the beech forests of Patagonia." **Jennifer Borrell** NSW

It sounds great, Jennifer. When you have caught up on the paperwork and have time, please write and tell us more about it. DS

"I am concerned at the loss of our remnant native flora and the lack of their preservation and use for garden design /landscaping. I enclose 3 letters to and fro with the City of Glen Era which I think explains the problem. I also include the flora survey I did, with older members of SGAP (APS) and the Glen Era Environment Group, of the Huntingdale flora remnants - a wonderful selection for designing - together with the remnant flora in the Huntingdale, Glenhuntiy / Ormond and Elsternwick railway verges. The Herbarium, Melbourne identified these and they are the basis, as you know, of the Ormond East Primary School gardens at the School and Joyce Park (Elster Creek Trail).

! would be pleased if any GDSG members living in this area could give some assistance in maintaining and/or designing. Contacts: Ormond East Primary School -

Friends of Joyce Park

Stefanie Rennick Vic

GDSG members who are interested in any of the information referred to please contact me for further detail. I would encourage any members living in this general area to support Stefanie in any way they can, as I am sure she would welcome help in this ongoing battle. DS

DESIGN

Garden ideals

Barbara Buchanan Vic

I don't remember much about 5th Grade at school but one incident sticks in my mind. We often began the day with 10 minutes of composition on a given topic and selected essays would be read to the class. One day the topic was something like 'My Ideal Garden'. I don't recall the details of what I wrote, it may have included mention of a great bed of beautiful blue larkspurs we once grew but mostly it was along stereotyped lines of neat beds with standard roses, annuals and trimmed lawns. I doubt I included the Silky Oak in the back yard that I used to climb, because it wasn't *garden*. My idea of a garden had been absorbed from my step-mother unquestioned. The other essays read were very much the same except for one which described a much less tidy scene, with rambling paths, unconstrained flowers and a special hidey hole under a weeping tree. When a class vote was taken this won almost unanimously - then the teacher revealed she had written it.

Since the Study Group started and I have thought about what I want in a garden this incident has been much in my mind, not just because it opened new visions and independence of mind for me, but because the rest of the class felt the same. Australian plants did not come into it; this was pre-war and no-one we knew in Perth was growing them although there were a few attempts to use them in public landscaping, witness the avenue of *Eucalyptus citriodora* to commemorate the fallen soldiers of WW1 in

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King's Park and *E ficifolia* of all shades of pink and red lining the road to City Beach. The vast range of small plants we now have available for home gardens were simply not there. They were part of the bush, not gardens as far as most people were concerned. We could pick them by the armful from the roadside anyway.

The point I wanted to make is that it seems the idea of a natural garden had great appeal for us youngsters but we had all been brainwashed into thinking we should prefer neat orderly lines of a completely foreign flora until we were shown it could be otherwise. Another idea we all assumed was that the front garden was there for show, to impress, whatever sort of mess the back yard was. Housewives walked to the shops, neighbours had time to look at the front garden and a brave show was important; the kids certainly didn't play there. This could be seen as a watered down version of the way the grand gardens of Europe were made to impress, a showcase of the owner's power and wealth. Versailles is the classic example, and the fountain gardens of Italy, followed by the gardens of the great houses of England. A true Australian garden eschews ostentation and is altogether a more comfortable place, relying on shapes, textures and foliage and bark colours for its effect.

We all know that aspirations change with experience, ideal gardens along with others, and that fashion can be all important to some people, together with the desire to go one better, have something that no-one else has. But I would argue that for most APS members at least the aim of a natural look is predominant. I would also stick my neck out and argue that we like a certain amount of order, not necessarily showing in obvious rigid lines but in the underlying harmony and balance of shapes and colours, masses and voids. In other words for the gardener to be in control but for this control to be so subtle that it is not obvious unless it is carefully looked for.

I used to talk (write) about being formal close to the house and grading to more relaxed planting further away - I do have space to indulge this - but I now think I really just mean small plants near at hand where they can be watched over and appreciated better, grading to larger shrubs further away. I have gone formal enough to plant rows following the curve of the drive (they don't all survive!) and I may have to trim them a little to keep them in bounds but I hope this can be managed without introducing rigidity - I hope no-one will know it has been done. This amount of pattern is satisfying.

I want it to look as if every plant is just right for its place, really belongs and as plants mature this is going to require judicious use of secateurs too. Already the balance of sun and shade is swinging well to the shade which is to the good so far but I am running out of open sunny spots for such plants as need them to do their best. It is going to be a struggle between my desire to grow showy West Australians and my need for shade. In a dream garden one does not have to make compromises, but in reality choices have to be made so it is vitally important to have clear priorities (but be prepared to alter them occasionally).

A somewhat later vision of the ideal garden is a cool green oasis, lots of shade, greenness, water. Somehow this has to be achieved with plants that tend to greyness in their foliage and limited water availability. There is a real challenge to meet and still have a garden that belongs. Thank goodness I don't live anywhere drier.

The implications for garden design of medium-density inner-suburban living

from <http://www.global-garden.com.au/burnley/sept99dte.htm>

Ruth Beilin

(Ruth Beilin is a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Horticulture and Resource Management at Burnley College.)

The move to higher housing density in inner-suburban areas in Australian cities has significant implications for the way we design gardens in these areas. Most fundamental is a huge change of scale.

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Previously most gardens contained large trees (albeit often too large for the space), but there will be little room for trees except in the streetscape. We will most likely see the use of shrubs pruned as trees. We desperately need indigenous nurseries to fund plant breeding research and selection, so the available plant spectrum is extended.

The other major change is likely to be a move to increased use of hard surfacing. All the common space may be transition space - used for moving through rather than as a focus in itself. We have to rethink how we use hard surfacing in these areas. One solution is to meld the ground plane and the vertical plane - perhaps run similar surfacing materials up the walls. This has the effect of symbolically pushing out the space and making it more than a transition zone and part of the livable space.

The big challenge in these small gardens is to find a sense of place. Once you've determined what it is, I think you should set about dramatising it. The garden can be bold or subdued depending on the mood you wish to create. Careful selection of plant material can help reflect the mood. It is often best to confine your plant choice to a limited range of plants. You might, for example choose bold, dramatic plants in the style of Roberto Burle Marx and treat them like living sculptures. Alternatively you could choose a selection of ferns and let their patterns and textures create a feeling of peacefulness.

To create the illusion of space in a small area, the most effective way is to make use of glass walls that extend the garden into the house and vice versa. Depth can also be created by careful choice of wall colours - white gives the appearance of extending space and interestingly, a matt black on a corner wall can suggest shadow and the illusion of on-going depth.

Another possibility is to make use of reflective pools. Even if the space only allows for a still pool that runs along the bottom edge of a wall, it will add depth to the space. Running water, too, can create this effect. Small gardens often lend themselves to contemporary style water features that sit flat against a wall, but bring light and movement into the space.

Courtyards can be difficult because the walls often create deep shade, except for a burst of hot sun in the middle of a summer day. To deal with this, it is important to choose plants that have the environmental tolerance to deal with these conditions. I think you have to live with the fact that these areas will be largely shaded. You can create shade structures easily in a small area and this may be the best solution for the midday sun - areas of hard surfacing can get very hot.

Courtyards also lend themselves to container gardening and once again I must emphasise the importance of the vertical plane. Containers can actually be built into the walls at different heights. Walls themselves need to be reassessed. Traditionally, walls have tended to be made of materials that discouraged people from leaning against them. In such small spaces walls need to be friendlier and part of the living space, and of the whole design.

I think we can make much better use of wall colour, and not just use invisible colours. Coloured galvanised iron can be used very effectively. The Sante Fe gardening style is a good example of the use of colour. Often in these gardens you will see a courtyard tiled in rich ochres, purples and midnight blues. Two of the walls might be white and the other picks up the wonderful deep colour. It's very exciting.

We can use plant materials in exciting ways too, to give walls texture and life. I like the idea of areas being cut into the foliage and three dimensional tiles hung on the wall - the wall becomes a feature wall.

The important thing in a small space like a courtyard is that there must be a great attention to detail. Care must be taken with edging and transition zones. Ornamentation and furniture must be kept to scale.

Keeping a sense of scale, attention to detail and reassessment of how we use hard surfacing and walls areas are the major considerations in meeting these new design challenges.

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GARDENS

A 'secret' garden

Cherree Densiey Vic

There have been delightful novels and at least one film made about the discovery, usually within the boundaries of a huge neglected country garden, of a secret area hidden behind walls and impenetrable thickets of vegetation. A 'secret garden' has been discovered by accidentally stumbling across a well-hidden, overgrown entrance, and once inside, the explorer has had the most marvellous experience of wandering through what was, usually from a previous generation, the creative realm of an inspired gardener. The concept has always intrigued me.

If we translate the experience to draw a parallel, it is not unlike when one wanders through bushland, to come, unexpectedly, across a clearing to find a wonderland of the smaller flowering plants. (Usually, and more realistically, it is where the local shire has excavated years ago for gravel or cleared to build a fire dam and the scraping of the bulldozer blade has removed large trees letting in light and sunshine for the smaller plants to revegetate - one finds wonderful orchids especially in these areas).

There is a certain amount of romantic anticipation in wandering along a tiny overgrown pathway and then to experience wonderment as it suddenly opens up to reveal an area, which seems to appear 'for your eyes only'.

So this is the inspiration which has 'sparked' the design for my new garden. However one won't be able to find it within the existing garden, but beyond it - out of sight to anyone within the present garden, and not normally looked at by anyone (except Ian's sheep), and just waiting to be discovered by any visitors. I know for sure that no-one from the three neighbouring farms will be able to see it. (Ian says that the new area can be seen from about 2kms away from the road over the top of Crossly Hill, but I doubt it!!)

I have persuaded Ian to let me have a further area from an existing paddock - it will be 35m by 55m or nearly 2000 square metres in area, (we don't do anything by halves in the Western District of Victoria) and to the north of the existing garden jutting out into the ever-diminishing and very flat paddock beyond. The 'borrowed' landscape will be looking across the flat drainage swamps towards the old sand dunes of Killarney beach - all now rich green pastures. The existing garden has been planted with medium sized trees and bushes along the northern boundary to provide a windbreak for the rest of the garden and so will now form a visual impenetrable barrier to this new area.

The area will be ploughed and then a pathway will be formed with a front-end loader. The pathway will be go down to the bedrock, which in this area is about half a metre below the surface of the soil. This bedrock is called tuff rock, formed when the underlying sandstone was fused by the heat and pressure of the volcanic action from nearby Tower Hill about 25,000 years ago. (Incidentally our wonderful view across the paddocks to Tower Hill will now be very accessible from the 'secret garden'. It is one of my deepest regrets that I did not take this view into account when I landscaped the existing garden - one has to go outside the front gate to look across to Tower

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Hill!). This tuff rock is extremely hard, sparks fly from it if it is hit by a sledge hammer, and will make a fairly rough and undulating pathway. The removed topsoil will be used to mound up the remainder, which will be contoured, not with 'silly hills' (Geoff Simmons Qld, Newsletter 25-3) and then closely planted. The whole area will be mulched heavily before planting to suppress weeds right from the start and to help consolidate the soil. The soil is fine-grained acidic black volcanic loam and the underlying tuff rock gives an alkaline reaction. Physically, it sets like concrete in the summer with ever widening cracks and in winter sticks like glue!! However it is reasonably workable in spring and autumn. (I'll need Ian to get out that plough very soon). I find that plants, apart from local ones which do very well here in Killarney, are those from coastal far SW of Western Australia.

So what will I plant in my Secret Garden? I want to try and create one of those 'clearings' - just very little plants and, bearing in mind that with no windbreak at all to the screaming westerlies, screaming north-westerlies and screaming hot or cold northerlies, if the plants are not matting or mounding they will just lift up and blow away like tumbleweeds!! The idea of creating a 'living carpet' of vegetation is strongly appealing and should prove quite a challenge.

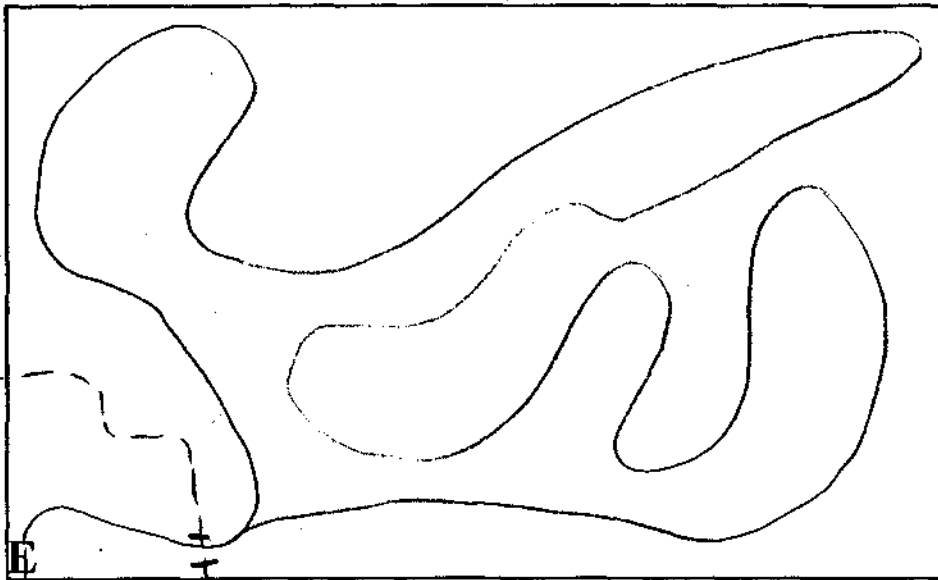
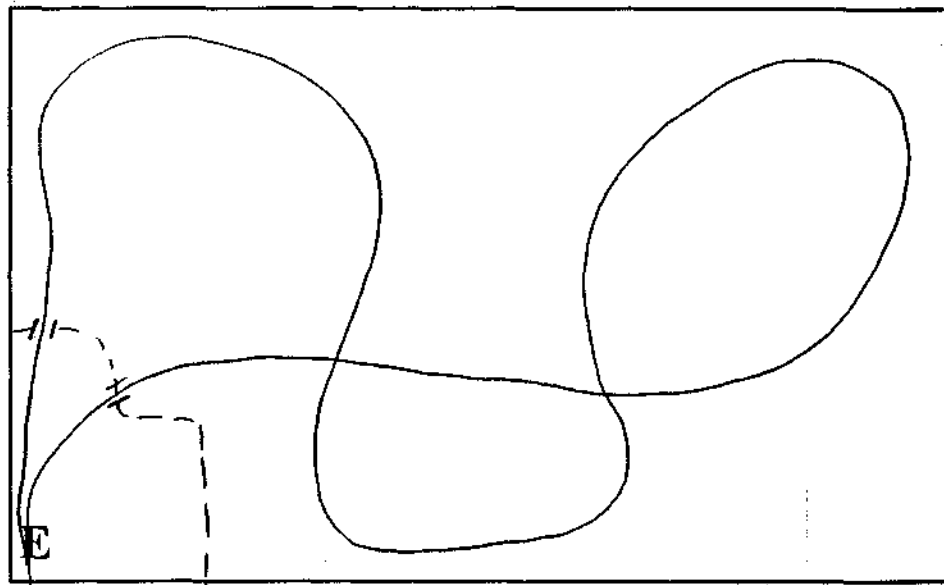
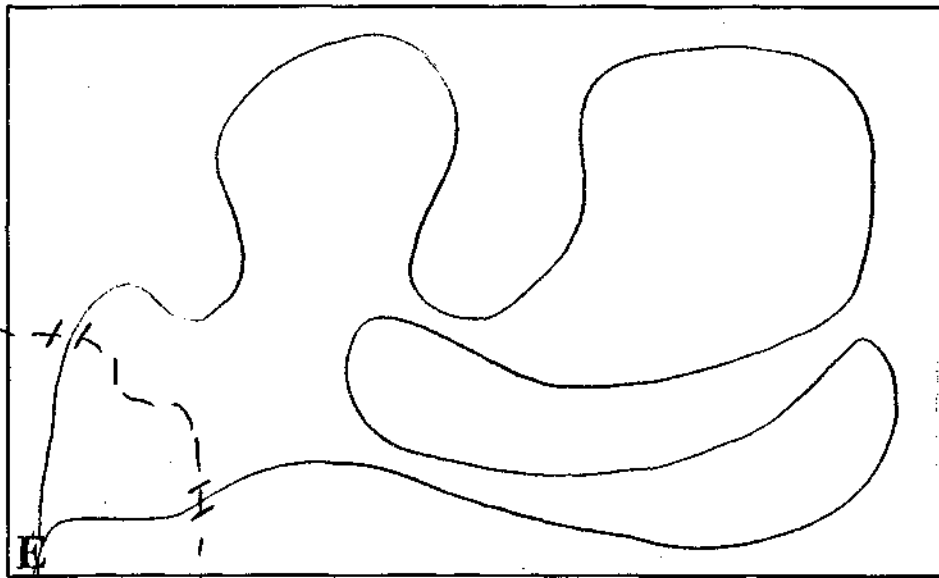
I shall start to propagate from the following list in order to plant next autumn:

Banksia integrifolia 'Prostrate Form', *B. petiolahs*, *B repens*, *brachyscomes*, *Chrysocephalum semipapposum*, *C. baxteri*, *Correa* 'Western Pink Star', *Correa pulchella* 'York Peninsula', *Correa* 'Glenelg River Red', *dampieras*, *disphyma*, *Eremophila glabra* 'Prostrate forms' *Eremophila biseratta*, *Goodenia ovata* 'Prostrate Form', *grevilleas* (possibly *G. preissii*), *Helichrysum scorpioides*, *Hemiandra pungens*, *Hibberita grossilarifolia*, *isotomas*, *Kennedia prostrata* (white and red forms), *Kunzea pomifera*, *K. ambigua* 'Prostrate form', *mazus*, *Mentha australis*, *Myoporum parvifolium* - several forms, *pratias*, *Pultenaea pedunculata* (top plant), *Scaevola albida* (local form), *Thryptomene saxicola* 'Prostrate White' and violas. As we are close to the sea, I'll try and propagate the local Spinifex with its marvellous rounded heads of spiny seeds to plant and let run among the rest. The local *Clematis microphylla* might look good sprawling around too.

And how will anyone find how to get into this garden? Well that's the secret! (However, I will give you a clue. Find the whispering grove of Allocasuarinas and push your way underneath them to find the secret entrance). I had thought originally that a tunnel could be excavated but this was a little too ambitious!! The area, as I mentioned is 35m x 55m. I enclose three rough plans of how the pathway could be shaped. I welcome any ideas on an alternative plan as I do for additional plants. I also welcome initial reaction to the whole idea of a 'Secret Garden'. Plants need to be mat growing or VERY low and able to sprawl into the 'living carpet' of my secret garden, (i.e. nothing to lift the eyes upwards - the 'borrowed landscape' of Tower Hill in the distance and the old sand dunes to the north should do this).

The idea of a 'secret garden' is very appealing and brings back childhood memories. I also really like the concept of 'living carpets' or 'tapestries' of prostrate plants. Please send in your ideas for the pathways - choose one of Cherree's plans or draw your own - and for additional plants. It would also be interesting to work out a possible 'tapestry' arrangement of some of the plants that Cherree has listed above. DS

9 CHERREE'S SECRET GARDEN ----SOME IDEAS



- *existing garden is along southern boundary
- *exit/enter is at same point - in SW corner beneath *Allocasuarina verticillatus*- MARKED **E**
- *natural seepage/drainage line is marked in -----
- *mounding will be constructed between pathways -ie pathways will be below ground level
- *NO PLANTS TO BE ABOVE ANKLE HEIGHT

Paul Thompson's garden

Chris Larkin Vic

On a very pleasant sunny Sunday afternoon the Melbourne Branch of GDSG met in a courtyard, shaded by a large Red Cedar (*Toona australis* or *T. ciliata*), at the home of Paul and Pam Thompson in Elms Rd Mooroolbark. Paul is a well known landscape designer and we were there to take a look at his back yard. Pam and Paul have lived on the property, which originally belonged to the Elms family, since 1971. They have built on to the original 6.5 square cottage and converted the stables into a studio space.

Paul described the use that they have made of the land as personal and experimental. There is a healthy vegetable garden and fruit trees positioned to the north for maximum sun. A large amount of land at the back of the house has been fenced off for a dam and chickens and there is a section that is Pam's exotic garden.

Paul pointed out that they are positioned at the top of a rise i.e. no water drains on to the property. He also said there were numerous drains to 'harvest' the rainfall. A series of ponds and watercourses around half the house, which ultimately drain to the dam, form the visible part of the system of water harvesting. To get to the front door of the house you walk on a timber bridge with water gently flowing over rocks from near the house, passing under the bridge and then on into a pond.

It appears that a number of factors - the drainage system, being at the top of a rise, a lack of topsoil and the large number of mature trees, have resulted in a very dry garden environment. Paul does not believe in general watering. They water the vegetables and fruit trees and Paul waters his amazing invention - a fern wall - so that in the garden generally it is very much a case of survival of the fittest. Paul said that he is interested in the tolerance of plants when put to these sort of harsh extremes. This is a garden dominated by large trees and large shrubs that are sometimes woody and straggly. Combined with an understory of grasses and tufting plants such as dianella the overall effect is naturalistic where it succeeds and somewhat barren where experimentation has been less successful and renewal has either not been attempted or is in its infancy.

Paul is still keen on buying plants and planting them out. He describes himself as a collector. He also has plans to extend the garden at a future date into that part of the property which contains the dam. In this direction there are good views of the Dandenongs that Pam and Paul are eager to preserve and to take advantage of from as far back as the house itself.

Two garden visits

Pat Webb Vic

We visited two (out of three possible) gardens on Saturday November 6 during APS Geelong's weekend.

Tony Cavanagh's garden at Ocean Grove

I had enjoyed Tony's article in *Growing Australian* APS Vic NL of September 1999 on 'Rejuvenating an old garden'. The article had come out of discussion at a recent APS Geelong meeting.

Tony's garden is on an acre of land about 2km from the sea. It is about 20 years old and full of so many interesting plants; many big trees which must have altered the micro-climate and soil moisture content hugely since Tony started the garden.

I sympathise with Tony when he talks about plants becoming old and scruffy with age but I do feel we have to be 'bold and brave' and remove some of the older plants. Whether we renew with the same or different species perhaps more appropriate to the changed conditions is the challenge.

Quoting from Tony's article - "when large shrubs die they leave unsightly holes in the garden ... all too often you are faced with trying to establish a small replacement plant in a shaded, dry area." For me, I enjoy the new vista; this often gives me the opportunity to change certain areas in the garden. However I do admit these decisions cause much discussion in this household. I am quite keen to use the secateurs and saw and 'have a go' - but John is far more cautious!

'Half a Chance', Rosalind Smallwood's garden at Point Lonsdale

The second garden John and I visited was a complete contrast, being a young garden about 4 years old but, due to inundation while the house was being built, planting is even more recent. Many plants are still too small to get the full effect. I would so enjoy seeing this garden in two years time. As Rosalind was away, she left some interesting notes about her aims in the garden and what she is trying to create. These were excellent and useful to have. She is using indigenous species, with grasses very prominent. I quote from her notes: "Because our local plants don't offer much visual drama, it becomes clear that a strong design structure was needed for good presentation of both the house and the garden. I decided to limit the number of species used, but to repeat the planting of those species for maximum impact." This was most impressive and I think that in a year to 18 months it will be great. I would have liked to ask Rosalind about on-going maintenance of the grasses. Will she cut back, burn or let them seed and take out the older plants when they become large and scruffy - as they can (especially in a smaller garden - not acreage). I loved the pool and the two areas of unlined soaks to retain as much stormwater as possible. In the middle of the garden, Rosalind had a sculpture known as '*Ofeariarustics*', the work of a Geelong metalworker, Craig McLachlan - lovely to see and settling in very well to the garden.

Two interesting visits and so very different; both lovely Australian gardens.

Both Tony and Rosalind were members of the GDSG for a number of years. APS Geelong is one District Group that has been a member for many years also.

I agree with Pat's comments about what should happen when "plants become old and scruffy with age". I think it is always worthwhile trying drastic measures before its removal - severe pruning, sometimes to almost ground level - to give the plant a final chance. DS

The wonderful coastal garden of Jane and Peter Burke was open in January for the Open Garden Scheme, in conjunction with their neighbours' garden. I visited 'Offshore' twice - first when it was open to the public and about 2000 people visited over the weekend, then a few days later to take photographs of this most successful garden. Jane works as a coastal vegetation management consultant and contributes articles to the "Age".

~~The following description is taken from Jane Burke's Open Garden Scheme handout:~~

"Most of the plants used to revegetate the natural bush areas are indigenous species of local provenance. These plants are not watered or fertilised. Some understorey areas are weeded by hand to protect orchids and other small ephemeral species. Conservation of coastal understorey species, some of which face local extinction, is an important part of this management strategy. The gardens also provide seed and cuttings for propagation of local provenance taxa. Many wild plant species are being trialled to assess suitability in more formal landscape applications.

To continue a bushland atmosphere from the hinterland to garden, meandering walkways of stepped pier beams, granitic gravel and shellgrit give structure and form. Moonahs and she-oaks are progressively planted to replace senescent tea-trees. Weed control is maintained on a seasonal basis to prevent seed dispersal.

A gravel garden features dune plants - Knobby Club Rush *Isolepis nodosa*, Spear Grass *Stipa stipoides*, Cushionbush *Leucophyta brownii*, Fan-flower *Scaevola pallida* and *Correaalba*. A Wallaby Grass lawn is mowed once or twice a year, the convenient excuse being that the seed will later be harvested for further native lawn establishment contracts in autumn. The weeping trees are an endemic from SW W.A., *Agonis flexuosa*; she-oaks *Allocasuarina verticillata* axe planted as a windbreak, near a trial area of Wallaby Grass cell planting. Moonah *Melaleuca lanceolata*, *A. verticillata*, *Bursaria spinosa* and Boobiialla *Myoporum insulare* are being planted as replacement species for senescent tea-trees. The aim is to recreate the diverse coastal woodland that existed here before colonisation.

The reasons for the localised demise of stands of tea-tree are complex. Prior to the arrival of white man, tea-tree was confined to a 100 metre band around the coast. After clearing and other disturbance, it has now opportunistically spread inland and has become a pest in some areas. Now these trees are old, with limited root systems due to crowding and competition for light and nutrients, lacking the vigour to withstand three years of drought. To put the nail in the coffin, possums preferentially graze on the softer growth tips of stressed tea-tree, rather than the less palatable foliage of more robust trees.

Down a curved series of steps to two small ponds. They provide habitat for frogs, skinks and water insects. Murray River rainbow fish control mosquito larvae. Flax-lilies *Dianellatasmatica* and *D. longifolia*, native mint *Mentha diemenica*, Running Postman *Kennedia prostrata*, Morning-flag *Patersonia occidentalis*

and *Poa poiformis* grow around pond verges. Leaves of the Marsh-flower *Villarsia reniformis* float on the water surface.

In the bush behind 'Offshore', tea-tree were removed to encourage the restoration of a diverse coastal bushland and understorey. The regeneration is only three years old. The sedge is Coast Sword-sedge *Lepidospermum gladiatum*, groundcover *Dichondra repens*. Some dead trees are retained for nesting and foraging habitat. Thickets of Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma* provide a continuum of refuge for small animals and birds, moving between the gardens and Mornington Peninsula National Park."

Visits to Queensland gardens

Barbara Kennedy Vic

Paul and I have just returned from a quick trip to Queensland. Only a 60th birthday party invitation was needed to get us there.

We first visited Myall Park near Glenmorgan - Dave Gordon's dream. Although now needing a lot of TLC, it is a wonderful garden. Large in area (130 acres) it has a great variety of plants. We found it peaceful, pleasant and interesting. (Nita Lester and committee are on the lookout for volunteers to help maintain the garden.) (*I know GDSG members Lyn & Peter Reilly are active Friends of Myall Park. DS*)

Another interesting garden visited was Kerry and Annabelle Rathie's garden at Greenbank. Their garden was, in contrast to the arid garden of Myall Park, a tropical haven. We had a walk through their rainforest as well and saw many rare and unusual plants. Kerry, a geneticist, was doing a lot of grafting experimentation.

A third garden of interest we visited was that of Bails McIntyre in the Tamworth area. Bails has, in 10 years, built her own house manually and established a wonderful garden, all the time increasing the vegetation around it. Every room has views of the garden. Some of the trees were ancient-looking e.g. an *Acacia baileyana*, even though it was less than 10 years old. There were a great variety of plants. The warmer, wetter climate combined with the slightly acid clay-loam soil meant that they had a quicker growth and the garden was a haven for birds.

We both came home full of ideas and enthusiasm.

Tropicalissimo gardens

Anne Thompson NSW

The following is extracted from a talk under the title 'The Sydney garden: where is it headed?', presented by Anne to the Horticultural Media Association at the RBG in Sydney in July 1999, and reproduced as an article in 'Landscape Outlook' Sept, 1999.

It may be a surprise to many of you that while we in Sydney have been indulging our passion for every other garden style not remotely connected to our climate and conditions, the rest of the world has been embracing *tropicalissimo*, that exuberant school which celebrates dramatic form and exotic foliage.....

If you think about it, we have been doing *tropicalissimo* in Sydney for years, although public opinion labelled it rather tacky. Perhaps, because it was all too easy to achieve, there was no struggle to achieve the 'look'. We also committed the ultimate marketing sin of not giving it a name with a trendy ring.....

So what defines *tropicalissimo*? Is it just the plant palette - all those lusty gargantuan plants with form, foliage and vibrant flowers - or does it also encompass the structure of the garden?

Many *tropicalissimo* gardens evoke jungle understorey, some are cool sanctuaries, others rely on

minimalistic sculptural plants like cycads and dracaenas in austere settings.....

Tropicalissimo works wonderfully well in the totally artificial environment of the inner city. It can instantly transport us from the urban to the wild. A few oversized plants immediately create a sense of intimacy: our own jungle book in our backyard.....

Tropicalissimo may not be for everyone or every situation but here is a gardening style we can do better than nearly every other serious gardening nation.

Other Australian plants mentioned by Anne Thompson were *crinum*s, *Gynerium* lilies, native ginger, palms, bold glossy grasses and *Dicksonia antarctica*.

BOOKS, MAGAZINES & THE INTERNET

***The New Native Garden: Designing with Australian Plants* by Paul Urquhart**

(Lansdowne 1999)

reviewed by **Diana Snape** Vic

This is the first book to focus clearly on the use of Australian plants in garden design. It is a most attractive book, 222 pages in full colour, with many beautiful photographs. I have mentioned already that six gardens of members were featured plus the work of five of our professional designers. The aims and views presented in the book are very similar to those of the GDSG. It begins with a look at the history of gardens in Australia and the use of Australian plants in them. In writing of a 'truly Australian style', Paul Urquhart puts the use of 'art and decorative elements distinguishable as Australian' ahead of 'plants to reflect the character of the overall landscape' - I would reverse this order of importance.

The section on building a garden is thorough, covering the 'big picture', design principles, getting started and choosing plants. There is a long section on colour (the 'living palette') with mainly close up photos. Garden style as 'the convergence of art and nature' is well treated, with reference to a selection of styles and the relevance of climate. Twelve individual gardens of different types are described, with photos and plans of parts of these gardens; the accompanying illustrations are disappointing. One name I'd question is a 'meadow garden' - not very Australian! (Grassland garden is probably a more appropriate term.)

Design detail, including access routes, boundaries and pools, are followed by a short treatment of 'design principles in action' and a rather mixed grouping of topics including groves, garden art and attracting wildlife! In 'plant selection' about 50 plants (in 7 categories) are described in some detail with photographs. I think this is a somewhat limited approach with too much focus on plants of and for the Sydney region. A better treatment could be to discuss families or genera of plants and their roles in garden design with less emphasis on individual species. The section on garden care includes pruning techniques, with details for some favourite plants (only 5). Mulching and low water use are mentioned and pests and diseases receive a lot of attention (useful - but is it part of garden design?). Finally there is a resource list, good to have but not extensive.

Altogether a book I would recommend all GDSG members borrow or buy and read. It is well done and

contains many good ideas. Unfortunately there are minor errors and typos which should have been edited out, but these do not spoil the overall enjoyment of the book.

Gordon Ford: *The Natural Australian Garden* by **Gordon Ford** with **Gwen Ford** (Blooming Books 1999) reviewed by **Diana Snape** Vic

Although he did not live to see his book in print, just before his death Gordon Ford held some of the page proofs in his hands, which must have given him great satisfaction. It is not a long book (112 pages) but it's liberally illustrated with historic black and white and beautiful coloured photographs. There is a moving prologue by Morag Fraser and an apt foreword by Graeme Law. The book reveals Gordon Ford as a wonderful, gentle man as well as a perceptive designer and a creative gardener. I like the quotes "We must feel part of the land we walk on and love the plants that grow there... if we are to achieve a spirit in a garden." and "The flora, fauna and landscape of a nation contribute to the identification of a national soul."

Gordon outlines his design influences - his childhood landscape, then later the Eltham scene and his mentor Ellis Stones. Influential books included Brenda Colvin's *'Land and Landscape'* and Sylvia Crowe's *'Tomorrow's Landscape'*. He identifies three important influences on the natural garden style in Australia as being the informality of the 18th century landscape school in England, the cottage garden movement and the older Japanese garden culture. Key factors were the recognition of masses and voids and the principles of asymmetry. He began work in 1952 and pays tribute to the pioneer nurserymen; he regretted the preference then of many people for the imported over the indigenous (don't we still!).

In design principles he discusses creating a bush garden. There are examples of his favourite genera for upper, middle and lower storey plants, and groundcovers, grasses and reeds. He loved working with rocks - "My heart sings when I see a truckload of boulders coming onto a job" - and also with water.

In the last section are 15 examples of 'principles at work' in gardens he has designed, mostly large gardens but including 6 small ones (0.1 or 0.2 ha), scattered around Melbourne. All have the distinctive 'natural' style for which Gordon Ford will long be remembered with pleasure. Those attracted by his 'natural' style will enjoy this book.

Gardens of the National Trust by **Graham Stuart Thomas** (1979) **Barbara Buchanan** Vic

Quotes Barbara liked (with her comments in italics) :-

- Fashions come and go, taste remains.
- In general the influence of the rhododendron was bad upon garden design; they were usually planted to excess and without regard to their ultimate size. (*/ sometimes wonder if the same applies to grevilleas.*)
- All great gardens have been made by an individual or a succession of individuals. (*Committees are no good for the job.*)
- In our governing of gardens we admire all that nature gives us while at the same time holding her at

bay. Is this not the essence of good gardening? Directly we relax the picture fades, the lines become blurred and nature proceeds to surge softly back.

- Sometimes I think we are too greedy in our gardens. We want colour from flower and foliage throughout the year and are sometimes pulled up abruptly by a gentle thought about green being the most important colour of all.
- Gardening is founded on endeavour to grow what we want and exclude what nature wants. Nature is intent on growth and the breaking down of growth in order to sustain future growth. We want all growth to be sustained continually.

Lots that applies to Australia in these.

Landscape Australia -Distinctive sculptures

A report in *Landscape Australia* 4/1999 shows two striking and colourful relief sculptures, based on pieces of jewellery created by Helge Larsen and Darani Lewers in Melbourne. They prepared a full scale model for the first, which was then made into a 1.5m x 1.5m sculpture in fused glass by Cydonia Glass Studio, Sydney. The second, 1m x 1m, is in stainless steel with three connected and layered sheets, having some areas of enamelled paint (red and orange) sanded back to reveal the steel surface. Both sculptures now reside in a Singapore garden, owned by the perceptive and adventurous lady whose idea this was.

Internet

Recommended by **Colleen Keena** Qld:- <http://www.global-garden.com.au/gardenfeature2.htm>

DESIGN IDEAS

How to degrade the landscape without really trying

Gordon Rowland NSW

This article is reprinted from 'Native Plants for NS W July 1999

Last month I visited clients who would like their garden re-designed in harmony with the adjacent riverside bushland, a typical sandstone community of Sydney red gum, eucalypt, banksia, she-oak, grevillea and numerous other species.

Like so many bushland reserves adjacent to housing developments this timeless landscape has been contaminated with a haphazard assortment of exotic species: asparagus fern, *azalea* and rhododendron, Canary Island date palm, cotoneaster, jacaranda, lantana, Lombardy poplar, large-leaf privet, small-leaf privet, weeping willow and others.

Most of these plants are invasive and they displace indigenous species; some harbour the aggressive Indian mynah bird which displaces native birds, while winter-fruiting trees and shrubs such as cotoneaster sustain the omnivorous pied currawong through winter until its preferred diet of birds' eggs and nestlings becomes available during spring. No wonder the currawong population has reached plague proportions in Sydney while smaller native birds struggle to survive.

This imbalance in native fauna populations exacerbates the visual confusion and environmental degradation caused by many introduced plant species. The message should be clear. Unless you have good reason to do otherwise, give preference to indigenous species, especially if you live near the bush.

Serendipity (NL 27 p18) - what a lovely word! I was surprised to discover that it is derived from the original name for Sri Lanka / Ceylon in days long gone. It is a good word to describe what goes on in the garden, especially as a counter-balance to some of the things that go wrong.

A few years ago, we decided to replace our silly little patch of grass in our front garden with gravel. Its borders had been encroached upon and, as the encroachment included a *Grevillea intricata*, mowing was becoming tiresome and pricklesome. So, over the grass went layers of wet newspaper and then a few inches of fine gravel. We didn't plant seriously into this area, but liked the open effect and contrast the gravel gave us. However, there was a small patch of *Mazus pumilio* and *Goodenia humilis* growing around the nearby pond. Within a year the mazus and goodenia covered about half the gravel with a green, light-traffic mat, and in late spring we have mauve and yellow flowers all over. Very serendipitous!

Friends gave us a few seeds of *Hibiscus trionum* a couple of years ago. Pat put some in a pot to propagate, the remainder were scattered in a front garden bed of gravel mulch. Those in the pot never amounted to much but now, every year, in the garden we have the beautiful creamy petals with purple/black centres popping up amongst all kind of plants. Being nicely neutral in colour, they don't 'clash' with anything else. They self-seed and need little attention except perhaps to cut them back to their base when flowering is finished. (They are an annual or biennial herb). They are not invasive, extra plants are easily pulled out.

PLANTS in DESIGN

Lately we seem not to have concentrated much on our plant 'palette', the huge variety of Australian plants we can use in design. It is easy (and sensible) to stay with local plants and the plants we know best but I think it is also good occasionally to stretch our minds a little and consider some plants which are new and different. Please let me know if there are any particular genera or types of plants you would like to see an article on. I know it is difficult (impossible?) to cover all climatic and geographic areas but I think it can be worthwhile trying. I thought the following were interesting as a selection for frost-prone areas, and some more lists may be included in the next Newsletter. DS

'Top 10' plants

Gumnuts No. 20, the SGAP (APS) Email from Brian Walters, NSW, included responses to his 'Top 10' request. These were readers' lists of 10 (or more) attractive, reliable plants that are growing well, sent to Brian atsgap@ozemail.com.au.

Larry Little from Stone Mountain in Georgia, USA (Eastern USA-Zones 7 & 8), has some suggestions for cold-hardy Australian plants for frosty areas.

1 *Eucalyptus viminalis* is the best eucalypt overall. Superb growth rate of 8 ft plus with a slightly weeping habit to the branches. Cold hardy to around 5F (-15° C) and possibly lower!

2 *E. gunnii* has typical silver to grey foliage and moderate growth rate of around 3 ft per year. The only

dislike I have about this eucalypt is the weak and wobbly trunk. I have to continually stake it to keep it from flopping over.

3 *E neglecta* has outstanding cold resistance and will do quite well in partial shade. Growth rate is moderate at about 2 to 3 ft per year and faster once established. This species will tolerate OF (-18°C) with little damage.

4 *E cinerea* evidently is highly variable in hardiness but seems to survive 10F (-12°C) or so with little damage. Fast growth of around 4 ft per year or more plus attractive juvenile foliage make this a great choice.

5 *E. nova-anglica* has been rather slow-growing but has nice silver-blue foliage and may perform better as it gets more established.

6 *E pulverulenta* is very similar to *E. cinerea* but even faster growing to around 5 ft each year. It also is cold hardy to at least 5F (-15° C) and maybe lower. Maintains juvenile foliage quite well without trimming.

7 *Acacia melanoxylon* is fast growing to around 6 ft per year. Hardy to around 10F (-12°C) but will resprout vigorously and thrives in clay soil.

8 *Callistemon pallidus* is vigorous and bushy, though it has yet to flower.

9 *Leptospermum brachyandrum* appears to be shade and cold tolerant with good tolerance of clay soils.

10 *Grevillea robusta* is cold hardy only down to 20F (-7°C) or so. However, seedlings are worthwhile to winter over indoors and use in the perennial border where the beautiful fern-like foliage is a great backdrop for flowering annuals or ornamental grasses. They love summer heat and humidity and grow upwards of 4 to 5 ft in one season.

SNIPPETS

A correction

In the last Newsletter I mentioned *Hibiscus geranioides* as being a prolific self-seeder.

Colleen Keena Qld tells me that the plant I obtained some time ago as *Hibiscus geranioides* is in fact a South African hibiscus. Perhaps I should have guessed I

Garden competitions?

This subject was raised at the last Melbourne meeting. What do members think of the idea of garden competitions? Should the GDSG encourage them? I have mixed feelings about them. Gardens are so individual that they are often difficult to compare and such comparisons must tend to be subjective. From one point of view I do not really like the idea of gardens 'competing'. Each garden gives pleasure to its owner and probably many visitors as well. On the other hand, accepting the restrictions of such competitions, they are helpful for publicity and a good way of encouraging the creation of beautiful gardens and their enjoyment by a larger number of people. The preparation of gardens for competitions is similar to their preparation for Australia's Open Garden Scheme or other garden visits, which I definitely think are a Good Thing.

MEETINGS

Melbourne meetings

The last meeting was held at **Paul Thompson's** on Sunday October 17 1999. Please see report of garden visit p 10. There was general discussion of a number of topics (e.g. see above and **Nicky Rose's** letter p3).

Peter Garnham described a new area for which the Friends of Gardiner's Creek have obtained funding for landscaping. This area slopes to the NE, is 100 metres long and 30 m down the slope. Some members will have a look at this area before the next meeting when we'll consider ideas for the design.

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Next Melbourne meeting: Sunday February 6 at Tony & Joy Roberts', 'Noorumboon',

Bannon's Lane North, Nutfield (Melway 185 E2). Come at 1.45 pm for a prompt start at 2 pm.

Please phone Diana Snape or Tony & Joy to indicate whether you can come.

We'll be looking at the progress Joy & Tony's garden has made since our last visit in December 1998, and then ideas for the design of the new Friends of Gardiner's Creek area.

We'll also be planning our program for this year. At the last meeting **Nicky Rose** suggested that we might have another workshop weekend (see details of previous weekends on page 3), possibly in July or August 2000. If any Victorian members have ideas or suggestions concerning a venue and/or garden design projects we might consider for this weekend, please let me know ASAP. Such events take some planning so this should start as early in the year as possible.

NE Vic Branch

The last meeting on Sunday November 21 1999 at Barbara Buchanan's was very well attended and productive. The other garden visited was that of **Fiona McCallum**.

Next meeting: Sunday February 27 10.30 for 11 am at **Barbara Buchanan's**, RMB 1590 Myrree.

Program: Morning coffee, walk around garden, discussion of latest Newsletter, progress of book, ideas for Jacci Campbell and Fiona McCallum. Although it looks a very full day, I have also arranged for us to look at **Anne Ford's** developing garden, about 20 minutes away. As soon as the autumn break comes Anne hopes to get serious about her garden and has asked for ideas.

We are meeting here again so that we can follow one garden through the seasons. I am always looking for suggestions too. After 10 years and many droughts there is a lot of dead wood to be removed while other places have become overgrown. It has been an extraordinary flowering season and many plants have been having a second fling following 3 inches of rain just after Christmas; who knows what another month will bring?

Please phone Barbara to indicate whether you can come.

Sydney branch

There are two interesting possibilities already in view for this year. **Jo Hambrett** writes:

The first is a weekday site tour of Homebush Bay. The guided tour takes approximately 1 1/2 hours and a commentary is given. It may be possible for the group to be accompanied by one of the gardeners who would be able to provide additional information. We would need enough people to fill a minibus and the cost would be \$50 per person plus hire of the bus. Tours stop (understandably) in June. Would all interested members please ring me and I will happily organize the tour if we can get the numbers (probably 15 - 20 or so).

The second is a GDSG tour hosted by Maureen and Norm Webb in their area (St Georges Basin near Jervis Bay). The date I am looking at is May 27/28. Norm has a terrific 2-day itinerary planned, however we can condense this to one day if this suits more people. The itinerary includes: visits to award-winning Australian native gardens; visiting remnant bushland areas currently being revitalized by the local bushcare group; exploring Jervis Bay Botanical Gardens; and beachwalk and dolphin-watching within Jervis Bay National Park. Norm and I have information re accommodation if we decide to take two days. Please let me know ASAP if you are coming OR if the date clashes with some other APS (SGAP) outing. We have plenty of time to move it around at this stage.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT - Quarter ending 31/12/99

<u>Receipts</u>		<u>Expenses</u>	
Subscriptions	540.00	Postage	90.00
		Photocopying	224.80
		Duty (FID)	<u>0.38</u>
	<u>\$540.00</u>		<u>\$315.18</u>
<u>Balance in bank</u> (23/11/99)		\$3359.31	
<u>Cash/cheques in hand</u> (31/12/99)		<u>\$205.00</u>	
<u>Total funds</u> - as at 31 /12/99		<u>\$3564.31</u>	

MEMBERSHIP

180 membership subscriptions paid for the 1999/2000 financial year - approximately 215 members.

New members

A warm welcome to the following new members of the Study Group. We hope you enjoy your membership.

Tony Chipperfield
Wendy De Carolis
Fiona McCallum
Kathleen Ralston

Membership renewals

My apologies to any members who had sent in their subscription earlier but whose names weren't included in the last Newsletter.

John Armstrong, Michael Bates, Judy Boldiston, Jennifer Borrell, Steve Burley, Jane Calder, Jacci & Robert Campbell, Rosemary Cumming, Jan Gough-Watson, Lindy Harris, Tony Heawood, Monika Herrmann, Jeff Howes, Brenton Isted, Paul & Barbara Kennedy, Pam King, Jo Kopp, Geoffrey & Ann Long, Joan Macmahon, Grant Molyneux, Erica Nathan, Ian Percy, Philip Tow, Carol Wilmink, SGAP Armidale & District.

The GDSG book is underway, with members of the editorial committee beginning to write the chapters they have chosen initially. All articles from previous Newsletters are being considered to see whether they can contribute to relevant chapters of the book. Each chapter draft will be read by one or two other members of the committee, then I'll have the responsibility of the final review to give the book as a whole a consistent style. We think it will probably take a couple of years (and that may be optimistic). If you have any ideas or suggestions regarding the book, don't hesitate to let me know about them.

Now that the summer holiday season is nearly over, I'm looking forward to hearing from more members with their comments on any aspect of garden design. Please share your experiences, reactions and insights with fellow members. Remember none of us are experts - we're all learning and there's a lot to learn, so we need to know anything about garden design with Australian plants that you've observed or discovered. This could be the way you've used a particular plant, or your favourite plant combinations, or a specific or broader design concept that appeals to you. Let us know about it. We are always keen to hear about stimulating books and attractive gardens, both private and public. Please tell us about them.

Best wishes (for the year 2000!) from

Diana

Diana Snape