

TRENDY CAMELLIAS

By Barry Johnson

It may be 2009 and I may be getting old but, I can still draw comfort from the fact that I pre-date hair gel, male metrosexuality, male exfoliation, cyber-speech and digital everything. Not that I'm a total troglodyte but, I can still remember the days when a toy was a tip truck and sandpit and not an iphone and ipod. The days when a wee was just that and not a video gaming device. The days when we actually went to the pictures and rolled our Jaffas down the aisle, instead of demanding to own home theaters with booming surround sound systems, on 5 years interest free and payments by summons. In Victoria where I live, I can even recall days where our outdoor activities were curtailed by rain whereas, these days after 12 years of drought, nearly a generation has

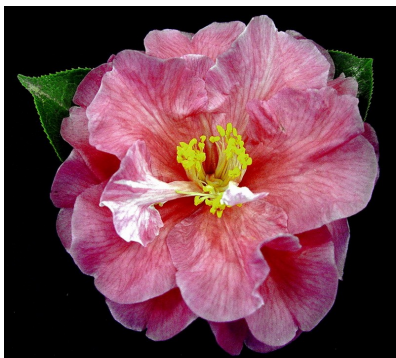


Generation Why?



grown up only knowing 'odd showers'. The days when home gardeners were encouraged and not subjected to environmental inquisitions and global warming doomsdayers. I can still vaguely recall my state of Victoria being called 'The Garden State'.

I can also remember the early, turbulent days of my involvement in the camellia society or, to be exact, the 'elitist' Australian Camellia Research Society (Victorian Branch). Those were the days when some egos were bigger than the reticulata camellias they were trying to grow and breed. My early days were dominated by camellia enthusiasts obsessed with the challenge of breeding and/or obtaining the big boofy retics. These were the 'flavour of the month' plants of the period. Breeders such as Edgar Sebire, John Hunt and Dr. Bob Withers were heavily into producing new reticulata cultivars. Edgar produced many outstanding retic. seedlings such as Crinoline; Westfield; Wandin Sebire and Ada Sebire. I remember John was more into controlled crosses, having a bit of fun with R. Cornelian and R. Lasca Beauty in his early days. Outstanding Hunt reticulatas are 'John, Tony and Phyllis Hunt'. Some of Dr. Bob's were Lady Pamela; Elsie Ross and St Patrick. The necessity to propagate reticulatas by grafting has always put up a cost-effective barrier to their commercial viability, success and mass circulation with most of them remaining within the realms and aspirations of the camellia enthusiast, much to the chagrin of visitors to our camellia shows.



R. Westfield



R. Crinoline



R. Elsie Ross



R. Lady Pamela



R. St. Patrick



R. Tony Hunt

As the years rolled on, more viable and accessible camellia hybrids began to emerge, initiated by such pioneers as Professor Waterhouse and Tom Savige from New South Wales. These ranged through a variety of flower, foliage and growth forms which served to expand the diversity of the range. Many of these hybrids have added some sun-hardy cultivars which has been an important factor in our gardening climate. The Waterhouse varieties were heavily wedded to the Williamsii hybrids and Tom Savige and Ray Garnett (Victoria) favoured the small flower/foliage varieties. The smaller forms have been particularly popular, particularly with women.



As Shakespeare said "What's in a name?" When you're trying to market a new flower, plenty. Many of these small-flowered cultivars names tapped into the essence of female appeal with names such as Wirlinga Bride, Wirlinga Belle, Wirlinga Gem, Wirlinga Jewel etc. Ray Garnett has enjoyed similar success with his sensational Sweet Jane and Sweet Emily Kate. His use of feminine, common name associations have also had broad commercial appeal.



H. Wirlinga Princess



H. Sweet Jane



H. Wirlinga Bride

Apart from cultivars such as Yuletide, Plantation Pink; Hiryu, Apple Blossom, Fuji No Mine and Showa no Sakae etc. Sasanquas were relegated to the back stalls of camellias until the 1990's when a proliferation of sasanquas were released under the banner of the 'Paradise' range from Bob Cherry's nursery at Kulnura, NSW.. A resurgence in the popularity of gardening (and media shows), landscaping trends, including hedging and espaliering saw the re-emergence of the hardy sasanqua. Although this resurgence has now peaked, the 'humble' sasanqua is still the largest selling camellia class in Australia.



S. Paradise Pearl



S. Apple Blossom



S. Yuletide

In 2007 Camellias Victoria hosted an International Camellia Congress and it was interesting to note that our American counterparts loved the variegated cultivars (the more garish the better). Australians have generally favoured more subtle colours and variegations.

Interestingly, at this point in time, the breeding of new *reticulata* cultivars has waned in favour of a diverse range of hybrid creations. Many members of longstanding when it comes to breeding new cultivars, have passed on and those remaining are breeding on a smaller scale. This could also be a by-product of private landholdings being downscaled and the relentless drought. I have been trying to encourage some of our wholesale camellia growers (you know who you are) to get into breeding as they have the space, range of stock plants and the technical infrastructure for commercial throughput and success.

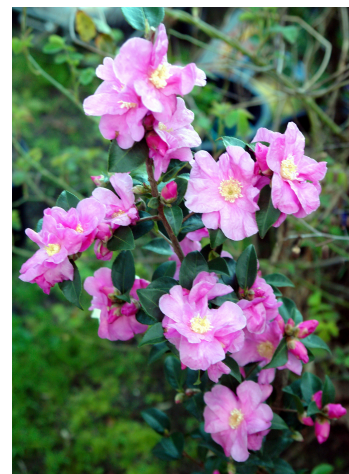
Australia is one of the last bastions of globally clean horticulture and our ability to successfully breed interesting, versatile and hardy cultivars such as the recent editions of J. Federation; H. Illumination, H. Pink Bounty; H. Spitfire; H. Bridal Bouquet and R. Winter's Own could be expanded to the international stage to showcase our talents.



H. Bridal Bouquet



R. Winter's Own



H. Will's Wonder

So how do you breed and new camellia? Firstly, you can try with chance seedlings. However, the odds of producing something different and commercially marketable are much less than doing some research and trial and error, controlled cross, hybridizing. A great research platform is [www. ie. World-wide Web ie. the internet](http://www.ia.camellia.org.au). Accessing our own camellia websites such as our own at camellia.org.au or just Googling away, will return a wealth of information on the subject.

Australia State Camellia Societies all have active New Camellia Registration Committees whose job it is to critically appraise and assess any newly submitted cultivars for official registration. When I say 'official' I mean registered and documented in the International Camellia Register. In practice, anyone could raise an innocuous looking camellia and call it 'Boomer Johnson'. One of the responsibilities of all Registration Committees is to ensure that only 'worthy' cultivars are put forward for official registration. Don't let this put you off from breeding new camellias. This is just to ensure that we don't make 'frivolous' registrations otherwise, the market can be infused with unworthy or, similar-looking cultivars. Well knowing the influence of egos and family connections on naming, if you think you are on a winner, picking a name with some kind of commercial appeal would be a good suggestion. Ruta Hagman was probably a beautiful lady but, her name doesn't inspire one to buy the camellia of the same name. Australia has historically been to the forefront of camellia breeding and I for one would not like to see us drop the pollen brush. Happy dabbling.



R. Ruta Hagman