

September Meeting Recap

The September meeting of the Southern California Horticultural Society was our annual Horticulturist of the Year Award Banquet, held at the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden. This year we honored Donald R. Hodel. On a very warm night we gathered early at the Arboretum as our man-of-the-evening, Don Hodel, offered to lead guests on a short tour of some of the remarkable palm specimens growing in the gardens. After the tour guests mingled over cool drinks and were invited to begin bidding on the silent auction items on display inside the Peacock Cafe. Later arrivals brought our numbers to over 80 guests. The tables on the terrace of Peacock Cafe were decorated with centerpieces of palm fruits and foliage and seed coverings (all assembled by James E. Henrich) After the social hour we were ready to eat. The palm theme of the evening was reflected in the wonderful food catered by the talented people of the Peacock Cafe. The salad contained hearts of palm, the succulent chicken had a date based stuffing (even the vegetarian choice-stuffed Portobello mushroom had the date stuffing)—and dessert was of course coconut sorbet and Pindo palm fruit. Bravo, Niki! (and your great staff).

After dinner the guests walked down to the Bamboo Room (the Palm Room was booked for a different event!) to hear a few speakers tell us why our awardee was long overdue for this honor. James E Henrich kicked off the proceedings welcoming all of the attendees and introducing the first speaker, Kathy Musial. Kathy (to the musical strains of "Tiny Bubbles") began telling us how Don Ho began his career. She was gently prodded to let her know that it was not Don Ho, but Don Hodel. This set the overall tone for the evening—semi-roast and heartfelt words of praise and good humor. Kathy then went on to tell us that Don had launched her modeling career by having her pose next to trees for scale purposes as took photographs to illustrate his book, *The Exceptional Trees of Los Angeles*, (1988, funded by SCHS). Next, Jim Bauml spoke to us about working with Don and what a generous and knowledgeable person he is (who also started Jim's modeling career in the same way as Kathy). Rounding out the introductory speakers was Rose Epperson, sharing with us how great it is to work with Don currently and to get in a few jokes of her own as well.

Then it was Don's turn to speak and he showed us some memorable photos from his boyhood, growing plants in his backyard

(a secret kept from his schoolmates). From these early interests in marigolds and chrysanthemums he moved on to more challenging subjects. Don graduated from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (BS 1974) and the University of Hawai'i (MS 1975) with degrees in ornamental horticulture. As an undergraduate at Cal Poly, (he reminded us) he was the 1973 recipient of the Southern California Horticultural Institute's (as we were formerly known) student scholarship. After graduation from the University of Hawai'i, Don told us how he worked for the National Tropical Botanical Garden on Kaua'i and the wholesale nursery industry on the Big Island. Returning to the mainland in 1980, Don worked in the wholesale nursery industry in San Diego before being appointed to his current position with the University of California in 1983. He spoke of his research on trees and palms and showed pictures from numerous trips to Mexico, Central America, South America, Hawai'i and the South Pacific, and Southeast Asia. He has named and described more than 50 species of palms that were new to science, many of which can or are now being successfully cultivated in Southern California. Don has shared many of his plant discoveries and introductions with the primary botanical gardens and arboreta in Southern California. He has authored or co-authored more than (he said 275 or so—not the 500 we had listed) publications about various aspects of the identification, selection and management of landscape plants in Southern California. Don's heartfelt words of gratitude for all of those who inspired and helped him realize a remarkable career in so many varied aspects of the horticultural world were gracious and moving. What a wonderful time we all had the Los Angeles County Arboretum. Thanks Don!

And thanks as well to all of the volunteers and Board Members of SCHS, and the Arboretum who helped make this wonderful evening possible. Special thanks to James E. Henrich for coordinating the many aspects of the evening, Laura Bauer for keeping the silent auction on track, Pat Steen, Yvonne Savio and Rachel Young for checking in our guests and otherwise keeping chaos at bay. Thanks as well to all of the other SCHS Board members who helped. Special mention to Joan Citron for providing the lion's share of great stuff for the silent auction—as well as many other SCHS members who donated cool plants, art and objects.

—Steven Gerischer

SHARING SECRETS

In September, we asked you to answer "What is your favorite palm tree and why?" and here are some of your responses. Read more on our SCHS MemberLodge website, schs.memberlodge.org.

My favorite palm is...*Chamerops humilis* 'cerifera'. I saw it growing on the steep Atlas Mountains of Morocco. It's slow growing making it a good option for containers or small planting areas. The blue color works wonderfully against dark greens of ceanothus, cypress and myrtus. and small leaves that can be used in flower arrangements as a striking sculptural element.

—Laura Morton

Pindo palm!! It is an attractive plant, but the fruits are out of this world. I was at the Arboretum once on a hot day when the pindo palms were dropping fruit all over. The smell was so tantalizing, and I was so thirsty, and the fruits are so juicy and refreshing, but I wasn't sure if it would be acceptable to opportunistically snack on them. I hear that you can make jelly from them, too!

—Anon.

I am not a big fan of palms—Ha! I have removed enough seedling washingtonias that I sometimes shudder when I see them (unfair, as they are remarkable survivors). I do find I like chamaerops—something in the symmetry appeals. But *Bismarkia nobilis* won me over. I saw it for the first time in the park-like planting beside Santa Monica Blvd. in Beverly Hills and fell in love with the extraordinary color (silver gray) and wonderful shape of its foliage. I was lucky to see it in the wild in Madagascar (particularly on the drive into Isalo where it dots the plains leading up to beautiful rock formations). So far I have lacked the space, courage and budget to plant one! Maybe someday.

—Steven Gerischer