

# Passion Can Move Mountains!

by Étienne Bouret

**W**hen Jules Gravereaux planted his first rose in the kitchen garden of his new property at l'Haÿ, just south of Paris, he did not know that just a few years later he would bring together all the known varieties of *Rosa*—more than 8,000 cultivars!

The beginning of the nineteenth century was still a time of independent exploration, when an “amateur” could contribute to the body of scientific knowledge. But unlike botanists such as Crépin in Belgium who worked on herbaria, Gravereaux decided to collect living plants, initially by purchase, then by collecting during his study travels, exchanges with his correspondents abroad, and gifts from breeders and rosarians.

With this collection, Gravereaux focused on the description and a new classification for the roses. To this end, he sorted the varieties, carefully labelled them in the garden, and created a single file in which he registered the synonyms and information about the habit, flowering, and hybridization experiments for each species or variety. In 1900, he published the first “Catalogue des roses cultivées a l'Haÿ” and in 1905 the “Manuel pour la description des rosiers.”

To design the garden, Gravereaux asked Edouard André, an eminent landscape architect who worked with the Baron Haussmann and M. Alphand on the green spaces of Paris, to create a new style of garden devoted to just one plant: the Roseaie.

By 1914, the Roseaie was so well known all over the world that the name of the little town of l'Haÿ was changed to l'Haÿ-les-roses. At his death in 1916, Jules Gravereaux left to posterity a rich and carefully documented collection. All sec-



Jean Girin. Photo by Étienne Bouret

tions and species are represented and organized by departments, separated by tall rose trees, telling the history of the Rose.

- The History of the Rose Avenue—a retrospective of the rose from the first wild Species of the mountains of the Caucasus and Asia to the yellow and orange Pernetianas.
- The Botanical Collection with the beautiful hips of the wild Species in shrubs and trees, and also the *Rugosa* and *Pimpinellifolia* families.
- The Gallica Collection—in Gravereaux’s time, the competition between breeders and the race for innovation and remontancy had already made the once-bloomers grown by M. Hardy in the Jardin du Luxembourg of Paris obsolete. We have M. Gravereaux to thank for the fact that we can see Gallicas growing today!
- The Malmaison Roses—When Empress Joséphine died in 1814, her collections were plundered. Gravereaux reconstituted the collections of 200 roses all around Malmaison, and maintained a duplicate collection at l’Haÿ.
- The Oriental Roses—This part of the garden was decorated with Oriental statues, and roses were trained on bamboo lattice. Here were the Chestnut rose, a collection of Chinas, *Rosa foetida*, *R. persiana*, *R. hemispherica*, *R. sericea*, *R. helenæ*, and some strange roses like *R. wichurana foliis variegata* and *R. heterophylla* or *R. pulverulenta criocarpa*.
- The Horticultural Collection—This contained a collection of the most important roses created by breeders from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The enclosure, made of old style scantlings, supported the first descendants of *R. wichurana* and *R. multiflora* bred by MM. Manda, Barbier, Turbat, or Paul. Inside this enclosure arranged by section, class, and group, were Noisette, Bourbon, Polyantha, and Bengale roses, and of course the Hybrid Perpetuals and Hybrid Teas.
- Les Roses de l’Haÿ—Formerly dedicated to the roses bred at l’Haÿ, this part of the garden has been replaced today by the best large flowering roses bred outside France—roses by Kordes, Tantau, Boerner, McGredy, Dot, Harkness, and many others.
- The Garden of the new French Roses, in the old “Jardin de Roses,” contained the greatest roses bred by French breeders over the previous ten years, which were continually replaced to keep them current. Today we can still see the final creations of Croix, Dorieux, Delbard, Meilland, Laperrière, Eve, and others.
- Along the north wall was the Collection of Tea Roses, some of which are unique, like “Maria Star,” which was bred by Gravereaux himself.
- In the middle of the garden is the Roseraie à la Française with its famous lattice dome covered by 50 ALEXANDRE GIRAULT *wichurana* roses.

From 1916 to 1936, the Roseraie, still owned by the family, experienced grave losses: 2,000 Tea roses, more than 1,000 Hybrid Perpetuals and 700 Species were lost before the County Council of the Seine bought the property and saved the collection.

By 1945, the number of varieties stabilized between 3,000 and 3,500, and in 1968, the County Council of Val-de-Marne became the owner. More roses disappeared during the very cold winters of 1985 and 1986 and the summer heat waves of 2003 and 2005.

In 1990 when some of the roses were more than 80 years old, and much of the soil completely exhausted, the County Council embarked on a 10-year renewal of the collection. The Council chose to replace plants by purchasing existing varieties and by grafting the others. Despite efforts to return all of the varieties to the collection, some were lost because of errors in the naming of cultivars in commerce.

Today, the Roseraie is so magical in May and June. The garden is home to around 3,000 varieties of roses, with fifty percent having originated before 1916, and eighty percent before 1950. One-third are once-bloomers; another third, the Noisettes, Bourbons, and Hybrid Perpetuals, were bred before 1900 and do not bloom in the summer.

Little is known about the history of the Roseraie between 1916 and 1936, and a number of roses are now mislabelled. As most of the varieties are no longer in commerce, identification must be made with the help of descriptions found in old catalogues and books of the period and by comparing roses with the same names in other collections.

Losses, however, continue. The vagaries of climate and history have had an impact. Even the grafting to preserve individuals seems to weaken the plants over the course of successive grafting, and the necessity for dense planting requires some spraying and harder pruning than is perhaps desirable.

All these factors underscore the danger of isolated management of the collection and the need for a worldwide conservation policy which could reduce the risk of more major losses by establishing parallel cultures, and help re-introduce endangered or lost varieties.

It is in this spirit that in 1990, the Association “Les Amis de la Roseraie de l’Haÿ-les-roses” was created, joining together amateurs, scientists, breeders, and nurserymen.

The purpose of the Association is to study, popularize, and support actions to benefit the Roseraie, roses, and knowledge of the garden arts, and to help in the conservation of the roses and our historical inheritance:

- by proposing to the County Council a biochemical and chromosomal analysis plan to emphasize the Roseraie’s rich genetic diversity;



- by working with the green spaces department (the county council group in charge of plants and tree care) on the computer filing of varietal data (identification, description);
- by taking part in various regional and international demonstrations, meetings and garden visits.

In 2003, a number of volunteers began the huge task of rose identification with the help of a field report of rose characteristics

that is used to describe each rose and rose family of the Roseraie. A first phase on Hybrid Perpetuals has been recorded and still needs to be filed on computer. A second phase on Rugosas started in 2005 with the help of numbered photos of old wood, young wood, flowers, and hips. Photos and a part of the descriptions will be available on the Association's web site [please add url here].

The work of identification may take years. Meanwhile, unique varieties continue to disappear from the Roseraie. To prevent the loss of this priceless biodiversity, individuals and associations need to pressure the Administration and take action to preserve what still exists. An outpouring of public opinion is necessary if government is to be convinced to support preservation.

An extension of the Roseraie de l'Haÿ is underway at the new Parc des Lilas in Vitry-sur-Seine, next to l'Haÿ. This contemporary space, in the spirit of Gravereaux, will encourage people to think about the place of the rose in the modern landscape. Many people believe that a large section of this park should be used to save rare roses because Gravereaux's Roseraie is first of all a place of conservation. If we want the grandchildren of our grandchildren to be able to put their noses in a delicately scented old rose we need to raise our voices to educate others and promote these wonderful places which are the Roseraies.

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FACING PAGE: Beauté Virginale. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Luis Brinas, Dance of Joy, Roseraie de l'Haÿ. Photos by Étienne Bouret

