



## SPECIES ROSES AT

# *La Bonne Maison*

*Odile Masquelier*

**T**he first Species rose I ordered was from Pajotin & Chedane, a very old nursery in Angers. It is *Rosa hugonis*, a magnificent sight when in full bloom. Happy in our dry weather and well-drained clay, it is a cascade of gold 3 meters high and equally wide, mixing its large corollas with the creamy yellow ones of its seedling CANTABRIGIENSIS, which is planted on a bank just behind. Another seedling, CANARY BIRD, arrived years later, and together with GOLDEN CHERSONESE and HELEN KNIGHT, shows to advantage against a thick carpet of *Brunnera macrophylla*. I also grow the double form of *R. hugonis*, which was sent to me by Professor Gianfranco Fineschi.





In the gravel, shielded by a hedge of golden *Thuya*, I planted the Species roses discovered in Sir Frederic Stern's book. *Rosa primula*, or PRIMULA the INCENSE ROSE, found near Samarkand in 1910, is the first to bloom in early April. Poised all along branches that arch towards the ground, its flowers combine the rich scent of incense with the delicate perfume of the soft-yellow corollas. The second one, *R. willmottiae*, is the only deep-pink Species to bloom in early spring, at the same time as the Judas tree. Enhanced by glaucous green foliage, it has a delicate arching habit and grows happily with silver *Artemisia absinthium*, *Senecio greyii*, and pink *Aquilegias*.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Odile Masquelier's hillside home in Lyon, France; Fortune's Double Yellow; bush and close-up of "Lijiang Road Rose". All photos by Odile Masquelier.

At La Bonne Maison, mid-April is the time for the China Ramblers to show off. Climbing up our neighbor's wild plum tree, FORTUNE'S DOUBLE YELLOW has reached 8 meters and with its froth of soft-apricot, semi-double blooms gently streaked with carmine it is quite a sight. In the dry spring of 2007 it flowered early for six weeks beside the pseudo "PARK'S YELLOW CHINA", or *R. indica ochroleuca*. The vigorous "PARK'S YELLOW CHINA" has vanilla-cream blooms very much like those of DEVONIENSIS and is endowed with the sweetest tea perfume.

"LIJIANG ROAD ROSE", discovered by Gianlupo Osti and rediscovered by Roger Phillips on the Road to Lijiang (Yunnan), is a favorite with all the garden's visitors. Powerful but with a supple habit, it has made its way through and overwhelmed a large *Prunus* 'Kanzan' in just five years. Its rich pink double blooms, which are very similar to MME. GRÉGOIRE STACHELIN's, cascade by the hundreds, creating an indescribable and intense fragrance. Located in a semi-shaded area, it

BELOW: *Rosa laevigata*. OPPOSITE: A garden path lined with irises.







WHEN ODILE AND HER FAMILY moved to La Bonne Maison in 1966, the two-and-a-half acres clinging to a hillside outside of Lyon essentially comprised a big orchard, a sizeable kitchen garden, a gravel courtyard, and a lawn with a few Polyantha roses—all tightly enclosed within surrounding walls. The south-east aspect from a hill overlooking the Saône and Rhône rivers was ideal, the old wine-growing grounds were hard to till, but the clay and pebble soil was suitable for roses.

Over the next ten years, low walls and steps were built, creating lawns that link the different levels, limit erosion, and create unity while still preserving the particularity of each garden area. Some sections of the garden, such as the yucca garden and the secret garden, are enclosed by hedges. Everywhere, roses entangle themselves, overwhelm cedars, cypresses, paulownia, and other trees, and romp up the walls. Old fruit trees, tenderly maintained and cut back, also serve as props.

Clematis like *Clematis armandii* and *C. spooneri* climb up more than 8 meters. Thus, there is a succession of flowers from March to November.

Odile says that a trip to Scotland in 1975 opened up her eyes to the softening effects of pastel tones, greys, and whites, and above all to the beauty of roses bearing old French names. She ordered her first old roses from England and arches from a local blacksmith. Today, 65 arches are distributed over five pergolas, and more than 800 species and cultivars of labelled and listed roses flourish, starting from the 10th of April with the first Species and continuing until the frosts.

The garden of La Bonne Maison first opened to the public in 1987. In 1989 it became, under French law, the “Association des Roses Anciennes de la Bonne Maison,” with the object of preserving and researching Old Roses.





blooms profusely for six weeks.

Nearby, *R. fortuniana* scrambles through a large *Prunus laurocerasus*, clipped as a giant mushroom, which serves as its support and protector. Said to be a cross between *R. banksiae* and *R. laevigata*, *R. fortuniana* starts to bloom around mid-April. Its double, creamy white flowers are very impressive so early. They flow to the ground and last for a very long time.

*Rosa laevigata*, a giant with the most unusual, persistent, shiny three-toothed leaflet, is a fantastic sight at La Bonne Maison. Eight meters up in a glaucous cedar tree, it extends itself indolently all along the cedar's lateral branches, showing off 4-inch blossoms of creamy white. A big boss of stamens parades in the middle of the single corollas, justifying its nickname of Camellia Rose. I saw *R. laevigata* for the first time at La Mortola, the legendary garden on the Riviera, where it was trained along the terrace. I decided on the spot to grow this wonder and did so despite all cautions and warnings. In

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: A view of the garden; *Rosa laevigata* hybrids; "Park's Yellow China"; Ramona and iris.



February every year after periods of frost, I give it several good soaks of water. Its two hybrids are happily not as vigorous. ANEMONENROSE, a pure pink with darker streaks, and RAMONA, a deep carmine-pink, bloom earlier, intermingling in a stolid old pear tree and complementing each other.

*Rosa brunonii* 'LA MORTOLA', better known than the species itself, is without doubt the giant of La Bonne Maison. Trained





on the front wall of the housekeeper's lodge and covering 25 to 30 square meters, it greets our visitors. Its peach-tree-like foliage of pale grey-green is a very special asset, and for three to four weeks it is completely covered with white flowers that exhale a powerful and delicious musk scent. As a visitor noticed last June, although its petals fall off very nicely, leaving a clean façade, we have to prune it drastically every summer.

*Rosa longicuspis bertolonii* was first given to me as *R. mulliganii* and planted at the foot of a plum tree in the hydrangea border. Many years later I found out its real identity. Its glossy, persistent foliage shows to advantage the large corymbs of white blooms, which are not dissimilar to those of an apple tree

and soon followed by marble-sized orangey hips. An imposing sight in winter among denuded trees, he can become invasive.

*Rosa longicuspis* was given to me by our friend Viru Viraraghavan as a cutting he brought back from the wild. It took ages to bloom for the first time but now is very happy. Among the last Species to open, it exhibits darker hips later than others. My last *R. longicuspis*, now called *R. longicuspis* × *chinensis*, is a pink form given to me by Maurice Foster. Scrambling through a dome-clipped Holm oak, *Quercus ilex*, it bloomed for the first time this spring.

I planted *R. lucens erecta*, formerly *R. longicuspis erecta*, at the foot of a spectacular cypress to hide the base of its denuded trunk. Some years later, *R. lucens erecta* had climbed up the cypress to a height of 8 meters. It must be a hybrid as it has huge corymbs of very double, creamy pink blooms. Four years ago, a chance seedling invaded *R. lucens erecta* and nearly killed him. It took two tree pruners a whole afternoon to eradicate the invader. With the help of the mychorize, *R. lucens erecta* has now recovered and bloomed profusely this last spring.

*Rosa gentiliana*, or *R. henryi* or *R. multiflora grandiflora* according to Graham Thomas, is a superb Rambler, despite the confusion surrounding its name. A late bloomer with light corymbs of pure-white flowers, it has a very supple habit and

almost no prickles. Its magnificent foliage, which mimics cherry-tree leaves, is very acuminate, deeply serrated, smooth and shiny, and of a pleasant mid-green. It has a tough setting at La Bonne Maison but holds its own next to such already well-established neighbors as the overpowering TEA RAMBLER.

Not very far off, overlooking a high fence at the boundary, reigns *R. helenae*. Well-armed with hooked prickles, it will grow easily up to 6 or 7 meters. Everyone can see it from far away, as it is spectacular when in bloom with dense snowball-like heads of creamy white flowers. One of the last among the Species to bloom, *R. helenae* is favoured with a dark green foliage and a delicate perfume. Once the show is over, people passing by delight in the astounding beauty of its fruits, which are held in huge bunches of small oval hips.

The yucca garden, a well-secluded area, is overlooked by the next two species, which perform at nearly the same time: *R. multiflora adenochaeta* and *R. multiflora cathayensis*. *Rosa multiflora adenochaeta*, a pink and cream lace Species, supple without being invasive, light and spectacular without being showy, with scarce prickles, has a most delightful fragrance that is reminiscent of sweet peas. Its only defect is it doesn't set hips. Opening two weeks later, *R. multiflora cathayensis* is of a darker pink, but very similar. Happy with very little care, half climbing in a drastically pruned sycamore maple, half tumbling down a bank, its fragrance was amazing and overpowering this last spring. Both roses are the really ideal *sans soucis* Ramblers.

And finally, *R. bracteata*, the MACARTNEY ROSE, was sent to me by Professor Fineschi from his Cavriglia garden in Tuscany after I lost my first one to a severe winter. The cutting took time to start but is now slowly climbing up an old drying *Thuya*. Small, rounded, dark green, glossy leaves set off to perfection the pure-white blooms, which are enhanced by a yolk-yellow crown of stamens. I have seen *R. bracteata* trained as an evergreen shrub against a house in a Brittany village. Covered with hundreds of blooms in early August, it was an unforgettable sight. Sadly I have no more walls and hope the *Thuya* will do.

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ODILE MASQUELIER founded the first French old rose society, *Association des Roses Anciennes en France*, which hosted the 9th International Heritage Rose Conference in Lyon in 1999. She lives outside of Lyon at La Bonne Maison, where her exquisite garden attracts visitors from all over the world. Odile is the author of *La Bonne Maison, Jardin de Roses Anciennes*.



LEFT: The road to La Bonne Maison.

RIGHT: Odile Masquelier. Photo courtesy Odile Masquelier.