



The Chinaberry path with *Melia azedarach* flowering profusely at Quarryhill Botanical Garden in California, which celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2012.



The view across the valley from the prayer flags at Quarryhill.

Quarryhill Botanical Garden, USA

In 1987 Jane Davenport Hansen started creating the botanical garden that is Quarryhill in Sonoma Valley, California. **TONY KIRKHAM** writes about the exceptional collection of wild collected Chinese plants that thrive there 25 years on.

1987 can be remembered in the Dendrological calendar for a number of events in the tree world, particularly the Great Storm in the South-east of England that destroyed over 15 million trees in one night. This storm was a real wakeup call to anyone with even a slight interest in trees and it started a new beginning in the tree world, raising public awareness and generating new planting schemes across the UK.

In the same year, in Sonoma Valley, California, Jane Davenport Jansen had a vision that would make significant additions to arboreta across the botanic garden world, and leave a living legacy that is now one of the largest living collections of wild collected temperate Asian plants in North America; it was the creation of Quarryhill Botanical Garden.

In 1968, Jane purchased 61 acres in the foothills of the Mayacama Mountains off the Sonoma Highway in Glen Ellen, Sonoma County to be planted with vineyards, but 20 acres of the hillside contained several abandoned stone quarries and in 1987 she decided to create a garden. Unlike many gardens

that would be planted purely for landscape, aesthetic and floral qualities, Jane had set her sights on something unique to the area that would become her personal drive, a landscape planted with natural source plants derived from her own funded expeditions to targeted countries around the world with an emphasis on the Far East.

In 1984 Lord Howick also had the same idea of creating an arboretum set within his estate in Northumberland, England and was keen to begin collecting material from China and other countries in the Far-east. In 1985 he visited the East Coast of the USA and in 1986 the West Coast making seed collections for the arboretum. It was during the 1986 expedition that he met Jane Davenport Jansen and talked about joint expeditionary work in the Far East and in 1987 a joint trip to Japan was made with two members of the Quarryhill team joining Lord Howick. One of those was William A. McNamara who is the present Executive Director of Quarryhill and the person now responsible for taking the garden forward today. His vision has continued Jane's vision for her garden and transformed it into one of the most important conservation collections of temperate plants outside of the Far East.

Without wasting time, a plant nursery essential for an operation of this scale was soon established. In 1988, *Arbutus menziesii* (the native Madrone) was cleared and the first plantings went into the ground in 1990. The steep hillside is divided by several disused stone quarries that have filled up with water, becoming ponds and a source of irrigation water for the garden and are linked by a series of streams and small waterfalls which are traversed by small bridges. A network of informal gravel pathways were built to access the site for planting and maintenance and to help navigate the plantings.

With Lord Howick's close partnership with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, from the sharing of seeds Kew were asked to join forces with this new expeditionary team to begin what was hoped to be a long series of seed and herbarium collecting expeditions to China. Kew was particularly keen to resume field work in China, as there had been a long break since the likes of E. H. Wilson had been busy and The first trip was in 1998 after a series of discussions between Kew, Howick, Quarryhill and Academia Sinica and several exchange visits from Academia staff to the USA and UK as a part of benefit sharing under the Convention of Biodiversity Policy. Whilst the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh were busy in Yunnan province, these trips would target Sichuan province and the collector code for these expeditions, following the request from China will be known by many dendrologists across the world as 'SICH' for all material collected in Sichuan. Nine expeditions to China have since followed over the ensuing years with many reintroductions of living material to gardens in both Europe and USA.

Since 1987 Quarryhill has participated in over 19 expeditions to temperate Asia including China, Japan, India, Taiwan and Nepal with many of the plants generated from these growing in the 20 acre garden.



From left *Idesia polycarpa*, *Lilium speciosum* var. *speciosum* and *Rosa chinensis* var. *spontanea*.

I have been lucky to have known Jane, her generosity and passion for plants and her personal garden and I feel very privileged. Despite knowing Bill McNamara since the 1980s I first visited Quarryhill in 1999 following attendance at the AABGA conference “A Century of Plants” in Vancouver, BC and was so inspired with the setting, the climate and the layout of the plantings. It is a garden to wander and discover and the growth of the trees over the past 13 years has transformed this garden to an established habitat in the Far East and for any moment you could be on a hillside in the foothills of Sichuan or in a forest on Yakushima in Japan.

I am also very lucky because I am a member of the Quarryhill Advisory Board with several eminent horticulturists from botanic gardens across the world, so I get to see the steady development of the garden and the phenomenal growth on the plants in the Californian climate that is envied by so many other arboreta curators.

The garden is worth visiting at any time of the year as there is always something to see and no matter how often a visit is made you will always find something different or new by exploring the myriad of habitats and microclimates that the garden’s staff have created through clever planting; however spring/summer is not to be missed.

Jane was dedicated to her personal operation in the name of plant conservation and committed funding to the entire project, including 15 collecting expeditions until her untimely death in 2000. Her vision has been continued, turning this amazing, small oasis set in the lower flanks of the Mayacama Mountains



Emmenopterys henryi flowering at Quarryhill.



photographs © Quarryhill Botanical Garden



From left *Magnolia doltsopa* and *Enkianthus campanulatus*.

into a world renowned botanical garden with a leading living collection of high conservation status valued by many scientists and horticulturists from all around the world and in 2012 Quarryhill celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Opened in 2012 to celebrate 25 years and one of the latest additions to the garden is an educational planting, the Jiang Entian Chinese Heritage Rose Garden, named after the prominent rosarian from Taicang, China which celebrates the influence of Chinese roses in our modern day garden roses. Included in the plantings is a wild collection of *Rosa chinensis* var. *spontanea* which features in the current logo for Quarryhill and *Rosa odorata* var. *gigantea*, another key Chinese species that has been at the forefront of the hybridisation of modern day roses.

One of the wonderful aspects of the Quarryhill is to wander through the “main event”, the Woodland Garden from the entrance above the nursery through the myriad of gravel paths and bridges to the top of the garden where there is a small cairn with Tibetan prayer flags and for a moment in time you could well be on a mountain somewhere in China. There are over 25,000 wild collected plantings which include over 1,500 different taxa from the Asian flora.

By the arbour there is a planting of *Cornus capitata*, the evergreen dogwood from China which can be seen at anytime, but in June it will be guaranteed to be in flower with showy yellow blooms followed in the autumn by red, strawberry-like fruits. Further along the path is a rare plant in the family Rubiaceae, *Emmenopterys henryi*, a favourite of

photograph © Tony Kirkham



Small cairn with Tibetan prayer flags.

mine. This is a rare flowerer in the UK, but here in Sonoma it frequently flowers and this plant is one that Bill McNamara, Lord Howick, Mark Flanagan and I collected on an expedition to the Dabashan, Sichuan in 1996 and after only six years since 2002 has been free-flowering. Other plants such as *Liriodendron chinense*, *Pterostyrax psilophyllus*, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, *Vernicia fordii* syn. *Aleurites fordii*, the Tung tree, *Broussonetia papyrifera*, *Aesculus indica* and *Pinus roxburghii*, Chinese and Japanese birches, crab apples, rhododendrons, magnolias, maples and the list goes on – flank either side of the paths creating small pockets and micro-climates for more unusual shrubs and herbaceous plantings. Most plants are left to grow naturally with little intervention with the secateurs or saw and many of the herbaceous plantings are self-seeding and naturalising beneath the canopy. But this garden isn't just a beautiful walk; there are several conservation projects ongoing. Quarryhill is possibly the largest planting of the rare, critically endangered *Acer pentaphyllum* from the Yalong River in Sichuan that you will see in any garden around the world, all wild collected from this region in China with an aim to saving the species from loss in the wild due to a development programme in the Yalong Valley. The unusual maple leaf from this species also features in the Quarryhill logo.

Magnolia species threatened with extinction in the wild also feature on the rarity list in this garden and the excitement is never more than when you stumble across a plant tucked away in its own little enclave growing so well in this perfect Californian climate. *Magnolia sinica* is thought to be the rarest plant in the garden and one of only two in the entire USA. Attempts are also being made to bulk these plantings up in the nursery in the hope that they will eventually produce seed that will reverse the rarity of these choice trees in arboreta across the world.

If you are on the Quarryhill mailing list you will know that Quarryhill hold many adult educational events from Japanese flower arranging to designing gardens with grasses and educational tours for fourth and fifth grade classes in Sonoma County. Many International plant societies hold their annual regional meetings including the conifer and magnolia societies, giving the delegates an opportunity to see some incredible woody specimens planted somewhere in the botanically interesting 20 acres.

If you are ever in Sonoma Valley, just over an hour's drive north from San Francisco, and have a day to spare; you'll need a day, look no further than a trip to Quarryhill, a must for any discerning dendrologist. You will be given a warm welcome by Bill and his dedicated team of staff and if you are lucky a personal tour, but every plant is labelled so a self-guided tour is a pleasure and I promise you it won't be long before you want a return visit possibly in another season.

