The Legacy of Dr. Werner Rauh

Pamela Koide Hyatt will be visiting us again this month. This is a quote from her: “During a recent presentation to a Bromeliad Society group, I mentioned the name of the late Professor Werner Rauh. Immediately someone in the audience asked “who is that?” This came as a surprise to me, as I have always considered him the godfather of Bromeliads. So this is a fitting time to present a new program about his life and important work with Bromeliads. He was the director at the Heidelberg Botanical Garden and Herbarium for several decades. Prior to his retirement, he undertook more than 36 expeditions, mainly to South and Central America, as well as to southern Africa and Madagascar. This program will discuss his wonderful work and contribution to the world of Bromeliads. I will show many of the plants that he discovered and some that bear his name, as well as share some of my experiences of traveling with this amazing botanical expert in Peru in 1988.”

For those of you who do not know Pamela, she is the owner of Bird Rock Tropicals Nursery in Carlsbad, California with a main focus on Tillandsias. Since starting her nursery in 1981 she has traveled extensively in search of tillandsias and has hybridized over 3000 hybrids. She has also had newly-described tillandsias named in her honor. This will be one meeting not to miss.

Casper Curto and Daryl DuCharme signed up for refreshments this month. Any additional contributions are always appreciated.
This year we had the pleasure of visiting 3 gardens in the East Bay. Blest with beautiful weather we met at the home of Wes and Marilyn Schilling in Fremont. Long admired by the club as a grower and hybridizer we congregated on the back lawn by the patio where many of Wes’ bromeliads summer. In a small area tens of bromeliads are potted and stacked in Wes’ popular plant stands seen at the monthly Show & Tell table. The neoregelias get plenty of light without direct sun due to the shade of the lanai and adjacent tree. Bromeliads like aechmeas, neoregelias and nidulariums are planted in the beds surrounding the house with many in the trees or in plant stands in the front of the house. One of the focal points in the small garden is the Platycerium bifurcatum that engulfs a tree accompanied by a philodendron and heliconia. Everyone was in a good mood and enjoyed the garden and the good company.

Our next stop was the large hillside garden of Leianne Crittenden in the Oakland Hills. It is a marvel of a series of gardens with spectacular views of the bay and densely planted with tropicales, sub-tropicals and temperate flora. Following the paths to find the 7 hidden patios and seating areas we delighted at each turn by something in flower or shimmering in striking foliage. Neoregelias soaked in the light and warmth and displayed their colors to everyone’s pleasure along with kangaroo paws, impatiens, roses, and many more plants and curiosities.

The final stop was at Daryl DuCharme and Casper Curto’s home a short ways down the hill. Every visit their home is a search for the latest upgrades to landscaped area at the top of the hill. My favorite was the asian beach and screen that contemplated the Bay. Every brom, orchid, succulent and whatnot is grown well, happy and a delight to see. This was also the location of our potluck and the fine spread provided by the tour members did not fail to top off a fine and fun day. We even had a small raffle so everyone went home with a new plant.

Thanks to our hosts Wes, Marilyn, Leianne, Daryl and Casper for opening their homes to us. We all had a wonderful time. Daryl wants to know where the loaf of Sourdough bread came from? He reported it made great French toast, garlic bread and base to serve stew on. Thanks also to Dan Arcos for planning this event that is always one of the most popular each year for our members and guests.
Sample photos from the Wes and Marilyn Schilling tour stop (Vriesea Candy Stripe in center)

Sample photos from the Leianne Crittenden tour stop

Sample photos from Curto/DuCharme tour stop
Overlooking the picturesque Arkles Bay, surrounded by Bromeliads and Pohutukawa on the sunny Whangaparaoa peninsula, is home to budding bromeliad breeders John and Agatha Lambert. Both John & Agatha are architects and their home is a design and build, work in progress. The home is spread over five levels, with many rooflines showing off their innovative design skills and maximizing views out over the bay. Bromeliads have taken up residence on every level and anywhere that catches the sun.

Bromeliads first got their attention about 10 years ago while they were visiting “Enz of the Earth” in Kerikeri. They were actually there to look at the collection of Balinese furniture and crafts. John had a fascination for all things Balinese which was cultivated by many trips to Bali during his time working in Borneo. “Enz of the Earth” had a nice collection of Bromeliads on display, and this was enough to entice John & Agatha to take a small selection of concentrica type hybrids home with them. Several years later it was a trip to the Takapuna markets that changed everything. It was during this visit they first met their good friends Peter and Jocelyn Coyle. Peter and Jocelyn were selling a selection of Bromeliads at the markets, and their display really caught John and Agatha’s interest. A visit to Totara Waters followed, and that was it, they developed an incurable case of Bromeliad fever.

John has grown many plants from seed, he even has a mango that was propagated from seed, but it was one of Gerry Stansfield's seed growing demonstrations that caught John’s attention, and made him realize the potential of growing Bromeliads from seed. John spent quite some time talking with Gerry after the demonstration, getting all the information he could on the process and the secrets of the polystyrene light box propagator. It was not until a few years later that John had the chance to put theory into practice. A number of their Vrieseas came into flower in the same season, and John could not resist dabbling with a few of the flowers. He said it was pretty obvious looking at the flower which part required the pollen, his pollination was successful, and by the next spring he had plenty of Vriesea seed to experiment with. John set up a polystyrene propagator, similar to the one Gerry had shown him, and within two weeks he had germination. He was just thinking, “Wow! This is easy”...when within another two weeks nearly all his precious seedlings had died. John does not give up easily, so he kept trying, but he kept getting the same results. He became less and less excited about the initial germination, as he knew it was only a matter of time before most would die. Continued perseverance however, and the fact that he had plenty of spare seed eventually paid off & his success rate improved.

This initial taste of bromeliad hybridizing was just enough to whet John and Agatha’s appetites. Now a few years on they are a lot more deliberate in their approach to hybridizing. With their background in architecture, and Agatha’s artistic talents, as evidenced by her lovely oil paintings displayed at the 2009 Bromeliad Fiesta, they have the ability to design potential hybrids well before even making a cross. While their early crosses were all with Vriesea, they have experimented with Aechmea, Billbergia, Canistrum, and even a few bigenerics. Gradually they have changed their focus, and now Neo’s have become the plant of choice. They are starting to see promising results from their crosses with pedigree plants like carcharodon ‘Tiger, ‘Royal Hawaiian’, and ‘Queen Kopiliani’. Other crosses have been done using plants like zonata, ampullacea, and smithii, as they prefer to keep a species as one of parents. They say no one should restrict himself or herself too much when planning hybrids, as they feel most Bromeliads will perform well under the right growing conditions. The BSI photo index is a very useful resource for research, as it will show if similar crosses have already been done, and it will give insight as to how potential hybrids could turn out.

John and Agatha really like the compact, multi leaved Neo’s they’ve seen growing in the tropics. Their vision is to create unique hybrids that are well proportioned, with wide leaves, and a full rosette, just like those plants in the tropics, but ones that will perform well in our climate.

John and Agatha face the problem many home hybridizers do, and that is lack of growing space. To work efficiently with the space available, they have to be very selective, and will only pot up seedlings with potential. The rest of the grex will go into a community pot to grow on. If the selected seedlings start to show promise, they will then re-look at the grex to see if any others are worthy of potting up. At this point in time, they have some 50 trays of seedlings, each with at least 100 plants in them.
waiting to be potted on. Due to this large number of seedlings, they decided not to do any crosses this season, so they could concentrate on their current stock. Bromeliads are very slow growing from seed, so it is important to give the best seedlings optimum conditions. Also be mindful that a grex of seedlings takes up very little space, but they soon expand!

Their advice to anyone wishing to start hybridizing is to start with something like Aechmea, or Neo’s, use proven parent plants, have a lot of patience, and make sure you have a lot of room.

John and Agatha are in this for the fun of it, they say it’s great to watch a small green seedling gradually change into a promising plant. The reward is the chance to create something unique that can eventually be shared with and appreciated by, all Bromeliad enthusiasts.

[This article by Andrew Devonshire shows us how bromeliad fanciers in New Zealand get started in hybridizing bromeliads]
The BSSF is a non-profit educational organization promoting the study and cultivation of bromeliads. The BSSF meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Recreation Room of the San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. Meetings feature educational lectures and displays of plants. Go to sfbromeliad.org for information about our meetings.

The BSSF publishes a monthly newsletter that comes with the membership. Annual dues are single ($15), dual ($20). To join the BSSF, mail your name(s), address, telephone number, e-mail address, and check payable to the BSSF to: Harold Charns, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

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The Bromeliad Society International publishes the Journal bimonthly at Orlando, Florida. Subscription price (in U.S. $) is included in the 12-month membership dues. Please address all membership and subscription correspondence to Membership Secretary Annette Dominquez, 8117 Shenandoah Dr., Austin, TX 78753-5734, U.S.A. or go to www.bsi.org.

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