

Coloring California

Hibiscus rosa-sinensis **The Chinese** **(or Tropical) Hibiscus**

"Myella"

"William Stewart"

"Lasca Beauty"

Introduced, November 1968

Botanists and gardeners have long been captivated by the ornamental hibiscus, *H.rosa-sinensis*. Its talent for producing exciting hybrids (to date, over one thousand) has also produced a multitude of hibiscus hybridizer hobbyists. Ross H. Gast, a self described "dour Scotch gardener," became a research associate at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum in 1958, and was responsible for the three hibiscus that were introduced in November, 1968.

The hibiscus, *H.rosa-sinensis*, has a wide distribution in China, India, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. No wild hibiscus has survived in any of these countries, and, until a fossil was discovered in India, China was presumed the place of origin. Hibiscus flowers, with flaring petals and a long protruding column of stamens are spectacular. The blossoms are both single and double and measure from

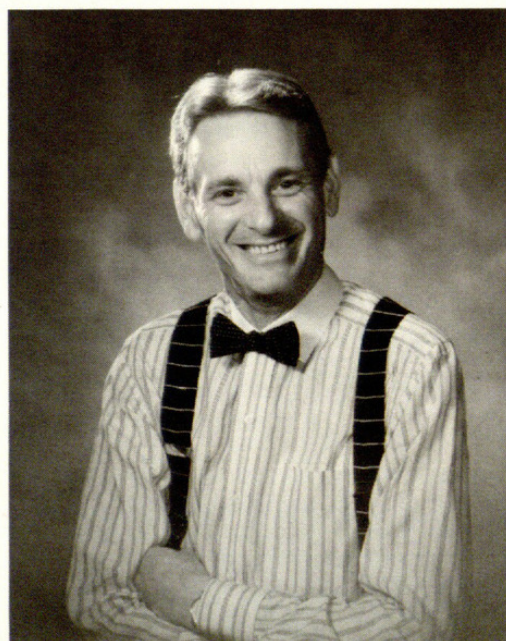
CALIFORNIA ARBORETUM FOUNDATION

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Leonard Tharp to be Designer-in-Residence at the Arboretum



Leonard Tharp

Leonard Tharp, noted floral designer and author will launch an exciting new year of programs at the Arboretum. Tharp's presentation at the Arboretum in late February will mark his first appearance on the West Coast. As the Arboretum's designer- in-residence, Tharp will present a series of lectures and workshops on the art of flower arranging over a period of 2 weeks. The California Arboretum Foundation is proud to present this unique opportunity for both industry professionals and dedicated amateurs.

For years a dynamic speaker in horticultural circles, Mr. Tharp has been especially active on the lecture circuit since the 1986 publication of his book, *Leonard Tharp: An American Style of*

Flower Arrangement. His floral boutique, Leonard Tharp, Inc. was an acclaimed success in Houston, Texas until Mr. Tharp closed the shop to relocate in the Washington D.C. area. There he established the Leonard Tharp Conservatory of Floral Art, which holds regular symposia sponsored by the American Horticultural Society at its National Headquarters, River Farm.

Mr. Tharp's classes at the Arboretum are scheduled for February 21, 22, 27 and 28. Participants may choose to attend morning lectures or all-day workshops with Mr. Tharp. A broad spectrum of topics will be covered with each day providing a wealth of practical information as well as a higher appreciation of the natural world. Workshops, limited to 15, will offer participants the exciting opportunity to create their own floral design working directly with Mr. Tharp.

Invitations for Mr. Tharp's series will be mailed in early January. Subjects for the lectures and workshops will be included in the registration materials. For further information, please contact the Foundation Office at (818) 447-8207. Mr. Tharp's book is currently available at the Arboretum Gift Shop, (818) 447-8751.

Travel News

Come Along With Me

A trip to the March 1990 Philadelphia Flower Show affords a marvelous opportunity to include visits to other "not to be missed" sites. Working with Hospitality Philadelphia Style, an organization that promotes the flower show and depends heavily on local volunteers to make visits a success, a 4 nights and 3 1/2 days itinerary has been arranged exclusively for members of the California Arboretum Foundation and their guests.

To briefly summarize the highlights:

- We will be staying at a great Victorian landmark hotel in the historic area, the Independence Park Inn. There are only 36 guest rooms, all with high ceilings.

- An expertly guided tour of "Flowers in Art" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

- Lunch in a private home in the Chestnut Hill area.

- A visit to the home and garden of Ernesta and Fred Ballard. Ernesta was the head of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society for many years, is largely responsible for the excellence of the flower show, has been honored by many horticultural societies for her contributions.

- a visit to the Morris Arboretum, a 175 acre estate.

- a welcome dinner at a private club.

- a visit to the Barnes Foundation, a gallery housing 1,000 paintings including works by Picasso, Renoir, Cezanne and Matisse, formerly a private home.

- Lunch at City Tavern, reconstructed on the spot where Washington, Jefferson, Franklin et al relaxed as they discussed the problems of the day.

- preview party and dinner at the flower show - opening night! Black tie for the men. Cocktail dresses for the ladies.

- a day in the Brandywine Valley including visits to Winterthur Museum and Gardens and Longwood Gardens.

- Lunch at the Chadds Ford Inn.

- a visit to the home of noted herb specialist Joanna Reed. She will prepare dinner for us using herbs from her own garden.

- an early morning (pre-public opening) behind-the-scenes tour of the Philadelphia Garden Show - an excellent time to take photographs.

Dates, facts and costs:

Plan to arrive in Philadelphia by Thursday evening, March 8, 1990. Touring with Hospitality Philadelphia Style begins Friday at 9:30 a.m. and doesn't end until you want to say farewell to the flower show on Monday, March 12th.

- \$525 includes all admissions, tour busses and guides, 3 lunches, 2 dinners and a \$50 contribution to the California Arboretum Foundation.

- \$700 will include all of the above and add the Philadelphia Flower Show Preview Dinner to your itinerary.

- You are responsible for the cost of your transportation to Philadelphia and from the airport to your hotel and vice versa, and your hotel room.

Independence Park Inn rates:

Double occupancy \$109

Single \$99

(Includes complementary European breakfast and afternoon tea.)

Since these days in Philadelphia have been specifically arranged for us with visits to private houses and gardens, even a dinner cooked by herb specialist Joanna Reed, we must have your fee, \$525 or \$700, by January 15th. For a more detailed description of the places we will visit, what we will see, stop by the Foundation Office and ask to see the folder sent by Hospitality Philadelphia Style. I tested their hospitality at the time of the 1988 Philadelphia Flower Show and gave it 4 stars. This promises to be even better as it is more extensive and planned just for CAF members and guests.

There will be a New York Flower Show from March 3 to 11 and a Massachusetts Flower Show (Boston) March 10 to 18. I am planning to extend my trip to one or both. If you are interested, there is a place to check on the enclosed reservation form. It is easy to go by train. The largest additional cost would be for hotel rooms, especially in New York City.

Alice Frost Thomas

Coloring California *continued from page 1*

two to fourteen inches in diameter. They display an incredible array of color — from white to pure yellow, through orange, rose, violet, purple to brown. In California, the plants grow from four to fifteen feet in height; in the tropics, they can be tree-like at thirty feet.

The hibiscus is a member of the mallow family that includes plants of economic value, such as okra and hemp, as well as ornamental shrubs. Hawaii features the exotic beauty as its state flower. The Chinese and East Indians find practical uses for the hibiscus. In India, they polish their shoes with the petals.

In spite of domestic applications, the blossom has been dubbed "Queen of Tropical Flowers." In the tradition of royalty, portraits of the hibiscus hang in two galleries in England. The earliest portrait, made in the 1770s, hangs in the British Museum. The other portraits, commissioned in 1810 by a tea merchant, are water colors painted by a Chinese artist. These hang in the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society.

These beautiful flowers excited all who travelled the trade routes. In 1753 they were described by botanist Linnaeus. By the end of the 19th century they were introduced to the greenhouses of Europe. As early as 1820, propagation became a significant and rewarding interest. In 1868, hybridization, a hobby of the wealthy plantation owners in Hawaii, eventually made Hawaii the acknowledged leader in research and experience in the field.

Such enthusiasm captured the interest of Ross H. Gast, who went to Hawaii as a young man in the 1930s to escape the depression. There he worked with A.B. Bush, a compulsive hibiscus pollen duster. In addition, he sought out old Japanese gardeners to learn the techniques of pollination developed on the plantations in the past century.

Mr. Gast returned to California in the forties to make his fortune with a simple invention, the paper and wire "twistems." This provided him with the leisure and income to pursue his passion, hibiscus hybridizing. He purchased a greenhouse, when he realized that a controlled atmosphere was necessary to successfully hybridize hibiscus in California. His work included building a bibliography on hibiscus, making a collection of old varieties and true species, and developing a program to produce hardier hibiscus for the nursery trade of Southern California. In 1958, when he became affiliated with the Arboretum, he was the leading authority in the field of hibiscus hybridization.

By Constance Wood



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