



Ralf Berster's Rosenhang

by Daphne Filiberti

Ralf at Eltville,
the inspiration for
Rosenhang



There is a very beautiful and impressive collection of roses within 10 miles of the European financial center — which also happens to be one of Europe's major gateway cities: Frankfurt, Germany. If you are ever in the vicinity of this interesting and colorful city and you love roses, Ralf Berster's Rosenhang is a must see visit. There's a good chance you would fly into Frankfurt if you ever make the pilgrimage to Sangerahausen, which houses the largest rose collection in the world. Juxtaposed to the bustling city of Frankfurt, the Rosenhang is a tranquil haven for birds and roses.

There is an interesting history behind the garden. To begin, Ralf Berster first became interested in old garden roses in 1990 after the wall came down. He had friends over from East Berlin who had a longtime dream of seeing the Rhine. They ended up at Eltville, a city of wine, sparkling wine and roses, situated picturesquely on the river. While they were there they visited the beautiful Elector's castle with

its extraordinary rose garden — which is the city's landmark, built in the first half of the 14th century. The old garden roses there left an immediate impression on Ralf. He quickly became fascinated by their

antiquity as well as the mystique of their names. Not only was there something old fashioned about these roses, but they also had personality and wonderful fragrances. When he returned home, he be-



photo courtesy Daphne Filiberti

gan to read about the roses he had seen and subsequently started to buy. He caught rose fever and pretty soon the roses outgrew his little garden. He underestimated their potential for growth and his

garden soon grew into something resembling a jungle. He came across a grassy public lot, which is now the Rosenhang. Originally the lot held a loam pit. When there was no more demand for loam as con-

struction material, the pit on the lot became used as a village dump mostly for concrete. In the '60s when the pit was filled they added soil from the region over it, planted some shrubs, trees and a few roses

there, and allowed the grass to grow. The soil is a volcanic loamy mix, which the roses love.

It was Trevor Griffiths and his beautiful and unpretentious rose books which inspired Ralf to write a letter to the town hall and suggest planting roses on the lot. Ralf planted the garden at his own expense and took full responsibility for the care of the roses. He got carried away with the project and didn't see what he was in for. The concept behind the garden was to keep up the environmental integrity of the lot — which had become a focal point after the transformation from village dump to public garden had taken place.

The city administration gave him the green light in 1993 and he began to dig holes in preparation for the plantings. In October and No-



'Louise Odier' and 'Adélaïde d'Orléans'

'Venusta Pendula'



'Griseldis'



Rosa villosa

vember of that year he planted the first 200 roses. He planted 200 more each year for the subsequent two years. In the course of the years he learned from several mistakes he had made. A certain

not a big issue. He only takes away dead wood and what is growing out of hand. He does without the use of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides. Ralf can be quoted saying that sometimes the

sobering up process took place at the same time. Following a long sequence of mild winters, the last were extraordinarily cold, and the teas and most of the hybrid Chinas didn't make it.

He tries to allow the roses to grow as they please. Pruning is

roses don't look picture perfect but the birds can sing happily ever after.

The Rosenhang has a wonderful collection of more than 600 old rose varieties with all classes of old garden roses represented. The natural, skillful plantings look as if they were happened upon in nature, resembling a meadow. I have had the opportunity to visit the garden on several occasions. Walking through the garden I am struck by a chorus of birds. I have seen a mockingbird's nest in the roses and sometimes you can see a scarab or two peaking through stamens as well. Roses grow as they will up the trees in the cherry orchard on the property. 'Venusta Pendula'

swirls around a pine tree making its way into the highest branches. The rose is an ayrshire of unknown origin, which Wilhelm Kordes brought back into business in 1928. It is very hardy and beautiful with its reddish flower buds opening into creamy white blooms.

There can be a symphony of colors and fragrances intermingling as you leisurely stroll the property. There are many pleasant surprises as you work your way through. There is an architecture to the garden but I believe it was conceived intuitively. Some of the larger, taller shrubs that reach the 12-foot range in height like 'Griseldis', 'Anne of Geierstein' and 'Highdownensis' with their sparkling hues of pink and soft red form natural backdrops to vast varieties of

OGRs. 'Dr Georges Martin' leans up against an inviting park bench. Favorites like 'Kazanlik' and 'Mme Hardy' are somehow expected in a garden like this; but their displays are jaw dropping just the same.

Every so often you can come across a rare rose or one that you haven't seen before and have only read about. One example would be 'St John's Rose' (*R. sancta*), which comes from Ethiopia where



'St John's Rose' and 'Dr Georges Martin'

it is said to have been found on Coptic graveyards, but meanwhile is almost extinct because the goats eat almost everything that's green in the vicinity.

As I reflect on the garden, I notice that deep purples with their velvety robes like 'Centifolia a Fleurs Doubles Violettes', and 'Tuscany Superb' command attention like glamorous stars on the red carpet.

They add depth of color, drama and intrigue to the softer shades of antique roses. In German they call their velvety irresistibility "zumpt". You can find many roses with saturated jewel like colors

flowing through this garden. If you are ever in the area, you are welcome to come and visit. This is a place to stop, take a deep breath and enjoy the roses.

The garden is open everyday and no appointment is necessary. The address is Büdesheimerstrasse; D-61184 Klein-Karben; Germany. Once you are on Büdesheimerstrasse there are signs to direct you to the garden. It is across the street from the old cemetery there. Ralf Berster is also available for tours. He can be reached at 06039/43349 within Germany and at 0049/6039/43349 from the states.

Visit our website for a complete list of roses planted at Rosenhang: www.rose.org -> Resources -> Interesting Links side bar.



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