

Peter Jackson Expands Louisiana Iris

Breeding in Australia



BY TOM W. DILLARD

During the dreadful autumn of the year 2000, while America endured the political intrigue of the contested vote recounts in Florida, I sought solace at an international iris conference in New Zealand. It was this gathering which gave me the opportunity to get to know scores of interesting people from throughout the iris-growing world, with Peter Jackson of Australia being

join this internet discussion group by sending an email to Lairis-subscribe@yahoo.com.) Peter posted messages quite infrequently, but when he did, they were invariably interesting. He would occasionally bless the whole group by posting a photograph of his latest seedling. And indeed, he had a camera hanging from his neck when I met him on the sprawling lawn of a suburban Tauranga

his wife, Pam, who was, just like her spouse, charming in one of those quiet but thoughtful ways frequently found among Australians.

It turns out that Peter was born in New Zealand, growing up in Wellington in the North Island and Canterbury and Otago in the South Island. Jackson recalls, “My interest in irises (bearded) began as a child, helping my grandmother in the garden. When we moved to Kapiti area (north of Wellington) in the late 1970s, several iris nurseries were offering Louisianas as a new kind for New Zealand. I bought several, including *I. fulva*, some Abbeville Reds, and a few named hybrids, such as ‘Grace Scott’ and ‘Eolian.’ From then on we were both hooked! They survived heavy winter frosts, which impressed us.”

In 1982, the Jacksons moved to Adelaide, South Australia, Pam’s birthplace. They found the soil highly alkaline, so they switched to growing Louisianas in pots of acidic growing medium, which they set in ponds of water. This is a labor intensive enterprise, and Mrs. Jackson contributes more than her share.

Hybridizing Program

By 1994 Peter was ready to start his own breeding program. He admits his initial program simply involved matching one handsome parent with another favorite. Still, Peter believes this early phase provided “a lot of pleasure” as well



Peter Jackson of Adelaide, South Australia, in the garden.

among the most prized encounters. For several years, Peter has been quietly hybridizing Louisiana irises—and finally, his cultivars are being introduced into America.

Internet

Peter and I first met via the Internet; we both subscribe to the Louisiana iris “listserv” discussion group. (Anyone can

tour garden. We were both snapping images of a delightfully designed and soothing water garden.

“Hello Tom, I’m Peter Jackson,” I hear him say softly, “and I’m glad to meet you off-the-Internet.” Peter was an even more interesting and fun in person than in the confined frame of a computer screen. He then introduced me to

as a “time of observation,” when he could learn to carefully evaluate seedlings. He registered and introduced his first hybrids in 1997, ‘It’s Lilac Time,’ and ‘Oaklands Jewel’.

Jackson says he has gotten to the point now that he plans his crosses very carefully, in part simply due to space limitations imposed by growing seedlings in pots.

Goals

Among his goals is “to produce a high quality red, a ruffled near black, and to experiment with veining and spray patterns.” He has always been attracted to the red Louisianas, mentioning ‘Ann Chowning’ as a favorite, noting, “I love the deep currant red and also the contrast of the bright gold triangular signals.”

Peter has selected “the reddest LA that has appeared in my seedling patch,” for further observation and refinement. This cross of ‘Lucy Payens’ x ‘Gladiators Gift’ is a bitone with bright red falls (which he admits need further work).



The same cross produced a lower growing iris of intense yellow with heavy ruffling of strong substance, which might be introduced later.

Breeding for red also produced ‘Coonawarra Claret,’ one of Jackson’s guest irises that bloomed for the 2002 Society convention in Little Rock. Introduced in 1999, ‘Coonawarra Claret’ is a deep velvety wine red, which contrasts nicely with cream style arms and a deep gold star signal. His near-black breeding line has produced ‘Storm Boy’ and ‘Iron Man,’ with several seedlings under evaluation.

‘Coonawarra Claret’ resulted from a cross of ‘Gladiator’s Gift’ x ‘Desert Jewel.’ ‘Gladiator’s Gift’ (J. Taylor, 90) shows up again and again in Jackson’s crosses, as it does in much of the breeding work being done in Australia and much of the American west coast. He also makes quite a lot of use of ‘Lucy Payens’ (J. Taylor 92) as well as Taylor’s famed ‘Margaret Lee’ (R91).

The gardening public has been quite taken with two of Peter’s cultivars which are not from his dark red breeding. ‘It’s Lilac Time’ (R. 97) is a very soft lavender bitone with complementary cream and lilac style arms, and it is reported to have a pleasing fragrance. A deep rose pink with an umbrella form, ‘Bright Parasol’ (R99) sports a raised spear signal on all petals.

Among Jackson’s favorite named Louisiana irises are the previously mentioned ‘Ann Chowning,’ and several introductions by fellow Australians, including Heather Pryor’s ‘Garnet Storm Dancer’ and ‘Venus Vortex,’ a deep purple with a huge white spray pattern that Jackson proclaims “stunning—very dramatic!” He likes John Taylor’s ‘Undercover’ (R 96), a dark violet, as well as Taylor’s ‘Daintree’ (R 97), a “beautiful bright yellow with great form and ruffling.”

Compact Program

Jackson’s breeding program has been carried on in a tiny back yard garden in Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. The Jacksons grow over 120 varieties of Louisianas, plus his seedlings—all of this

done in 500 pots. “People are amazed at what we can fit into our back yard, but it’s a case of making sure that everything is in its place,” Jackson says.



Jackson Irises. From left, top, ‘Encounter Bay’, which has just received an HC from the Victorian Iris Society in Australia; ‘It’s Lilac Time’, among Peter’s first, a 1997 registration.

Above, from top: ‘Storm Boy’, a deep purple; ‘Burra Burra, a red-brown blend registered in 2001; and the spectacularly ruffled, light lavender blue ‘Queen Adelaide’, registered in 2001.



Each year Jackson plants his seeds in trays, and during their first year the resulting seedlings are transferred twice to successively larger pots. After the first year, plants are repotted yearly, a southern hemisphere summer-long process involving both Peter and Pam. Fortunately, Peter owns his own cleaning company (which gives him greater control over his time than the years he was employed as a master craftsman in wood).

In addition to gardening, Jackson has a long and abiding interest in music. He has a large collection of music, mostly classical and involving orchestral, piano, chamber, and lighter styles. He has played the piano since childhood. He and Pam are both cat fanciers.



More From Peter. *From top:* a stalk of the 1999 deep rosy violet 'Bright Parasol'; 'Royal Music', cream beige and dark red from 2001. **Right, from top:** veined and creamy 'Creme Freeze'; the velvety red 'Coonawarra Claret'.

Coming to the USA

Irises bred by Peter Jackson have been scarce in North America, but that situation is about to change. Isle of View Iris Garden, located in Battle Ground, Washington, has become Jackson's representative in the United States. Ms. Lynn Finkel, proprietor of Isle of View, expressed great hopes for Jackson's hybrids on the American market: "These irises are not only beautiful, they are also tough. We want to do our part to get Peter's irises into gardens throughout the nation." Lynn said the Jackson irises are being propagated now, and she anticipates offering them in her 2004 garden catalog.



Tom Dillard is Secretary of SLI. The Isle of View Iris Garden can be reached through the Garden's website or regular mail, as shown in the Commercial Directory, page 31.