

On the evening of April 12, at the historic Blinn House in Pasadena, the SCHS hosted guest speaker Brian Kemble, Curator of the Ruth Bancroft Garden in Walnut Creek, to present our 2024 Ruth Borun Lecture Series. He spoke to us on the topic of “All Plants Come From Somewhere.”

Kemble has worked at the Bancroft garden since 1980, and it is his responsibility to maintain the look and feel of this preservation garden, guided by Bancroft’s design principles and the conservation easement overseen by the Garden Conservancy. He is always on the lookout for plants that can seamlessly be woven into existing compositions, and shared his thoughts about how he selects plants to optimize their successful integration into the garden, selecting specimens based on physical and aesthetic compatibility with the existing landscape.

He began his presentation with a photo of how the garden looked when Bancroft first began establishing it in 1972, and populated his talk with images from the garden today. Kemble shared pictures of plants selected by Bancroft growing alongside more recent acquisitions, as well as photos showing many of the specimens in their native habitat. Kemble’s beautiful images were accompanied by his detailed descriptions of the plants, including information about their growth habits and how some have broader adaptability than others and can succeed in conditions very different from their home turf.

Kemble has made dozens of trips worldwide seeking out drought tolerant plants and experimenting with numerous species to learn through trial and error which plants can adapt and succeed in a new environment at the Bancroft garden. For instance, while *Aloe melanacantha* happily feeds hummingbirds in Walnut Creek, *Aloe polyphylla* struggles and develops black tips on its spines. Other genera successfully represented in the garden are *Gasteria*, *Crassula* (*C. rupestris*, *C. deceptor*), *Cheiridopsis*, *Cephalophyllum*, *Ferocactus*, *Dudleya*, the family *Aizoaceae* and *Agave*, the last of which are quite well-represented. One particular *Agave parrasana* was already



Photo credit: Brian Kemble

growing at the garden when Kemble first started working for Bancroft, and over the years additions included *A. shawii*, *A. colorata*, *A. victoriae-reginae*, *A. bracteosa* and *A. impressa* among others.

Kembles adheres to the tenet that plants from climates similar to ours are more likely to succeed in our gardens, particularly ones from the world’s Mediterranean climate zones. However, he also believes that it is important to remember that all plants, even hybrids, derive from species that originated in an actual place, and therefore experimentation is needed to learn what each plant’s preferences and limitations are. He feels that by including botanic diversity in our gardens, and sharing knowledge, we can aid in the preservation of certain species whose native habitats may be under threat or endangered.

🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

Video for this program will be posted to our YouTube channel soon.

SPECIAL THANKS

The SCHS would like to thank the following for their assistance in making this event a success: Blinn House coordinator Nick Giovanazzi, the SCHS board for all their efforts during the evening, as well as behind the scenes, particularly the RBLS Committee whose work brought us our speaker, and Aprille Curtis whose lovely bouquets went home as door prizes, and of course, the Borun Foundation, without whose endowment these types of programs would not be possible.

SCHS MAY CITG EVENT

As our first Coffee in the Garden event for 2024 is slated for May 4, it will be history when this issue of newsletter arrives in your in-box, but through our PR outreach and social media, we were able to fill three separate tour schedules of SCHS member Alfred Hockenmaier’s garden in the San Fernando Valley.

Hockenmaier is an award-winning orchid grower who is committed to adapting his garden to an ever-warming climate. The garden is his life’s work and includes fruit trees, vegetables, ornamentals, and greenhouses, as well as a small stream and pond among other delights.

We thank Alfred for hosting us and look forward to sharing photos with our members next month! 🌀

SCHS MONTHLY GARDEN SHARE

Things will heat up by the end of May, so try to finish these chores now:

- Finish planting any warm season annuals and veggies so you can start harvesting sooner!
- Dead-head regularly to extend plants’ blooming season.
- Let your wildflowers drop their seeds before pulling them out.
- Monitor your irrigation as temperatures rise – decrease for California native plants, and maybe increase incrementally for all others as needed.
- Start checking for seasonal pests as well as fungal problems and treat as necessary.
- Continue on a feeding schedule for roses, fruit trees, perennials and veggies.

🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

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