

THE
Camellia
REVIEW





INSIDE COVER: 'JOE NUCCIO' *Photo by Bradford King*
FRONT COVER: 'JULIUS NUCCIO' *Photo by Bradford King*

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THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITOR

FIRES DOMINATE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BY BRADFORD KING

The Eaton Canyon fire devastated Altadena and Pasadena with thousands of homes and businesses lost. For camellia lovers, the key loss was Nuccio's Nurseries. Tom Nuccio's home on the property and other structures were destroyed. While some people didn't survive the fire, fortunately Tom was safe, as he was in the hospital the week before the fire. Jim Nuccio and his family had to evacuate their home and are also safe. They were able to move back home by mid-February.



While many of Nuccio's plants survived, there was no water or rain for 15 days after the fire. No one but first responders were allowed in the burned areas. Jim was able to assess the damage and deliver a van of 99 camellias to

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The Huntington. Tim Thibault, Curator of Woody plants, gave me a tour of the plants, which all looked to be in good shape.

Autumn Ayers and Julieanne Roake were able to get a truckload of 114 cultivars for Descanso Gardens.

Hundreds of camellia folk called and pledged to help. This was a problem, because the evacuation orders prohibited travel in the area. In addition, water and power were not ready to be restored. Nuccio's water supply had run dry; consequently, there continued to be fear of more loss of plants. Jim Nuccio reported that half of their inventory of 200,000 plants prepared for this season's market was lost. In addition, there were hundreds of stock plants, unregistered new seedlings, and historic species and cultivars that burned.

On January 23, a truckload of water was delivered to Nuccio's thanks to Jim Fitzpatrick, Vice President of the American Camellia Society, who also holds the same position in the Southern California Camellia Society. In addition, Jim Nuccio ordered a second truckload of water.

Jim Nuccio turned 75 on January 24 and got a wonderful surprise birthday gift—the water came back on that morning. While many azaleas didn't survive and some camellias burned, many camellias were OK!

This devastating fire, which was spread by winds as high as 100 miles an hour, has moved up the closing of Nuccio's Nurseries. It will close sometime in 2025 after 90 years of producing rare beautiful camellias and azaleas.



'FIMBRIATA'



CAMELLIA PETAL *Fimbriation*

BY BRADFORD KING

There are camellia flowers that have fimbriated petal edges, which make an especially attractive and distinctive bloom. Eight examples of camellias with serrated petal edges are described and illustrated below.

One of the most attractive examples of petal serration is the iconic sport of 'Alba Plena'. 'Fimbriata' has a medium white flower with serrated petals. It was imported from China to England in 1816. Fimbriata is a synonym of serration, hence its name.

'Clark Hubbs' has a large brilliant dark red peony flower with a fringe of teeth on the petal edges. In the 1970s and 80s, it was a popular camellia show bloom in California due to its size, rich red color, and interesting serrated petals. Today it is seen in older private and public gardens.



'CLARK HUBBS'



'RAINY SUN'

I find 'Rainy Sun' blooming in Descanso Gardens midwinter. The medium flower has wonderful red serrated petals. Unfortunately, it is not widely grown.

In 1951, Toichi Domoto released 'Flowerwood'. It is a sport of 'Mathotiana', which retained its large red bloom with the added attraction of having serrated petals.

Three other camellia mutations have deep petal serrations that also have beautiful colorful flowers.

In 1961, a pale pink peony flower with frimbriated petals was named 'Hawaii' by Paul Gains of the Hamilton and Clark Nursery. It is a sport of 'C. M. Wilson' and part of a trio of camellias honoring the 50th state.



'FLOWERWOOD'

The others are 'Kona' and 'Maui'. 'Kona' retained a peony flower with serrated petals but has a white flower with an unusual green tint.

In 1969, a large to very large sport of 'C. M. Wilson' was discovered and named 'C. M. Wilson Splendor' by Paul Gains. When Julius Nuccio, cofounder of Nuccio's Nurseries, was shown the beautiful



'HAWAII'



'KONA'

light pink anemone flower with deep serrated petals fully edged in white, he convinced them to change the name to 'Elegans Splendor'. This change documented that it was a flower mutation from the "Elegans Family." 'Elegans Splendor' has a large to very large flower with deep petal serrations. The anemone flower is a lovely shade of light pink with white petal edges.

In France, the iconic 'Ville de Nantes' has upright serrated petals on a dark red flower with white markings. It was released in 1910 by Heurtin in Nantes. It is a sport of 'Donckelarii'. Typically, in America there are few blooms with serrated petals until late season. However, the medium to large semidouble flower is popular with and without serrated petals.



'ELEGANS SPLENDOR'



'VILLE DE NANTES'

'DRAMA GIRL'



DRAMA

BY BRADFORD KING



'DRAMA GIRL VARIEGATED'

A drama queen is a person known to react to situations in an exaggerated and unnecessary dramatic manner. In other words, problems are blown out of proportion. Excessive emotion is the hallmark of a drama queen. A drama queen can be male, female, gay, or straight.

'Drama Girl' is dramatic when variegated, even when covered in icy snow at John Grimm's "Camellia Heaven."

During the late 1800s into the early 1900s, Charles Dana Gibson portrayed ideal feminine attractiveness and personal traits in his pen and ink



'GIBSON GIRL'



ALPHEUS AND ARETHUSA



illustrations that were known as “The Gibson Girl.” She appeared over a 20-year period in Life Magazine and Harper’s Weekly. In 1947, Descanso Gardens registered ‘Gibson Girl’. It has a medium semidouble white flower with red stripes. She has a lovely dramatic bloom not often seen, just as “The Gibson Girl” as an ideal women has faded through the dramatic changes of the women’s movement in this century.

There is even drama in the North Vista at The Huntington Botanical Gardens. An impressive mature 15-foot tall ‘Fashionata’ towers over the Allegory of the Greek river god Alpheus and Arethusa the water nymph. Arethusa is a beautiful nymph who attracted the attention of the river god Alpheus. She was not interested in his advances and fled. In order to escape, she transformed herself into a spring. Alpheus followed her through an underground tunnel and their water mingle in the fountain.

The drama continues every winter when ‘Fashionata’ produces abundant beautiful large deep pink semidouble flowers with curled and creped petals.

In conclusion, from the Greek theater to today’s televised award shows, we are entertained by drama. However, as much as we appreciate the beauty of *C. japonica* ‘Drama Girl’, a drama queen is at best entertaining and frequently hard to take.



‘FASHIONATA’



'FERRIS WHEEL' AND ITS RED SPORT



'FERRIS WHEEL'



'CIRCUS'

SEEING EYE TO EYE

BY BRADFORD KING

Tom and Jim Nuccio agree completely on many camellias but also have different favorite camellias. For example, Tom likes 'Circus' better than 'Ferris Wheel'. While Jim touts 'Ferris Wheel' as the largest white cultivar with stripes.

'Ferris Wheel' was introduced in 2016 and was awarded the prestigious Illges Seedling Japonica Award in 2019.

When 'Ferris Wheel' mutated a pink flower with red stripes and white petal edges, they agreed to register it as 'Circus' to keep the carnival theme.



'BLUSH FERRIS WHEEL'



'NUCCIO'S GEM'



'NUCCIO'S PEARL'



'SILVER WAVES'

In 2024, it was issued the ACS Swell Mutant Award.

Both cultivars are great additions to a camellia garden. They also agreed that the two other sports seen on 'Ferris Wheel' are interesting but not distinctive. They don't plan to register them. One is a pale pink; the other is a red flower the same color as a white flower's stripes.

They both pick 'Nuccio's Gem' as their favorite white camellia. It was introduced in 1970 by Joe and Julius Nuccio before either Tom or Jim joined the nursery. It was awarded the Illges Seedling Japonica Award in 1979. 'Nuccio's Gem' continues to be popular, as it has a classic medium to large formal double bloom.

Tom picks 'Silver Waves' as another of his favorite white camellias be-



'JULIUS NUCCIO'



'ROYAL VELVET'



'YULETIDE'

cause fresh yellow stamens are a standout in the center of 'Silver Waves.' Tom loves stamens!

They both chose 'Nuccio's Pearl' as their favorite pink *C. japonica*. It has a beautiful creamy blush pink formal double flower that shades to darker pink at the petal edges.

They saw eye to eye with their cousin Jude, Joe's son, when they named a large to very large brilliant dark red semidouble for their father. Julius refused to have a camellia named for himself. After he retired, the "Boys" decided to honor him. 'Julius Nuccio' was awarded the Illges Seedling Japonica Award in 2018. Jim Nuccio named a large to very large red semidouble camellia 'Royal Velvet' after he was in the shower and noticed a bath mat with a rich dark red color was called "Royal Velvet." The other Nuccios agreed with Jim. 'Royal Velvet' was introduced in 1987 and has gone on to win at many camellia shows over the years. It was awarded the Illges Seedling Japonica Award in 2001.



'BUTTONS 'N BOWS'

Did you know that both Tom and Jim were college athletes? Tom rowed crew for Santa Clara, and Jim ran track at Portland State and in the Army. Today they run Nuccio's Nurseries.

They unanimously agree that their favorite *C. sasanqua* is the very popular 'Yuletide'. This single brilliant red flower has a cluster of bright yellow stamens. It is noted for blooming during the holiday season.

Their favorite *C. reticulata* is 'Dr. Clifford Parks' for its classic very large rich red flower.

'Button's 'n Bows' is their favorite non-reticulata hybrid introduced by their father and uncle in 1985. Julius named it stating, "I hope this won't affect my manly reputation."

Nuccio's Nurseries was begun in 1935 by two brothers, Joe and Julius, and will close in 2025. Tom age 77 and Jim age 75 have decided to retire after Tom's house and other structures were destroyed in the Eaton Canyon fire. This 90-year-old nursery is known worldwide for its azaleas and camellias. It will never be replicated!



'DR. CLIFFORD PARKS'

SURPRISING *Camellia Facts*

BY BRADFORD KING

Camellias originate in Southeast Asia where they have been grown commercially for thousands of years for tea and oil.

COMMERCIAL CAMELLIAS

As you know, it is the new foliage of *C. sinensis* that is processed to make tea. However, camellia oil, also known as tea oil, is produced from camellia seeds by cold pressing to extract the concentrated oil. In Japan they use *C. japonica* and in China *C. oleifera* seeds.

The surprising fact is the many uses of camellia oil. It is used in cooking, for beauty care of hair, nails and skin, oiling tools, and joint care for horses.

ANCIENT CAMELLIAS

Camellias have a long history in Asia as ornamental plants. Camellias are long-lived woody plants. Many cultivars are known to be hundreds of years old. The surprising fact is that an ancient tree in Yunnan China is documented to have been planted in the Yuan Dynasty (1347 AD) according to the Kunming Institute of Botany. It can be found in Panlong Monastery.

In England camellias dating



CAMELLIA OIL BEAUTY PRODUCTS
Photo J. Trehane



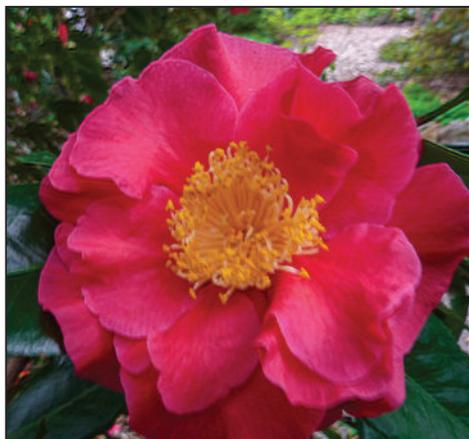
COLD PRESSING *Photo J Trehane*

from 1792 were discovered during renovation of the Wentworth Woodhouse estate.

In the U.S. pre-1900, camellias were a specialty at Magnolia Gardens since they began importing camellias in the mid-1840s.

The oldest documented camellia growing in California is a large, light rose red semidouble flower with broad thick petals that grows on an average spreading *C. japonica* tree. The original plant was purchased by Harlem Cate at Redondo Pier, Los Angeles, California, in 1888 from a sailor on a Japanese tramp steamer. It was planted in a nursery at Durfee Road, Pico, California, where it was known as ‘Durfee Road’. When the property was up for sale, Ralph Peer bought the plant to save it from being destroyed. Peer decided to move the plant to a place of honor at his home “Park Hill” in Hollywood where it was called ‘California’.

Moving the tree was a major undertaking. The roots on one side were cut and then two months later a second side and so on until it was ready to be boxed. Jimmy Tuliano, the Peer’s chief gardener and all-around handyman, was in charge. He went into the hole under the tree and daringly cut the tap root. The tree was lifted in April 1959 leaving a seven-foot deep hole. It was then trucked to Park Hill in Laurel Canyon, which has rocky slopes that



‘CALIFORNIA’

needed terracing in order to plant camellias. A good-sized level spot was needed to plant ‘California’.

The identified area was down a 200-foot embankment with a 40-degree slope. Wooden rail tracks were constructed including a 30-degree corner. Large ropes and winches were needed to lower this 30-foot-tall tree with root ball weighing 15 tons into the prepared hole. Half way down a large bang was heard

as one rope snapped followed in quick succession by all the other ropes. The tree slid to the corner as those watching anticipated disaster. The tree and root ball bounced through the corner and landed safely on its side in the prepared hole.

‘California’ was home!



'KANJIRO'

When Ralph Peer II sold Park Hill in 2004, the tree was moved to The Huntington Botanical Gardens where it currently resides.

CAMELLIA DORMANCY

Camellias, like most plants, go dormant in the winter due to cooler weather and less sunlight. The surprising fact is that camellias bloom when dormant. Camellias are one of the few woody plants that bloom when dormant because they require a certain amount of darkness for buds to open. Can you believe 'Kanjiro' is dormant?

When temperatures warm up and there is an increase in sunlight, camellias break dormancy and begin to flush new growth.

RED SPORTS

Many white camellias with red markings will mutate a red flower the same



GROWTH FLUSH IN APRIL



'FERRIS WHEEL' AND ITS RED SPORT

red as the markings. This is seen with 'Ferris Wheel', 'Kaleidoscope', 'Chris Bergamini', 'Robin's Candy', and 'Princess Masako'.

This phenomenon is also seen on 'Circus', which is a sport of 'Ferris Wheel' with a strawberry flower and red stripes.

FORMAL DOUBLE FLOWERS

It is well known that formal double flowers are both male and female sterile, which means they can't be used to breed new cultivars. The surprising fact is that late season a few formal double cultivars show stamens with viable pollen. This is illustrated by 'Nuccio's Bella Rossa', the last of thousands of blooms of this cultivar seen at Nuccio's in 2024.



'PRINCESS MASAKO'



'PRINCESS MASAKO' RED SPORT'



'CHRIS BERGAMINI' MOSTLY RED



'KALEIDOSCOPE' AND RED SPORT

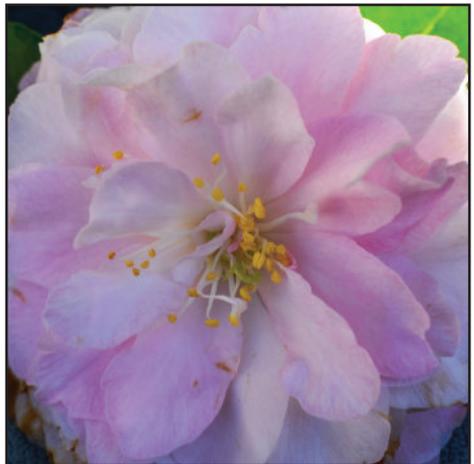
There are a few other formal double camellias that can have pollen late season. Jim Nuccio says he has observed it occasionally on 'Nuccio's Cameo'. This year I noticed stamens and pollen on 'Nuccio's Pearl'.

Tom Nuccio told me the pollen from 'Nuccio's Bella Rossa' is fertile, because in the past they had three of its seedlings. Was it a surprise that none were formal double? Perhaps! However, it is surprising there are no registered cultivars introduced as bred from a formal double camellia.

CONTINUOUS CAMELLIA GROWTH

Typically, camellias have new growth in the spring with some cultivars having a second growth spurt later in the growth cycle. However, the surprising fact is that *C. azalea* grows continually, producing new foliage and flowers all year long in China. The new growth produces new buds with flowers peaking in the summer, also a surprising fact. New Chinese seedlings have been bred that have these characteristics. While the American Camellia Society has imported some, they are not generally available.

We need to wait for the *C. azalea* seedlings to be guaranteed for



'NUCCIO'S PEARL'



'CIRCUS' WITH ITS RED SPORT



'NUCCIO'S BELLA ROSSA' STAMENS

two years then released for commercial propagation, which takes a few years before they can be marketed.

FUTURE SURPRISES

This year I was able to harvest pollen from *C. chuangtsoensis*, which has a miniature yellow flower. It blooms late summer into fall. Fresh pollen was used on early blooming 'Tama-no-ura' and 'Tama Peacock'. Pods have developed. Will they survive summer heat or squirrels that patrol for seeds and become seedlings? Will they live five to seven years and have yellow flowers? *Surprises await!*



***C. azalea* FLOWER AND NEW GROWTH**



C. chuangtsoensis



MALE ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD

FEATHERS

BY BRADFORD KING

We know birds and even dinosaurs had feathers. The interlocking Velcro like structure on many birds provides a smooth, flexible surface that sheds water and helps them to fly. Birds have a variety of forms and an array of colors from drab to beautiful. Beauty is illustrated by the male Allen's Hummingbird.

Camellia flowers come in a variety of colors including white. This classic hue symbolizes purity and hope. In western culture a white camellia means "You are adorable." The medium white formal double 'Feathery Touch' is a sport of 'Frizzle White'. It is adorable with its highly ruffled petals. The name connotes the softest of touches, like a whisper or gentle breeze, causing our senses to



'FEATHERY TOUCH'



'DAVID FEATHERS'



DAVID FEATHERS



'LAURETTA FEATHERS'

become alert as we wait for more.

One of the great camellia people we need to remember is David Feathers. He spent over 40 years as a writer, lecturer, and innovator of new camellias. He touted the camellia hobby as “a way to health and happiness.” In February 2011, The American Camellia Society posthumously awarded David Feathers its Tablet of Honor for his contributions to the camellia world. He was the Editor of the classic book *“The Camellia, Its History, Culture, Genetics and a Look Into Its Future Development.”* He introduced 13 *C. reticulata* hybrids including ‘Lauretta Feathers’, a large to very large blush white flower edged with pink, which is one of a very few cream toned *C. reticulata* camellias.

In some camellia cultivars, the petals look like the wings of a bird. This is illustrated by ‘Miyako-dori’ which means seagull in English.



'MIYAKO-DORI'



C. lapidea

CAMELLIA SPECIES:

C. LAPIDEA

BY BRADFORD KING

Several camellia enthusiasts were impressed at a recent camellia show when viewing *C. lapidea* on the Nuccio's display table. The pink flower has a light frosting and was close to four inches in size, which is larger than most of the camellia species. The pretty pink flower has heavily veined foliage. The round seed pod, with pebbles on its surface, looks similar to pods on *C. reticulata*. *C. lapidea* is a Chinese species, which grows in mixed wooded areas and thickets. It is not widely grown, which is a surprise, as it makes a well-formed small tree with shiny veined leaves and a good floral display of pink to red flowers.



C. lapidea SEED POD

HIGO TREASURES FROM JAPAN:

‘UME-GAKI’

BY BRADFORD KING

“Ume-gaki” (Screen of Apricot Blossoms) has a flat wrinkled red flower that fades to pink. There are 150 to 180 red spreading stamens. The pistil is pale green and is divided into four parts. It is an older Higo registered in 1912. The flower resembles the Japanese apricot.



‘UME-GAKI’



PARTING SHOT:

**'EGAO CORKSCREW'
AND 'SHIBORI EGAO CORKSCREW'**

BY BRADFORD KING

Jim Nuccio discovered a unique cultivar with zigzag branches growing in a bed of 'Egao' plants at the nursery. The unique growth habit is aptly named 'Egao Corkscrew'. When it was propagated, it was determined that flowers were also different from 'Egao'. Roughly half are loose peony, and the others are semidouble. Both flower forms have wavy petals unlike the large smooth



petals of 'Egao'. The flower color is clear pink like 'Egao'. It makes a good container plant and will do well in the ground planted in the foreground.

'Shibori Egao Corkscrew' is the variegated form of 'Egao Corkscrew'. The white blotches on the pink petals make a wonderful camellia. The zigzag growth habit lends itself to bonsai. The showy flowers will bloom on a small plant. Bonsai flowers are the same size as the ones in a pot or in the ground. Some may find this flower too large for the small foliage especially when grown as a bonsai. Others will enjoy the large dramatic bloom!





'KATIE'



‘GUILIO NUCCIO’