

SGAP Cairns

Society for Growing Australian Plants Inc., Cairns Branch
Celebrating our 40th year

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Cairns SGAP Visits a Garden Planned from the Ground Up

Don Lawie

There was a wide gate – shut, and a narrow gate – open. Bearing in mind the adventures of the Traveller in *A Pilgrim's Progress* I chose the narrow gate which offered vibes of welcome. "Come on in" it said "take your time, follow the curves and enjoy the plants".

This haven of coolness and beauty was, just seven years ago, ravaged by the attentions of a bulldozer. The owner/planners of this largish Edge Hill allotment, Brad & Jan, decided to start with a new slate on which to etch their very own plans and dreams unencumbered by those of former inhabitants. A very few special trees were preserved and the clearing went ahead, followed by impossible amounts of mulch spread initially by hand then by an ingenious pumping system. Yes, a wheelbarrow

of mulch is a heavy load.

The result? As we passed the narrow gate of welcome we were greeted by the last of the flowers of the Powder Puff Lilly Pilly, *Syzygium wilsonii subsp. wilsonii*, for the season. This large shrub is native to the Cardwell/Kirrama Range area where I have seen it growing as a twining climber but here in Edge Hill, Cairns, it was at its attractive best – a compact shrub, attractive all year round with its flushes of fresh leaves and ravishing flowers in late winter. (Winter? Well, we call it that).

We were admiring the varieties of maturing trees, many of which were adorned by the addition of orchids and elkhorn ferns, when we felt a strong call from a tree that had come down from Cape York to make its home. *Syzygium branderhorstii*, for which I know no common name [Editor - Lockerbie Satinash], has the intriguing habit of cauliflory – the flowers appear on a twig directly from the tree's trunk. These were still in bud which in time will grow into flowers and then the dark-red, finger-shaped fruit which, for a *Syzygium*, are reasonably tasty.

Several more trees and shrubs were flowering and fruiting but my attention was grabbed by, first, an



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open lawn featuring a stand of tree ferns, *Cyathea cooperi* looking like the Burghers of Calais, and the trees enclosing the lawn, principally luscious green leaves of the Fan Palm *Licuala ramsayi*. When I was a teenager in 1950's Babinda these palms were slaughtered en masse to decorate public halls for such occasions as weddings and Saturday night dances. The supply seemed inexhaustible then, but now?

Past the lawn was The House. Yes, capital letters indeed! Bold colours of ultramarine and ochre contrasted beautifully with the varied greens of the gardens. An award-winning design inspired by Philip Johnson's "Glass House", The House is both compact and open and features a swimming pool protected on one side by transparent walls and on the other by a sunken garden containing perfumed gingers which will fill the air in a few week's time. A rustic table big enough for all of our gang was filled as we enjoyed Jan's delightful plunger coffee and ginger slices for morning tea.

Refreshed, we continued our journey. A row of rotating composters was screened by a trellis of Pepper vines which included one of the few exotics here – Black Pepper *Piper nigrum* – and Jan had racks of pepper fruit drying naturally. (Yes we need some research into the edibility of the numerous species of native peppers which grow locally). A "hedge" which followed a slope to the back yard area was composed of the

twisted stems of the locally native *Medinilla* Vine *Medinilla balls-headleyi*. This hedge will come to life in the wet season with flowers aplenty followed by the attractive purple fruit.

The property is bounded by an ephemeral creek and is notable for a large tree *Ganophyllum falcatum* which is one of the relict trees which escaped the bulldozer and is probably a natural occurrence, as are the many Alexandra palm seedlings spread by the softly calling Torres Strait pigeons above us in the canopy.

Brad's pride and joy is a slowly growing *Idiospermum australiense*, a Wet Tropics tree which enjoys the distinction of being the only species in the genus and the only member of its family in the southern Hemisphere. Stuart told the story of this tree, which includes poisoned cattle, a plundered outback dunny and bombs over Berlin. We are proud to reveal that the new type specimen of *Idiospermum australiense* was collected by Stuart Worboys after the original was destroyed in the fire bombing of Berlin in 1943.

This visit has been a highlight of our SGAP year, an insight into the way that a purpose built garden can succeed. I would like to re-visit in, say 5 to 10 years time during the wet season, to again walk the winding path, consult the Burghers, enjoy Jan's coffee and discover whether our native peppers have been accorded a place in her cuisine.





A moat full of gingers surrounds the swimming pool in the internal courtyard..

"This project is a re-representation of Phillip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan Connecticut USA - 'less the glass' making it a perfectly adaptable modernist prototype for contemporary living in tropical latitude... A central dappled-light filled internal courtyard features the swimming pool as a feature garden within the main living and dining spaces. Open to the sky, this central garden provides a regular spectacle in tropical downpours as a 'rain curtain'."

Charles Wright Architects



Syzygium branderhorstii in bud near the front gate.



The foundations of the waterlily pond weren't quite level.

Upcoming events

Townsville

11 November, 7 p.m. Meeting of Native Plants Queensland - Townsville Branch at its new venue, Oonoonba Community Hall (Shannon Street Oonoonba). Jay Quadrio will talk about *The Blur Between Plants and Animals and Interesting Symbiotic Relationships*

15 November. Excursion to 6 Mahogany Drive, Forrest Beach, 12 km from the centre of Ingham. Meet at the north end of Rotary Park, Ingham at 10 a.m.

Website: www.npqtownsville.org.au

Tablelands

Meetings on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm, Tolga CWA Hall. Excursions the following Sunday.

Excursion officers: Bert and Chris Jaminon, 40914565.

Cairns Branch

Sunday 15 November, 12 noon. Note change in planned excursion and meeting - Cape York Plantings, Forest Gardens. The plantings at Forest Gardens were designed by Anton van der Schans about 20 years ago. We last visited Forest Gardens about 10 years ago: it will be interesting to see how things have changed.

Meet 10 a.m. at the Forest Delights Bakery, Forest Gardens Shopping Precinct, 121-127 Benjamin St (see map below). Remember, if you're travelling from Cairns you'll need to access via Murgatroyd Road Bridge over the Bruce Highway.

