



LOTUSLAND NEWSLETTER

Volume I, No. 1  Autumn 1992

The Legacy of Ganna Walska

The names Ganna Walska and Lotusland are synonymous with a beautiful estate garden in Montecito created by a woman who led an extraordinary and exciting life.

Driven from the fashionable social scene of Paris by the gathering storm clouds of World War II, the flamboyant ex-opera diva came to Santa Barbara in search of repose and calm. Isolated within her Montecito estate, she devoted herself to the creation of a botanical show-place of great ingenuity amid a reflective atmosphere.

Ganna Walska had no education in plant life, but she learned as she worked, her sensitivities attuned to the needs of the unusual specimens she acquired. She discovered, for instance, that California's occasionally heavy rains could uproot a newly planted cactus garden already struggling to adjust to an alien environment. Adversity only made her more determined to succeed, and to this day Lotusland is famous for its cactus garden.

Over a period of 40 years she created a dozen separate gardens. Each has its own design, sometimes controversial yet always in keeping with her reputation for the unusual and unique, even the bizarre.

When Madame Walska died in 1984, she left a legacy of beauty unmatched anywhere in the world.

— Patricia Tarkowska

Lotusland's New Visitor Center

A great deal of activity has been taking place at Ganna Walska Lotusland Foundation since last summer, when the County granted a conditional use permit for opening the gardens to the public.

During this time, the Foundation has been working to finish building and landscape plans for the new Visitor Center and parking area, to be located in the southwest corner of the Lotusland property.

There will be a new visitor access on Cold Springs Road, about 530 feet north of Sycamore Canyon Road. The new Lotusland gate will lead to an entry drive designed to provide a queue length for up to ten vehicles inside the property. A small parking kiosk will be located at the end of this drive, just before the parking area. This parking area will accommodate a total of 40 passenger vehicles and one bus.

The architecture of the Visitor Center was designed to emulate the style of the existing bath house adjacent to Lotusland's water garden. This bath house, (see page 2) was designed in the 1920s by George Washington Smith and is an excellent example of the Spanish revival architecture that distinguishes the Santa Barbara area.

The Visitor Center, as depicted in the architect's rendering below, will include a restroom facility and small resource

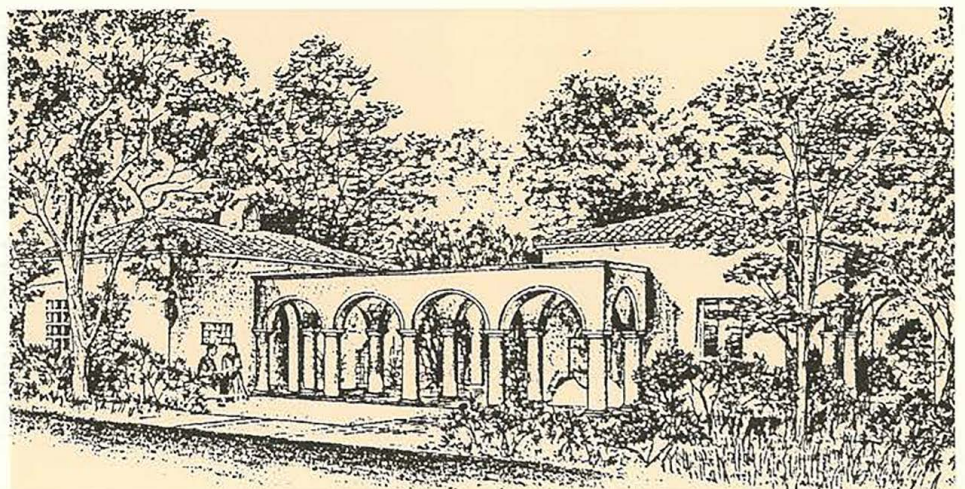
center in a 1,050 square foot building. The restrooms and resource center will be separated by an open, tiled patio and linked by a covered portico. Because the new Visitor Center and parking kiosk will complement existing Lotusland buildings, an important sense of architectural history and integrity will be maintained at the garden.

An attractive allée, defined by over-arching Australian tea trees (*Leptospermum laevigatum*) will lead visitors from the center to a tiled seating area where visitors will begin their guided garden tour with Lotusland docents.

To further achieve integration of the new Visitor Center with the established design style of Lotusland, the landscaping surrounding the parking area will consist of a new garden of Australian plants, using mass plantings, a major Lotusland design theme.

Respecting the existing grove of Australian eucalyptus species, the design team (Warner & Gray Architects, Sydney Baumgartner Landscape Architect, and Martin, Northart & Spencer Civil Engineers) carefully planned the parking layout to preserve as many existing, healthy trees as possible. Also, because the environment beneath eucalyptus trees provides difficult growing conditions, an Australian garden was chosen for the area to provide a geographic and

Architect's rendering of new Visitor Center draws inspiration from the design of existing Lotusland buildings. Drawing by William LaVoie.





How to Make a Reservation to Visit Ganna Walska Lotusland Next Year

Are you thinking that you might want to visit the Ganna Walska Lotusland gardens next year, and are you wondering how you would go about doing it?

We will have a special reservation phone number that you can call to request a reservation. It's not installed yet, but we'll print it in our newsletter when it's available.

Our public visit schedule will be as follows:

Opening Date: February 16

Closing Date: November 15

Tour times: Wednesday—Saturday,
10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Lotusland is closed to public visits
from November 16 to February 15.

Our opening date next year will depend upon completion of all construction activities required by the County in order to activate our conditional use permit. Following our opening year, our normal opening date will be February 16.

All visitors will need a reservation for themselves and their vehicles. Walking and biking to the garden will be encouraged. We will have a bike rack for visitor use. But even if you walk or bike, you will need a reservation. No neighborhood parking will be permitted, and no one will be admitted without a reservation.

Visitors with reservations will be mailed a package of information that includes a visitor permit, map and directions to the garden and garden rules. Those who make reservations not far enough in advance to receive confirmation by mail will be given directions and information over the phone, and their name will be placed on the reservation list. All reservations will include the number and type of vehicles used by an individual or group. If we reach our daily public visit maximums of either 100 visitors or 40 vehicles (35 when Cold Spring School is in session), reservations will be closed for that day.

In taking reservation information

over the phone, Lotusland's staff will encourage visitors to consider carpooling or vanpooling to the gardens and will assist with making ridesharing arrangements whenever feasible.

All visitors will enter by our new Cold Springs Road entrance. There will be a gate at the new entrance that will only be open during visit times, though there will be enough space for a car to pull into the gate area, read the sign on the gate which explains about reservations, and safely turn around. There will be a staffed kiosk at the beginning of the parking area where visitor and vehicle reservations will be checked.

Visitors will be free to enjoy the Australian plantings in the parking area and to use the restroom and visitor facilities until their tour time. Our trained docents will gather visitors into small groups for walking tours of one and one half to two hours.

As soon as we can accept reservations for next year, we will let you know.

—Anne Dewey

New Visitor Center

Continued from Page One

environmental compatibility, as well as an emphasis on drought-tolerant plants.

The Foundation is very excited about moving forward with the Visitor Center project. At the final review of plans by the Montecito Association Architectural Review Committee, members were impressed with the parking area design, commenting that it may just be setting a new and higher standard for parking lots in the community.

Construction is expected to begin in the near future (September or October) and will likely continue through the spring of 1993, when the gardens will graciously open to the public.

—Laura M. Bridley

Right: Design of the new Visitor Center emulates the style of the existing bath house, created by George Washington Smith.



Many thanks go to the Southern California Gas Company for relocating a gas vault on Sycamore Canyon Road east of Cold Springs Road. The updated vault is smaller, and its new location improves the visibility at the intersection.



Left: *Dioon spinulosum* is found in wet forests of southeastern Mexico and Central America.

CYCADS: Living Fossils from the Age of Dinosaurs

If you were to travel back in time to the Mesozoic era, 225 million to 65 million years ago, you would find the earth a very different place. The largely separate continents we know today were all lumped together as one super-continent, Pangea. World climate was generally dry, with occasional moist periods, and temperatures were warm to hot. Dinosaurs roamed the earth, and an assemblage of cone-bearing plants called gymnosperms dominated the vegetation. Although flowering plants first appeared about 100 million years ago, they did not surpass the gymnosperms in diversity and abundance until the end of the Mesozoic.

One group of gymnosperms that reached its peak of diversity during the age of dinosaurs was the cycads. Despite a superficial resemblance to palms or large ferns, cycads are more closely related to conifers such as redwoods or pines. Male cycads produce pollen-bearing cones, and the cones of female cycads protect the maturing seeds. Cycads also reproduce by offsets at the base of mature plants.

Unlike the dinosaurs, the cycads did not become extinct at the end of the Mesozoic, 65 million years ago. Although greatly reduced both in number of species and in the extent of habitats in which they occur, the cycads have survived to the present day little changed in form from their Mesozoic ancestors. If

any life form merits the description, "living fossils," it is the cycads.

At the present time there are some 160 species of cycads distributed in tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas. Florida's *Zamia pumila* is the only species native to the United States. Many cycads, perhaps most, are rare and threatened with extinction by habitat destruction due to the pressures of an ever-expanding human population.

The protection of the habitats in which these remaining populations survive is of great importance if cycads are to be saved as wild plants. There is also a need to save representative samples of the genetic diversity of the most threatened species by cultivating them in botanical gardens. Garden-grown plants can then be reintroduced into their former habitats, either to reestablish species that may become extinct in the wild, or to build up severely reduced populations.

Lotusland's cycad collection of some 425 specimens contains 84 species of cycads, over half the known forms. In addition we have several man-made hybrids that are of horticultural interest. Lotusland's collection is the most complete of any public garden in the United States, and ranks number two world-wide behind Orto Botanico in Naples, Italy, which is growing 106 species and subspecies of cycads.



Above: Barberton cycad, *Encephalartos paucidentatus*, is native to the mountains of the eastern Transvaal, South Africa.

As an institutional member of Botanical Gardens Conservation International, a consortium of public gardens around the world dedicated to preserving rare plants, Lotusland is contributing to the preservation of many species, particularly cycads.

The cycad garden at Lotusland was the last garden to be completed during Madame Walska's lifetime. Charles Glass, her garden manager during the 1970s, was responsible for the design, which was carried out under Madame's ever-vigilant eye. In keeping with the major design theme of the other Lotusland gardens, the cycads are massed in drifts for dramatic effect.

Begun in 1975, the cycad garden had its grand opening in 1979 on a benefit day for Santa Barbara Botanic Garden during which several hundred visitors walked through the grounds to see the wonders of Madame Walska's fabled estate.

— Steven Timbrook



Local Schools Learning at Lotusland

As part of their programs in art instruction, sixth grade classes from both Cold Spring School and Montecito Union School came to Lotusland this spring to draw in the garden. After dividing into small groups, students chose places in the garden that especially interested them and used their surroundings as inspiration to produce landscape drawings and sketches of plants.

Earlier in the year, the sixth grade class of Barbara Frambola visited Lotus-

land to learn about plants from around the world, continuing a tradition for Cold Spring School that began in 1988. Lotusland staff and volunteer docents walked through the grounds with groups of students, teachers and parents, and explained where the exotic plants had originated and the special adaptations they have to survive in their native environments.

It is always a pleasure to share the gardens with inquiring young minds.



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Printed on recycled paper

THE LOTUSLAND NEWSLETTER
is published by
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Santa Barbara, California 93108
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Printed by J & S Graphix

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No. 163