



'Artistry', AARS, 1997

courtesy J&P



'Timeless', AARS, 1997

courtesy J&P

# The Man Behind *The World's Finest Roses*

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Keith Zary

courtesy J&P

You probably know Jackson & Perkins as one of the leading names in roses, but you may not know who is responsible for developing the roses that have earned the company their legendary reputation. Dr. Keith Zary has been breeding roses for Jackson & Perkins for more than 20 years, and as vice president of research, has delivered to the market such beloved varieties as 'Gemini', 'Opening Night', 'Fame!' and 'Veterans' Honor'.

Keith Zary, born in Canada, comes from a long line of expert gardeners, whose expertise rubbed off on him at a very early age. His father, Joseph Zary, was a horticultural writer, broadcaster and show judge. His mother, Cecily "Monty" Zary, was well known for her work as editor of *Garden Clippings* magazine, and for her local gardening show. At the tender age of five, Keith was recruited as Monty's gardening assistant — a job which, he admits, almost drove him from the business forever. The Zary family's greenhouse had no running water, which meant hauling buckets of water into the greenhouse each morning to water Monty's hundreds of plants. During the cold Canadian spring, Keith spent every evening carrying doz-



'Fame', AARS, 1998

Rich Baer



'Opening Night', AARS, 1998

Rich Baer

ens of flats of plants inside to protect them from frost. Because his mother rewarded him with delicious homemade meals — and the occasional chocolate cake — Keith recalls that it was worth the effort. Though he swore off horticulture as a career and pursued other interests, eventually his early experience lured him back and led to a life-long profession.

Keith left home at the age of 17 and earned his bachelor's degree in history from the University of Colorado. Still unsure of what to do with his life, he embarked on an adventure to Africa with the Canadian University Students Overseas (CUSO). Keith discovered his hidden love of horticulture in Nigeria, where he developed a talent for educating rice farmers in swamp irrigation techniques. He then spent the next two years in Sierra Leone, using what he had learned to help the local people grow, cultivate and harvest rice more effectively. His experience in Africa and the wonderful people with whom he worked made a lasting impression on Keith and fueled his desire to help beautify the world through horticulture.

Back in the states, Keith returned

to college, earning his masters and doctorate degrees in Horticulture from Texas A&M University. Following a five year stint as a breeder for a seed company, Keith joined Jackson & Perkins in 1985 as assistant director of research, working with renowned rose breeder Bill Warriner.

Since 1995, Keith has served as vice president of research for Jackson & Perkins. Heading up the company's rose research facility in Somis, CA, he is responsible for their extensive breeding program, yielding some of the world's most celebrated roses, and earning numerous awards in trials all over the world. Among his many achievements, Keith is only the second U.S. breeder to ever win the coveted Presidents International Trophy of the Royal National Rose Society. He is also the first U.S. breeder in more than 50 years to be awarded the coveted Golden Rose of The Hague, The Netherlands. As of 2008, Keith will have won 10 All-America Rose Selections awards—more than any other living rose breeder.

With such an impressive list of international accolades, Keith has many reasons to boast. But if you have ever

had the opportunity to meet this quiet, unassuming man, you know that he never will.

**AR: Has J&P had a specific goal(s) in their hybridizing, for color, hardiness, disease resistance, fragrance, form, etc.**

DZ: That's a really good question, and different rose breeders will all have their own priorities, but the basic qualities for a good rose are universal: disease resistance, vigor and beauty of bloom. The primary goals for rose breeders have really evolved over the years. Before the 1950s, the only thing that mattered was a beautiful, high-centered bloom. This was because people were accustomed to taking the time and energy to treat their rose plants for diseases. However, as free time became less of a commodity, and people didn't want to spend all their time babying their roses, disease resistance became a major focus, and fragrance slowly took a back seat, much to the dismay of rose lovers. As roses gradually became stronger and more disease resistant, fragrance came back to the forefront. By the 1990s, fragrance again became a



'Candelabra', AARS, 1999

courtesy J&P



'Gemini', AARS, 2000

Rich Baer

major qualification for new hybrid teas and floribundas. In fact, in the year 2000, Jackson & Perkins introduced three new roses with either the word “Fragrant” or “Perfume” in the name to let the world know fragrance was back in a big way. Now the most important qualities for Keith are fragrance, disease resistance, own-root vigor, plant habit, flower color and flower form.

**AR: What have been J&P’s most successful seed and pollen parents?**

DZ: One of the wonderful things about working for a company with more than 100 years worth of rose breeding experience is that Keith has at his fingertips a distinguished gene pool that reflects all that experience. About half of the varieties in the breeding greenhouse are proprietary to J&P and used to meet specific breeding objectives. For instance, there are varieties that promote extreme disease resistance or that consistently produce new, exciting colors. Within the hybrid tea breeding program, some very successful parents that consistently produce beautiful progeny are 'Olympiad', 'Ingrid Bergman', 'Gemini', 'Pristine' and 'New Zealand'. Floribundas that consistently produce

progeny with great vigor, bloom power, and disease resistance are 'Perfume Perfection', 'Fabulous!' and 'Black Cherry'. All of the above varieties are available to all rose breeders, both professional and amateur. However, to illustrate the beauty of proprietary plant material, one of the most successful parents in J&P’s breeding program is C64-1881, which is available nowhere else in the world, and is responsible for world-famous children such as 'Pristine', 'Simplicity' and 'Samantha', as well as a host of other favorites.

Most parents do well as both seed and pollen parents, but a few are only used as one or the other. Of course, I can’t tell you all our secrets, but those are a few.

**AR: Does J&P keep accurate records of their crosses; do they, as apparently some breeders do now, mix their seeds when “harvesting” them in a blender?**

DZ: We keep very accurate records of our crosses. Jackson & Perkins’ breeding records go back to the 1920s. Our computerized breeding database contains 40+ years’ worth of information about anything we’d ever want to

know about our gene pool — how each parent performs as a female and/or a male, germination efficiency, disease resistance, dominant colors that pass down, parents that produce fragrant progeny, etc. All of this information is used when Keith writes his breeding program each year.

Many breeders process their seeds in a blender; we do not. We believe that the old-fashioned method of harvesting seeds by hand is safer and more effective.

**AR: What is J&P’s selection and “narrowing” process when the evaluate their seedlings?**

DZ: There are several levels of selection when evaluating seedlings. The first level is to evaluate the initial seed as it grows in the seedling greenhouse the year after the cross is made. At that point, there are more than 400,000 individual plants. Each seedling is evaluated based on the breeding goals set the previous year. So, it’s easy to reject roses that show disease susceptibility or ugly blooms. By the end of the first level of selection, the best 2,000-2,500 plants have been propagated to 25 plants and lined out in the field. As painful and



'Honey Perfume', AARS, 2004

AARS



'Tahitian Sunset', AARS, 2006

AARS

cruel as it sounds, the rest become compost! The following spring is when those 2,000 varieties are put through the second level of selection, in which Keith begins to evaluate their field performance. This is where own-root vigor really comes into play. If a variety does not perform on its own roots, it will not move forward. The roses that pass this level of selection are propagated to 75 plants and planted for another look the following year. There are usually about 300-350 varieties that pass this level of selection. The next level of selection, in which roses are propagated to 750 plants, is reserved for the best 150 varieties. The following year, Marketing is brought into the mix to assist Research in fine tuning the list down to the final 20 varieties to be entered into the All-America Rose Selections (AARS) trial. From those 20 varieties, the best six to 10 will be introduced into the market after two years of nationwide rigorous trialing and an additional two years of commercial build-up. This entire process typically takes about 10 years. As you can imagine, each level of selection gets more rigorous, which allows Keith the luxury of being very selective and choosing only the cream of the

crop to introduce to the market.

**AR: Does J&P bud up promising seedlings for further tests, or do they leave them on their own roots?**

DZ: That's a great question. Ever since the 1960s, Jackson & Perkins has been pioneering the production of roses on their own roots, beginning with shrubs and miniatures, and now with floribundas and hybrid teas, which are sold under the brand "New Generation". This ever-growing trend has caught on with other rose producers, who are now beginning to sell roses as liners and in containers. This opens many doors for consumers who are looking for new ways to purchase and grow roses. Now roses are not just for formal rose gardens. They can be grown on patios, in hanging baskets, and in small areas. Modern rose breeding with an emphasis on own-root vigor has made this possible. Therefore, within Jackson & Perkins' research program, all new roses are evaluated and built up on their own roots. On occasion, however, Keith will note a variety with a beautiful bloom that perhaps does not meet his own-root vigor requirements. In such a case, he will bud the variety to see if it holds any

promise as a budded plant.

**AR: Does J&P register their creations? If not, why not?**

DZ: Yes, Jackson & Perkins registers our creations. American Rose Society members are wonderful rose advocates, and it is important for us to support them. It is also very rewarding to attend an ARS rose show and see J&P favorites, such as 'Gemini', 'Hot Tamale', and 'Veterans' Honor', winning numerous awards, which of course would not be possible were they not registered.

The following is the list of Keith's 10 AARS winners:

- 'Artistry' (1997)
- 'Timeless' (1997)
- 'Fame!' (1998)
- 'Opening Night' (1998)
- 'Candelabra' (1999)
- 'Gemini' (2000)
- 'Honey Perfume' (2004)
- 'Tahitian Sunset' (2006)
- 'Moondance' (2007)
- 'Mardi Gras' (2008)

For a complete list of Keith Zary's roses, registered with IRAR, please see the next page.





'Moondance', AARS, 2007

AARS



'Mardi Gras', AARS, 2008

AARS

## Keith Zary's Roses

A Country Woman	Citrus Tease	Grand Finale	Outrageous	Stairway to Heaven
Almost Sunset	Colette *	Grand Prize	Paper Doll	Star Wheel
Amber Waves	Comet Tail	Greetings	Party Lights	Starlight Fantasy
American Hero	Coral Galaxy	Happy Trails *	Passionate	Sultry
Antique Brass	Corina *	Heavenly Pink	Pearl Essence	Summer Samba
Apricot Passion	Cotillion	High Society	Perfectly Red	Sundance
April in Paris	Crimson Lace	Honey Bouquet	Petal Pushers	Sunny Jean
Aromatherapy	Demitasse	Honey Perfume	Pink Gemini	Suzy Q *
Artistry	Diana, Princess of Wales	Hot Gossip	Plum Frost	Sweet Freedom
Avanti *	Disneyland Rose **	Hot Tamale	Pope John Paul II	Sweet Nothings
Baby Bloomer	Double Bubble	Ice Angel	Pure Perfume	Sweet Valentine
Bees Knees	Dream Weaver	Jingle Bells	Pure Poetry	Tahitian Sunset
Bella'roma	English Perfume	Key Largo	Purple Passion	Terra Jubilee
Bill Warriner *	English Sachet	Laura Bush	Purple Simplicity	Tigress
Billy Graham	Envy	Lavender Duet	Radiant Perfume	Timeless
Black Cherry	Fabulous!	Lavender Lace	Raspberry Punch	Tuscan Sun
Blaze of Glory	Fame!	Lemon Zest	Red Simplicity *	Ultimate Pink
Bridal Shower	Feisty	Lovers Lane	Red Spirit	Vanilla Perfume
Bunny Hop	Flamenco	Lovestruck	Ronald Reagan	Veterans' Honor
Burning Desire	Flirtatious	Lucky Star	Rose Rhapsody	Voluptuous!
Buttercream	Fortune Teller *	Magic Carpet *	Royal Wedding	Watermelon Ice
Cabana	Fragrant Apricot	Mai Tai	Ruffled Cloud	Weight Watcher Success
Camisole	Fragrant Keepsake	Mardi Gras	Salsa	Welcome Home
Candelabra	Fragrant Lace	Mirabel	Santa Fe	Wild Berry Breeze
Caramel Kisses	Fragrant Lavender	Mirabella	Sheer Magic	Wild Plum
Catalina	Simplicity	Miss Behavin'	Simply Marvelous!	Wild Spice
Cesar E. Chavez	Fragrant Rhapsody	Misty	Sisters at Heart	Wild Thing
Change of Heart	Fragrant Wave	Moondance	Snow Shower *	Wildfire
Charisma	Frankly Scarlet	Mother's Rose	Snowcone	Yellow Simplicity
Chelsea Morning	Gemini	Moxie	Solstice	Zaryellow
Cherries 'n' Cream	Golden Bounty	Nancy Reagan	Somersault	
Chorus Line *	Golden Girls	Opening Night	Sorbet Bouquet	* With William Warriner
Cinnamon Twist	Golden Zest	Orange Passion	Spellbound	** With John Walden
Citrus Splash	Good 'n Plenty	Our Lady of Guadalupe	Spice Twice	