

Kim Rupert: The Man and his Roses

by Ingrid Wapelhorst

We are fortunate indeed to have a rosarian like Kim Rupert in Southern California. Many VCRS members and guests know Kim as the authority we've turned to each year at our January Auction, as well as on our bus trip to Sequoia Nursery, for his incomparable knowledge about every rose in commerce—and some that aren't. So, who is this walking encyclopedia of rose lore?

Southern Charm

In his own words, Kim Lauren Rupert was born “some time in the middle of the last century in Birmingham, Alabama. A hyper active child, interested in anything that moved, and many things which didn't.” This explains not only his boundless energy and enthusiasm about roses, but also his Southern charm in answering “Yes, ma'am,” and “No, ma'am” in response to my questions! Like most of us, Kim's initial affection for gardening grew out of his experiences in his mother's garden. Leaving Alabama, he eventually established his home in the Los Angeles area in the late 1960's. And the urge to create his own garden began to develop. In the early 1980's he volunteered at the Huntington Rose Garden, helping to propagate rare and unusual roses, and soon was collecting roses of his own for the same purpose. When his mother became incapacitated in the late 1980's, Kim moved more than 350 roses from his mother's garden to a hillside in Newhall, California. From then until this past year, Kim has been creating beautiful and unique roses for others to enjoy. How does he do it, and why, you ask? Good questions. Let's take a closer look into the rose-breeding world of Kim Rupert.

An “Amateur Rose Hybridizer?”

First, a clarification. I came across the term “amateur rose hybridizer” in reference to Kim on the internet recently. Although the term “amateur” hardly seems appropriate to those who know Kim Rupert, in very simplified terms, the “amateur rose hybridizer” is one who is on his own without the luxury of corporate resources—both time and money--to support research, experimentation, years of trial and error, and without an established avenue for bringing any new rose creations to public attention. Despite these drawbacks, the advantage the “amateur rose hybridizer” has at his disposal is independence to do what he wants, to pursue his own dreams, his own passions. And Kim is nothing if not passionate about roses!

So what dreams has Kim been chasing in the past twenty plus years of hybridizing and breeding roses? He expects nothing but the best: disease free, attractive plants with beautiful, fragrant, continuous unusually colored blooms. Roses with few if any prickles. Roses that will be equally at home in high heat and shade. He wants to develop roses that will survive severe neglect and live long after the rose grower's initial enthusiasm has waned. He wants to develop roses that demand minimum maintenance and might even be found on gravestones in neglected cemeteries long after we all are gone. An admitted perfectionist, he sets the bar very high for his creations. The thought of growing beautiful, healthy, and unusual plants which will actually thrive in your garden unattended is a concept somewhat new to the large nurseries and the commercial rose buying public as well. (Kim credits Tom Carruth as one of the current hybridizers who emphasizes interesting, disease resistant and easy to grow roses.) It's not surprising that Kim and others like him have had an up-hill battle in getting roses with a different agenda introduced into the rose world.

The Pursuit of 'Different' Roses

Using and propagating “different” roses has been a large part of the appeal to Kim as he pursued combinations as unusual as brown and gray or brown and yellow striped roses. When exotic colors don't appear in the offspring, he will still pursue the rose if it meets his other standards. “My ‘niche’ is ‘different and better’. My roses may never appeal to the mass market, but those who share my attraction to ‘different and better’ will, hopefully, love them” says Kim. Lavender and purple roses as well as those with stripes have also been his favorites over the years. In fact, striped roses have become so much of a favorite for Kim that his mentor and friend, Ralph Moore, named a beautiful scarlet stripes on a light yellow background moss rose after him recently. Kim has experimented with roses no one else had used before in propagation, most notably Basye's Legacy, from which two of his favorite roses ‘Lynnie’ and ‘Dottie Louise’ were developed. Basye's Legacy is a favorite because it produces both interesting and “cooperative” seedlings—those that develop regularly with healthy offspring.

Kim researches the ancestry of roses with qualities he likes, looking at the characteristics in their genes from which he can draw. Below are some of the roses Kim has introduced over the years. Brief description of their attributes, some personal influences behind his choices, and how they got their names may shed some light on what he has accomplished as a small-scale rose breeder. To say that Kim's been prolific is an understatement. As long as the list below is, it doesn't cover all of the roses he has created over the years. It does include most of those known to be currently in commerce, in private gardens, and some which may still be growing in nurseries or private gardens.

The First Born

Kim's first “child” was ‘Purple Buttons’, which made its debut in 1993 at Sequoia Nursery. This seedling of ‘Cardinal Hume’ is a miniature shrub with 1-1/2” to 2” deep red-purple, fully double flowers. It has nearly continuous bloom and a strong fragrance (Kim calls it a “Red Hots fragrance”). ‘Purple Buttons’ was offered at both the 2002 and 2004 VCRS Auctions with the following comment: “At the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden this rose in bloom is covered with so many purple blooms of clove scent that the foliage can barely be seen.” [Sequoia Nursery and The Uncommon Rose].

- Festival Pink (RUPfespín) - a sport of ‘Festival Fanfare’®, medium pink, which replaced Sparrieshoop in Kim's garden because it was healthier, had no mildew, and was a continuous bloomer. Aside from the Huntington Plant Sales, only the former Michael's Premier Roses carried this rose until they closed their doors last year. (San Jose Heritage Rose Garden)
- Kim's Cream' (RUPkimcrm) - a Floribunda with white and cream (“pale coffee” per Kim) 40-petalled flowers on a short (16” x 20”) bush, with a spicy fragrance, a Lavender Pinocchio x Lavender Pinocchio cross. If anyone is fortunate enough to know the whereabouts of this one, please report it, as this one has been requested by many rosarians!
- Golden Julia' (RUPgoljul). A sport of the beautiful russet/tan/beig ‘Julia's Rose,’ ‘Golden Julia’ has cooler tones in a medium yellow, and like its parent has a mild fragrance and 22 petals. Kim describes it as a “cool mustard color similar to that of ‘Honey Dijon.’ [Cliff Orent's garden, Palm Springs, California]
- Pink Cardinal Hume' (aka ‘Coral Hume’) - A seedling of ‘Cardinal Hume,’ a shrub rose with clusters of small, medium pink blooms which was offered at the January 2004 VCRS Auction.

Kim describes 'Pink Cardinal Hume' as a small, rounded, mounding shrub with bluish foliage and another one of his creations with a "Red Hots fragrance." [Sequoia Nursery. San Jose Heritage Rose Garden]

- 'Little Butterfly' HelpMeFind quotes Ashdown Roses as saying "the blooms of this rose look like little butterflies..." As we described it in our January 2003 VCRS Auction catalogue: "The number of blossoms in a cluster can easily reach 40 or so in various stages of pink and white with golden stamens...on a bush that rarely reaches 3'." 'Little Butterfly' was bred from 'Escapade' and is also a healthy, shade tolerant, continuous bloomer; a compact, "tuckable" rose happy in the ground or in a pot. [Ashdown Roses].
- 'Annie Laurie McDowell', is a seedling of 'Rena' (a paler pink climbing Floribunda bred by Ralph Moore in 1954). 'Annie Laurie McDowell' is a large-flowered climbing (LCl) rose with beautiful medium pink clusters of pompon shaped flowers on nodding stems, with a strong fragrance, repeat bloom, SHADE TOLERANCE and is completely prickly free. 'Annie Laurie McDowell' was named in honor of Candy Craig, an early Los Angeles area television personality who, along with her husband Dean, were dear friends of Kim. The Craigs restored the last remaining original homestead in the San Fernando Valley, The Homestead Acre, and were responsible for starting Kim volunteering at The Huntington. Mel Hulse of the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden saved this plant from obscurity by making future propagating material available. I personally grow this rose and love it! She produces abundant clusters which keep repeating—even in 90 to 100 degree heat—and the petals fall away cleanly with a nudge. (Thank you Kim, Mel, and Ashdown Roses)! [Sequoia, The Uncommon Rose.]
- 'Beulah Belle' is a 7 or 8 foot shrub with medium pink double blooms and a strong fragrance with occasional repeat later in the season. Kim describes it as having "pink, Centifolia-looking" flowers with "crinkly foliage". The source of the name is based on an amusing story about some friends of Candy Craig who had fun celebrating each others birthdays. Unfortunately, we don't have space for the complete story here, but suffice to say Kim has a sense of humor when naming some of his roses! [Ashdown Roses]
- 'Dotty Louise' or 'Dottie Louise' is a 5-foot, fragrant, repeat blooming shrub rose with single-petalled flowers of dark red/purple with beautifully contrasting white at the petal bases and deep golden yellow stamens. This rose is a cross between 'Orangeade'® and 'Basye's Legacy'. Dottie Louise was the childhood name of Mrs. Dorothy Cralle, who Kim affectionately describes as "the gracious, generous lady who created and operated Pixie Treasures, the miniature rose nursery in Yorba Linda, California, with her daughter, Laurie Chaffin, for nearly thirty years." Dorothy was a special favorite of Kim, and he was thrilled when she gave her permission to name the rose for her. [Ashdown Roses]
- 'Limberlost Blush' – An 8' shrub with double light pink or white and pink pompon style blooms with a strong fragrance (another fragrant beauty!). This hard-to-find rose is a sister seedling of 'Super Jane' and 'Annie Laurie McDowell'. Named after the Limberlost Nursery, a well-known and loved nursery in the San Fernando Valley which closed its doors several years ago, there are still plants of this "Limberlost Blush" growing in Kim's friends' gardens, but it will likely never be introduced.
- 'Super Jane' aka 'Limberlost Pink' 'Super Jane' is a Hybrid Musk rose growing to an

impressive 10 or 12 feet with strongly fragrant double medium pink blooms which repeat from spring to fall. This rose is named after Jane Delahanty, wife of VCRS President Jim Delahanty, and was described in the January 2003 VCRS Auction catalogue as a “seedling sister to ‘Annie Laurie McDowell’, thornless, except under stress, speedy upright grower with clusters of pale lilac blooms at the end of graceful, arching canes.” [Private Garden: James Delahanty, Sherman Oaks, California]

- ‘Lynnie’ — Judging from its sterling attributes, I’d guess ‘Lynnie’ is one of Kim’s favorites. ‘Lynnie’ is a 3’ X 3’ “architectural shrub,” with fragrant, semi-double, hot pink blooms with white at the base and yellow stamens. This is a cross between Ralph Moore’s ‘Torch of Liberty’ and ‘Basye’s Legacy’. Kim selected this rose because of its great health, near lack of thorns, continuous bloom and beautiful foliage. ‘Lynnie’ also exhibits interesting and unusual foliage that changes from a bluish hue to a deeper purple-green in cooler winter temperatures, progressing finally to autumn colors before they drop, leaving marble sized, tangerine colored hips. Others have reported resistance to black spot on the Gulf Coast and mildew on the Pacific Ocean, and she is reported to have survived one of the coldest Northeast winters in recent history with nothing more than a rose cone for protection. ‘Lynnie’ has endured ice storms and temperatures far below freezing in skimpy four inch pots with no protection. Kim admired this rose so much he named it after his favorite aunt. The color of the petals reminded him of the lipstick she wore when he as a child. ‘Lynnie’ is being tested at Rose Hills and is under trial with Peter Beales in Great Britain. [Ashdown.]
- ‘Nessie’ – A cross between a once-blooming Hybrid Gigantea climber ‘Montecito’ (a white flowering Hybrid Gigantea by Franceschi-Fenzi, 1930) as a seed parent and an unknown pollen parent whose name was on a tag lost to desert rodents). ‘Nessie’ covers herself with apricot pink, 2”, semi-double blooms with an intense spicy fragrance. The name is derived from her resemblance to the Loch Ness Monster, based on her rapid 9 foot arching growth. It’s also somewhat of a pun on another huge species hybrid climber, ‘Mermaid’. [Private Garden: Robert’s Desert Rose Garden, Rancho Mirage, California]
- ‘Rayon Butterflies’ – A 3’ pink-blend rose with pink-yellow blooms, bred from ‘Mateo’s Silk Butterflies’. The January 2002 VCRS Auction catalogue described this offering as a “very hard-to-come-by-rose,” and quoting from The Amity Heritage Rose website adds: “The overall color is pink, but it is blessed with the color changes of Mutabilis with yellow-apricot changing to light then dark pink. Light scent.” The name is a humorous reference to the way the rose turns darker pink as it ages, much like rayon, whereas Mateo’s Silk Butterflies turns mauve. Since it wasn’t what Kim was looking for from the cross, he removed it from his garden to make room for other seedlings. Others have requested the rose, including Janet Sclar of Amity Heritage Roses who asked permission to introduce the rose. [Amity Heritage Roses. Public Garden: San Jose Heritage Rose Garden]
- ‘Sunburn’ - A 3’ spreading shrub floribunda, single, open yellow flowers which “sunburn” deeper pink tones. This is a “lost” seedling which The San Jose Heritage and Mel Hulse saved. It wasn’t what Kim was looking for from the particular cross, so the records of its parentage are no longer available. The rose has taken on a life of its own since Kim passed it on. [Amity Heritage Roses. Public Garden: San Jose Heritage Rose Garden]
- ‘Too Cute’ – A Polyantha with beautiful 1”, very double blush pink blooms which are produced

in massive clusters of up to 40 individual flowers. The blooms are very fragrant and repeat well from spring to fall. Parentage on this one, again, was destroyed by the desert rodents; however, Kim was working with polyanthas, Hybrid Musks and other Old Garden Roses at the time. 'Too Cute' was a prolific bloomer in Kim's garden for years, was always one of his favorites, and when Candy Craig saw it, she exclaimed, "Darling! That's just TOO CUTE! [Ashdown Roses].

- 'Indian Love Call' – A tall, graceful, once-blooming, semi-climbing, or gracefully arching shrub rose to 7' by 3' with semi double, 3", fragrant, medium pink blooms, (Kim considers it "mauvy red with lighter reverse") and completely without thorns. This is another 'Basye's Legacy' cross, this time with 'Anne Harkness'. Like 'Lynnie', this rose "sun tans" in intense winter sun and colder temperatures; the upper surfaces of the foliage and canes turn violet while the reverse leaf surfaces remain dark green, turning scarlet and gold before they fall; it is very fertile, with large, round, tangerine hips on the plant until spring. Kim describes this as a rose for all seasons. This rose was first made available to the public at the January 2002 VCRS Auction. [Private Garden: James Delahanty, Sherman Oaks, California].
- 'Laurie' - A seedling from Mrs. Aaron Ward, a 1907 Pernet dwarf Hybrid Tea. 'Laurie' is larger and bushier than 'Mrs. Aaron Ward' in a 3' X 3' bush with 5" blooms (in mild weather, smaller in heat) which are full rosette with pointed petals in form reminiscent of some English roses. 'Laurie' was named after Kim's mother. [Not currently in commerce].
- 'Patchwork Sport' – 'Patchwork' was a red, yellow and orange blend, unregistered Hybrid Tea, similar to 'Granada' and 'Joseph's Coat'. Kim's plant produced blooms with striping and splashing of these colors instead of the more solid colors of the original. This was a find for someone who had collected all the striped sports of Hybrid Teas available in the United States. This sport was offered for a few years by Vintage Gardens and Sequoia Nursery, but is no longer available commercially. It appears to be extinct.
- 'Great News Sport' – From Kim's 'Great News' imported floribunda bred by E. B. Le Grice, the sport produced a large cluster of the expected pansy purple from 'Great News,' the other half exhibiting light, lilac pink with darker veining. Kim isolated the central bloom which showed half one color and half the other and the resulting sport was once offered by Vintage Gardens and Sequoia Nursery but is no longer available either commercially or privately.

When asked how many seedling turned out to be failures, Kim answers "Bazillions.!" But when you read about the attributes of roses like 'Lynnie,' 'Annie Laurie McDowell,' or 'Too Cute,' you can see why he continues the quest for 'different and better' roses.

The following list of roses includes those still in development, under consideration by various nurseries for introduction, and those still known by "study" names.

- 'Lauren'-- This seedling of 'Baby Faurax' has the same deep violet blooms as 'Baby Faurax', but they appear on a more graceful, China-like plant. Julia Cooper of San Diego is one of a group in Southern California known as the "HOMs" (Hooked on Mauves). Kim sought and received approval from Julia's daughter, Lauren, to name this rose after her. ("Lauren" is also Kim's middle name.) This rose is currently offered by Ashdown Roses under the name 'Purple Poly Seedling.'

- Winifred Coulter X Greensleeves' – A 2-foot shrub with very large, full medium pink ruffled blooms carried atop a dainty plant. Not introduced as of this writing, but those who are growing it look forward to its release.
- 'Torch of Liberty X Star Magic' – This seedling resulted from a cross of a traditional miniature and a thornless Bracteata hybrid. The plant is a shrubby climber with mauve red, double open blooms with purple petal bases scattered all over the plant from summer well into winter here in Southern California. Ashdown Roses has it in test fields.
- 'Lilac Charm X Basye's Legacy' - The reason for this cross was a successful attempt to intensify the mauve tints of 'Basye's Legacy'. Kim reports that this shrubby, floribunda-type plant has single, mauve blooms with some fragrance, and it appears to be QUITE fertile. It's currently being tested and may be released soon by The Uncommon Rose.
- 'Softee, Softee' – The legendary Ralph Moore created a seedling named 'Softee' from a cross of his two greatest breeding roses. Kim has been intrigued with 'Softee' for many years. The one seedling he has retained is a self seedling from 'Softee'. 'Softee, Softee' produces clusters of very double, "ragged" blooms in shades of blush to deep pink. The fragrant flowers grow to 2" in size and appear in clusters all over the plant. The bush is thornless with disease-free dark green foliage even with late afternoon overhead watering. Kim has not determined whether it is best considered a shrub, a groundcover or some other bush form but believes it would be "beautiful on a short weeping standard."
- 'Frances Fisher' - A cross of two of Kim's favorite single Hybrid Teas, 'Frances Ashton' (1937) and 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' (1921), this shrub has large, glossy foliage on a spreading bush. Pointed, blush primrose buds slowly open to semi-double, very fragrant, pale lemon ivory blooms, about 3" in diameter. The name is derived from the combination of the names of the parents; however, it is also the name of one of Kim's clients, actress Frances Fisher. Ms. Fisher is understandably excited to learn of the rose with her name and is looking forward to its introduction at Ashdown Roses.
- 'Inner Wheel X 0-47-19' - One of Ralph Moore's famous breeding roses is called, '0-47-19' (a 1947 'Floradora' X 'R. Wichurana cross). Kim crossed 0-47-19 with Fryer's 'Inner Wheel.' The result is a very healthy and fertile Wichurana rambler with pink and white hand-painted, semi-single 2" blooms. Although considered a once bloomer, it may repeat in mild summer locations. The Uncommon Rose has this rose in test for cold tolerance and other traits.
- 'April Moon X MORcrest' - The seed parent is a semi-double, pale yellow to white Griffith Buck shrub. The pollen parent is Ralph Moore's first "crested" rose breeder. The result is almost what Kim was hoping for: a plant with large, fragrant, double medium pink to red blooms with exaggerated sepals. He hopes to use it further with other sources of crested sepals.
- 'Sevilliana X (Basye's Legacy X Graham Thomas)' – This floribunda-type plant produces orange-pink "flecked or stippled" on a three-foot plant, from spring to fall. However, the foliage isn't quite what Kim wishes it was, although it will likely be used for further breeding.
- 'Orangeade X R. Fedtschenkoana' - R. Fedtschenkoana is a deciduous species rose from

Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan with “oddly gray foliage”—another “different” rose which attracted Kim’s attention. Although the species has proven difficult to cross with modern roses, Kim chose ‘Orangeade’, a rose he describes as a rose “you could pollinate with dirt.” This healthy cross grows larger than the species--up to seven feet tall and is even more aggressively invasive than the parent. He describes the scent of the species’ new growth tips as “Nobel Fir Christmas tree in a room with a hard wood fire.” Instead of the single, white flowers of the wild rose, this seedling has double, blush pink ones, and also retains the “linseed oil” scent of the parent. The rose is deciduous like its parent, but its foliage turns from the gray-green to a brilliant gold before being dropped.

- ‘Dotty Louise X R. Fedtschenkoana’ - Kim says he was thinking along the same lines with this cross as he was with the preceding one. He theorized correctly that if ‘Orangeade’ were successful, its offspring—Kim’s dark red single-- might also be. Over a half dozen seedlings have been retained from this cross, all of which demonstrate more saturated colors in all of the plant parts. They have all retained the scented foliage and exhibit bloom types from single to fully double, which range in color from blush pink to a dark, reddish purple. Every seedling is deciduous with assorted degrees of autumn color foliage. All but one sucker profusely like the species. Since recent DNA research has indicated that the ‘R.fedtschenkoana’ was one of the ancestors of the famous re-blooming ‘Autumn Damask’ (also known as the Rose of Castile), Kim plans to join the genes of the ‘Dottie Louise X R. Fedtschenkoana’ with the amazing species assortment to be found in ‘Bayse’s Legacy’ to create a more nearly perfect form of ‘Autumn Damask’.
- ‘Joycie X Basye’s Blueberry’ - This is a seedling from Ralph Moore’s orange miniature ‘Joycie’ and Dr. Basye’s species hybrid, ‘Basye’s Blueberry’. Kim had hoped for a thornless rose from this cross since both parents shared this trait. What resulted is a 3’ by 3’ semi-deciduous bush rose, with sharp, needle prickles, and excellent repeat bloom from spring into winter in mild climates. The flowers are double, deeply cupped, in a mauve-medium red. They are between 3.5” to 4” in diameter and “cut nicely.” Paul Barden recently reported in his article, "Progress in My Breeding Program," on his Old Garden Roses and Beyond website that "Kim Rupert has a seedling he is testing that is a cross of 'Joycie' and 'Basye's Blueberry' which has one of the best “old rose” fragrances I have smelled in a modern hybrid."

As you can see, Kim has an impressive number of roses to his credit, but you would never know it to talk to him. Despite his degree in Marketing, he is very low key about “selling” his own creations. It is only later after you leave him and look up a few of the roses that he has mentioned that you realize how many were his own.

Kim’s goal is to find unusual, disease-free, drought and heat tolerant, thornless, fragrant roses that can be easily maintained. He is fortunate to live and work in two different climate zones, Santa Clarita and Pacific Palisades, which provide evidence of a rose’s capabilities in widely varying environments. He is blessed with the eye of a hawk, a photographic memory, boundless energy, a teacher’s willingness to share all that he knows with any interested party, and the patience to help others who do not have all of his talents.

Sometimes it can be difficult to discern which influences have had more impact on his life: The glorious roses to which he’s so committed or the astounding list of close friends and rose aficionados with whom he has interacted. There is a synergy between the two forces which is inescapable. Some of his favorite people include Ralph Moore (Kim’s mentor), Paul Zimmerman of Ashdown Roses, Bob

and Kathy Edberg of the former Limberlost Roses Nursery, Mel Hulse of the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden, Paul Barden of The Uncommon Rose, and his good friends Candy and Dean Craig.

His garden has played host to many rose breeders from the U.S. to Great Britain and has also been part of a BBC publication and film production, *The Quest for the Rose*. He has written, and continues to write, articles for various publications as well as the E-zine located at the www.helpmefind.com roses website. He has captured his creations—and those of unusually colored and famous roses--on thousands of slides, which he has shared in talks at various rose societies (including the Ventura County Rose Society). He was one of the featured speakers at the Heritage Rose Foundation Conference in El Cerrito this past May. His roses have been introduced by Sequoia Nursery, Ashdown Roses, The Uncommon Rose, and Amity Heritage Roses. The San Jose Heritage Rose Garden contains a large number of Kim's roses. (The Ventura County Rose Society website, www.venturarose.org, contains links to each of these sites.)

After almost three decades in retail management, Kim decided to “have fun at making a living” and has been working in the landscaping and nursery business at the beach for the past few years. He rejoices in working with people who love roses, gardening, and the possibilities of things to be, despite a miserable commute each day. Much of Kim's Santa Clarita garden was sacrificed in order to extend another highway, level another hill, and to provide upscale condominiums for a surging urban population. He reports that he will no longer be engaged in hybridizing or propagating roses. This declaration, however, is at odds with his past history and his declared intentions regarding over a half dozen of the roses listed in this article. I'm sure I'm not alone in looking forward to more beautiful and unusual roses from Kim.

My sincere thanks to Kim for sharing hours of his time and volumes of information about the roses he has bred and his reasons for doing so; to Jim Delahanty for his gentle prodding, support and incomparable editing; to Mel Hulse and Ashdown Roses for a list of their current inventory of Kim's roses and pictures of them; and to HelpMeFind.com and their information on Kim's roses that inspired this article and was an indispensable resource for me. IW