



FLOWER SHOW

BY CHRIS WADSWORTH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VANESSA ROGERS

Soaring palms, twisted gumbo-limbo trees, giant lily pads, waving grasses, waterfalls, lakes and birds—oh, so many birds. It's a veritable Eden—a place of peace and serenity.

The property—just south of downtown Naples off Bayshore Drive—has been buzzing with activity for months. Workers moved earth, raked dirt, poured cement and installed thousands of plants and trees from around the state and around the world.

When the Naples Botanical Garden opens to the community November 14, it will undoubtedly be one of the finest attractions in Southwest Florida.

Let *Naples Illustrated* take you on a sneak preview tour of this beautiful utopia about to bloom.

CHILDREN'S GARDEN

First stop, the awe-inspiring Vicky C. and David Byron Smith Children's Garden, a fantasy playground come to life amid a lush garden and flowing streams.

Cabbage palms, red mangroves and cypress trees shade multiple activity areas. Picture a watering can that sprinkles laughing children below, bench swings swaying in the breeze, tree houses for exploring the leafy canopies and a butterfly house full of the magical flitting creatures.

There's even a waterfall that children can walk behind.

"It kind of mimics some of the springs we have in northern Florida with all the natural caverns," says Brian Galligan, the horticulture manager for the Naples Botanical Garden. "[The Children's Garden] will be fun for the kids,



that's for sure—anything that involves water and dirt and freedom.”

Many of the trees in the Botanical Garden, including a royal Poinciana and a strangler fig in the Children's Garden, were saved from the original underbrush on the site.

BRAZILIAN GARDEN

Renowned Miami-based designer Raymond Jungles created the eye-popping Brazilian Garden, which is a mix of natural and man-made. He was inspired in part by one of his mentors—the famed Brazilian designer Roberto Burle Marx. In fact, this area of the Botanical Garden features a vibrantly colored mosaic of squares, circles and stripes composed by Burle Marx himself.

The centerpiece of the garden is a rising cement platform topped by benches and ponds. Water cascades from one level to the next, and in the ponds, visitors will stare agog at the *Victoria amazonica*, or giant water lilies, that cover the surface like huge green bowls. These native Brazilian water plants are so large, they can support the weight of a small person.

Other trees and plants indigenous to Brazil include the American oil palm and varieties of the popular philodendron.

“When visitors come into the garden, the first thing they are going to see is the Burle Marx plaza,” says Jim LaGrippe, who along with his wife Ann, underwrote the Brazilian Garden. “I knew [Jungles’] reputation and when we heard about his participation in the garden, we got really excited. We have seen some of his gardens ... and they are absolutely sensational.”

RIVER OF GRASS

The Mary and Stephen B. Smith River of Grass, which runs through the heart of the Naples Botanical Garden, is a delightful respite from the more formal areas of the garden.

This wide strip of native grasses flows to one of the many lakes dotting the property. During rainy season, the water levels will be high as rainwater collected from around the garden is naturally treated and released into the surrounding preserve land.

“Every single drain on the property is tied into the head of the River of Grass,” Galligan

Left and below: A mosaic by Brazilian designer Roberto Burle Marx is a centerpiece of the Brazilian Garden.



Raymond Jungles, landscape architect for the Brazilian Garden



Above: Herb Schall, landscape architect for the Children's Garden.
Right: Naples landscape architect Ellin Goetz is working on the upcoming Florida Garden.



says. "It's flowing through native grasses and water lilies and ... it gives us a really good chance to clean the water out."

Like its namesake Everglades, this miniature River of Grass is lined with sawgrass and Fakahatchee grass. Ospreys and bald eagles are seen regularly. Visitors will have ample opportunity to enjoy both the wildlife and the whispers from the swaying grass as they stroll the boardwalks winding through the area.

CARIBBEAN GARDEN

The focus of the Kathleen and Scott

Kapnick Caribbean Garden is on the flora as well as the people of the Caribbean.

Banana plants and sugarcane are two of the types of foliage visitors will discover—examples of plants that have proved critical to the Caribbean way of life for centuries.

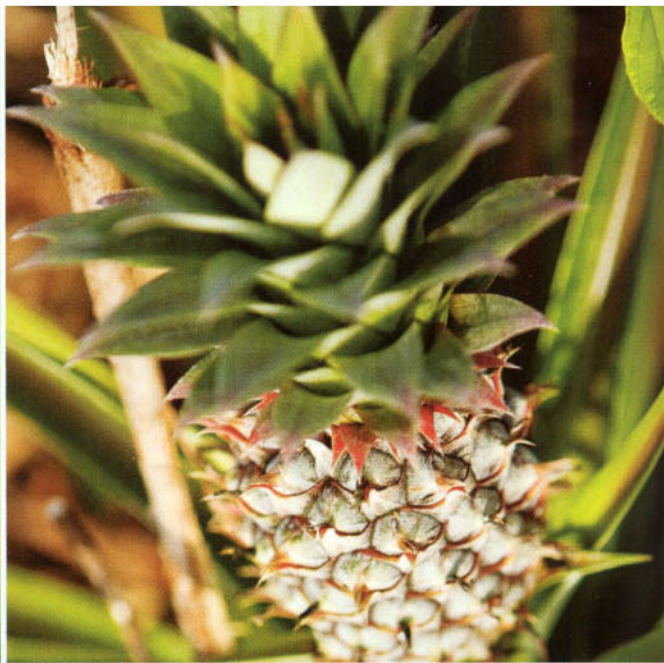
The garden also is home to a traditional chattel house, a wooden home like those used by field workers on many islands. The home will feature steel drums for visitors to play and the shelter can be used as a respite from sun or rain.

Another remarkable site in the Carib-

bean Garden is a long path lined with coral-encased pillars. These support a pergola, which will be covered with a climbing, twisting jade vine to create a shaded walkway.

The Caribbean Garden is named for Kathleen and Scott Kapnick, whose family's foundation has been a major supporter of the Naples Botanical Garden.

"We think the location [of the Caribbean Garden] within the garden is quite special—surrounded by the lakes," says Kathleen Kapnick. "It's a perfect spot for the contemplation of nature."



Garden Roots

The roots of a world-class botanical garden in Naples stretch back to 1993, when a group of visionary Neapolitans first started making plans. The dream became a reality when Harvey Kapnick, a former chairman of Arthur Andersen and a resident of Naples, provided a generous endowment to the nascent garden, allowing the purchase of a 170-acre site.

Kapnick, a long-time Chicago resident, had always enjoyed the Chicago Botanic Garden and hoped to see a similar oasis created in Naples.

"He supported symphonies and operas and museums, but he had a special

place in his heart for gardens," says Kathleen Kapnick, his daughter-in-law. "He believed that a garden was a place for young and old to contemplate and reflect on life's journey."

Harvey Kapnick passed away in 2002, but his dream lives on, thanks to the generosity of his heirs and the Kapnick Family Foundation.

"We too support cultural institutions and in these economic times ... these institutions are often the first to lose support because people see them as nonessential. We believe the opposite," Kathleen Kapnick says. "Harvey never left anything unfinished, and we wanted to see the garden completed to keep his

track record unsullied."

The first gardens and features opening this month are just the beginning for the Naples Botanical Garden. Plans are already under way for the future Florida Garden, featuring native and old Florida plants such as bougainvillea, as well as an Asian Garden, highlighting plants and trees of Asia. There's even talk of a Garden of Africa—and there's plenty of room to grow beyond that.

The gardens open with invitation-only events for donors, trustees and members November 10–13, and then open to the public November 14 at 11 a.m. with a ribbon cutting and daylong activities and entertainment. (naplesgarden.org)

Left: Plants mix with attractions like this "tree house" in the Children's Garden.



SOUTH WETLANDS

Not every part of the Botanical Garden has been carefully planned. One large area is being left up to Mother Nature—with a wee bit of help from humans.

The Collier Enterprises South Wetlands is a vast natural area along the garden's southern and western flanks. At one time, it was full to the brim with melaleuca trees—an invasive species originally from Australia. Garden staff oversaw a huge melaleuca removal project, using the melaleuca as mulch found in other sections of the gardens. Removing the pest also uncovered some wonderful examples of indigenous plants and trees.

"We saved multiple red mangroves that are now in the River of Grass," says Galligan. "They are slow-growing and ... they are not possible to obtain in nurseries or on the commercial plant market. They are priceless."

The clearing and maintenance of the South Wetlands has been supported through a valuable partnership with Collier Enterprises. The hope is it will become a center of learning for restoring the environment and controlling invasive species.

"The garden will be able to develop educational programs around the preserve that will serve to bring community awareness

to the valuable asset we have in our wetlands," says Tom Flood, CEO of Collier Enterprises.

BIRDING TOWER

There's a perfect vantage point from which to enjoy the South Wetlands—14 feet up in the air, atop the James and Linda White Birding Tower. At the end of a short boardwalk, the tower extends into the wetlands and offers a great place to watch the many local and migratory birds that pass through the area.

Blue herons, tricolored herons, wood storks, egrets and ibises are frequent visitors. Osprey are often spotted swooping down into the surrounding ponds and grabbing a fish for lunch. During the busy spring migration period, the area can attract 200 or more wading birds at one time. The tower was built in great part through a donation from James and Linda White. Linda is a past chairman of the garden board and Jim is an avid photographer. The birding tower was a no-brainer for them.

"The wetlands attract so many great Florida birds," says Jim White, who has seen snowy egrets, pelicans and hawks. "The tower adds another dimension to the garden besides just the plants." ♦