

# A Quest for Gold

## Viru Viraraghavan

**I**t all began in the beautiful surroundings of Sim's Park, a botanical garden located at an altitude of 2000 metres, in Coonoor, a hill station on the Nilgiri Mountains of South India. The garden enjoys a lovely equable climate, not



too different from New Zealand's North Island. When I first visited Sim's Park, in the early 1950's, it had an amazing collection of the Pernet roses, ranging from JULIEN POTIN (*top left*) to CONDESA DE SASTAGO, and so many others, all grown to perfection. Of these, JULIEN POTIN, in richest yellow, was the star of the show—no problem with the pale colours with which it is troubled in less temperate climes. I fell in love with roses then and particularly with golden ones.

My career in Government service meant that it took a while for me to start growing roses again. Inspired by the need to create better roses for India's warm climate, crosses were made with the Tea roses and with modern yellow roses, especially with one of the first unfading yellow roses, ALL GOLD (*le Grice*). Beginner's luck led to a striking



yellow, half Tea, but sadly a transfer to an impossible climate spelt doom for this rose.

Some years later, our rose federation held a convention in the lake city of Bhopal in central India. In the garden of a Nawab (minor royalty) grew rather appropriately, an extraordinary bush of ROYAL GOLD (*bottom left*), in an unbelievably intense colour. By now my rose breeding had gathered momentum and a combination of ROYAL GOLD and MADAME CHARLES SAUVAGE, a lovely Hybrid Tea from the house of Meilland, led to AHIMSA (*top right*) (aka ORIENT SILK), pure yellow and absolutely free of prickles. It was this latter feature that led to my naming the rose AHIMSA, which, as you may know, refers to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence.

But JULIEN POTIN was not forgotten. A cross with the then favourite of exhibitors, FIRST PRIZE, led to the wheaten brown and copper NEFERTITI (*2nd top right*)—my youthful imagination conjured up an image of that fascinating Egyptian princess, skin glowing in such colours.

Warm climate rose breeding had by this time become centre stage in my efforts and work started with *R. GIGANTEA* (*3rd top right*), which we collected from India's north-eastern region. *R. GIGANTEA* was described by Sir George Watt, who discovered the species in 1882, as climbing forest trees and blooming above the treetops, looking like golden magnolias from afar. As can be imagined, this description led me to use *R. GIGANTEA* in my breeding for yellow roses.





Among the many seedlings raised from seed from our expedition came one which at bud stage looked almost like LADY HILLINGDON. This plant became the basis of the new line, with the other parent being the Noisette, REVE D'OR, which does very well in India.

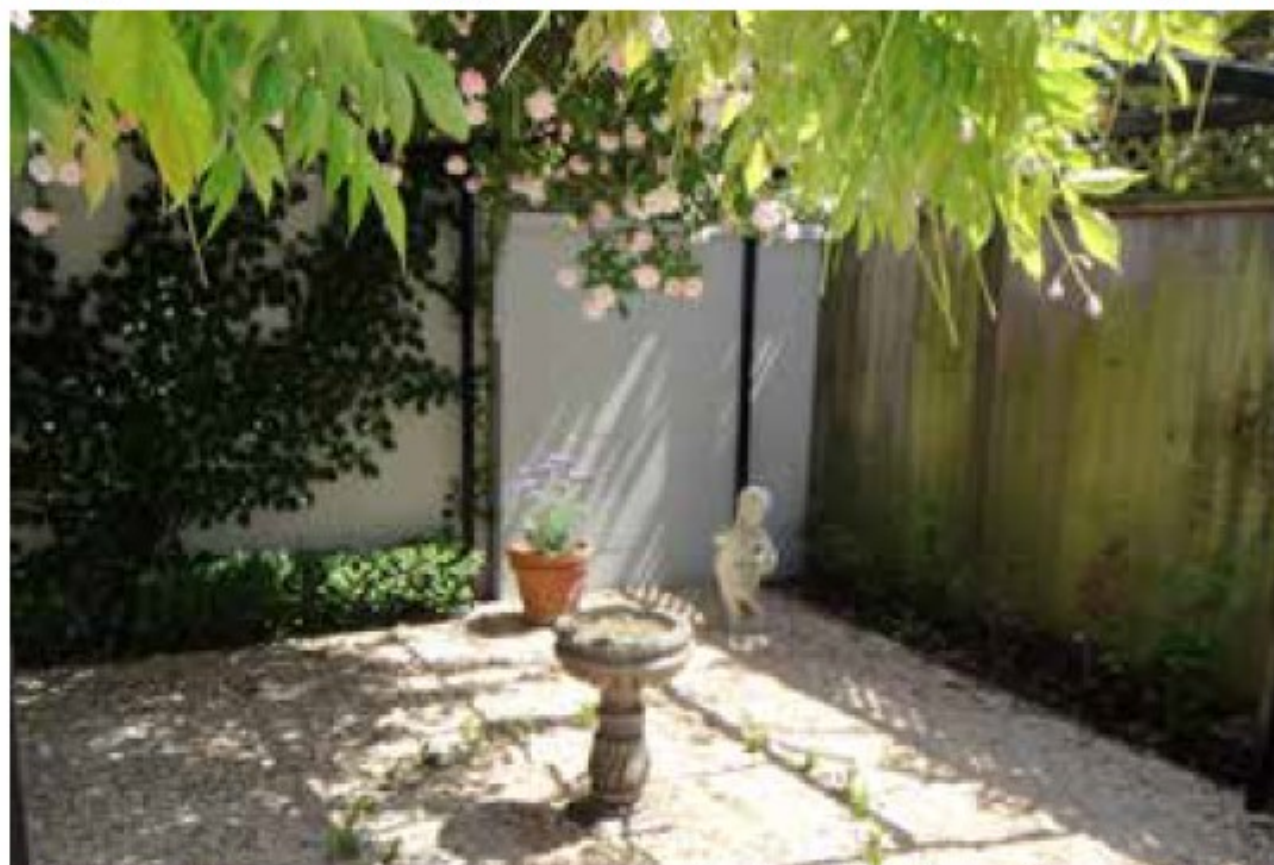
A spectacular result was the giant climber, AMBER CLOUD (*bottom right previous page*), which (much to my delight) has now spread from Florida (USA) to Sardinia (Italy), and from Sintra (Portugal) to Japan.

A further intensification of gold occurred with GOLDEN THRESHOLD (*centre*), a combination of a vermillion seedling, and GOLDEN of GOLDEN THRESHOLD have of colour, set off admirably anthers like eyelashes THRESHOLD led to further happened with the original Pernet roses, to produce my latest seedling (*title photo*), in coppery saffron gold.



brown HYBRID GIGANTEA SHOWERS. The single flowers an unbelievable intensity by the wine red and brown on a pretty face. GOLDEN intensification of colour, as had

And so the quest continues... a golden rose may not be gold in any material sense, but it is undoubtedly gold for the soul. ~ Viru Viraraghavan



When it comes to roses I am a romantic, which is why I love old roses. I prefer whites and pinks—French and 19th century, which is what I have now. And I love Italian gardens !! Which is what we sort of have now. DEREK ROBISON