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NORTHWESTnews

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Nurserymen build business, community

by Patricia L. MacAodha

When Sean Hogan and Parker Sanderson married in Portland last March, they celebrated almost 15 years of a relationship begun in an ambiance dear to both. Sanderson, then manager of the arboretum at University of California at Davis, attended a tour of the Rock Garden Society. Hogan, then an employee of the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden, led the tour.

Their wedding reception last spring was held at Cistus, the micro-nursery the two operate on Sauvie Island, featuring plants and seeds that Sanderson and Hogan acquire from around the world and that thrive in temperate zones, including the northern Willamette Valley. The nursery (named after the Rock Rose) features unique indoor/outdoor buildings, pavilions and a courtyard focusing on different themes and the cultures native to the many plants represented in the two-acre retail area.

How did the 2-year-old business grow so fast? Hogan is still asking himself that question. "Neither of us are business types," he says, but the venture "turned out to be really fun."

Cistus has enjoyed success from business and residential neighbors on the island as well as in the larger Portland area. Hogan, whose family moved from Oregon to California when he was

Washington." The two will go all over the world looking for seeds but are careful not to establish invasive species. While the partners do some local marketing, most of their plants—2,000 to 4,000 species at any given time—are exported to the East Coast, and they market all over the world.

The initial collection that arrived with Hogan and Sanderson was housed in a 100-plus-year-old greenhouse complex initially built by an immigrant couple from Lithuania. Hogan, a considerably taller Celt, says he often has to remember to duck when he goes through one of the many doorways. The complex, located in North Portland, is still in use for growing plants and taking seed-heads for future use.

Sanderson and Hogan credit much success to their employees. "We have a fabulous, hard-working staff," Hogan says, "very mixed, very accepted and accepting."

He is pleased with the sense of community developed with other horticultural businesses in the area. "The professional nursery community," he says, "is extremely interactive. When we get together, it's like seeing family. There's a lot of sharing."

The partners also enjoy sharing horticultural competence. "We like to teach people about the climate they live in, making gardening a fun sport, not to be feared," Hogan says. Many plant



A flowering cactus is one of the many surprises you will find at Cistus, which prides itself on out-of-the-ordinary plants and challenges the limits of strict zonal gardening.

a teen-ager, was drawn home "by the greater sense of community, greater diversity and a lot fewer barriers."

Sanderson led the move to Portland when he was tapped to manage a local outlet of Mill Valley's Smith & Hawken store. Hogan opened a garden design business for public and private clientele, which included such venues as curating the plants at the Classical Chinese Garden. The design element remains part of Cistus and is one of Hogan's specialties. He has published widely on the subject, most recently *Flora, a Gardener's Encyclopedia*, which he describes as "a big, green, 30-pound book." A current book project is targeted to emerge next spring.

During a period when there is a strong emphasis in Oregon horticulture on native plant stock, what motivates Hogan and Sanderson to focus on plants that are categorized as Mediterranean, Southern Hemisphere and Laurasian?

"To introduce a rich palate," Hogan answers, "but really to embrace plants from our ecogeographic zone—from the Bay Area to Western

needs are fairly simple, but "the greatest emotion people feel is fear that they will get the wrong plant and look stupid."

At Cistus, part of the emphasis is helping customers past that fear and into the joy of creating and maintaining the environment they will enjoy. They also have an interest in more involvement in their community, "to have woven ourselves into it as much as possible and made an avenue through which we can give back," Hogan says.

Having made such a success so quickly, what do the partners plan next? The answer is obvious for two men who describe themselves as "absolute plant geeks." They want to spend more time playing in the garden, traveling to bring back new varieties of seeds and "to have a life after building the business," Hogan says.

Their employees, he laughs, agree with this goal. After so much hard work, they think the bosses "should let the nursery run itself more."

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