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War & Peace in the Garden

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It's August as I type, September as you read, but hey, busy summer. Just catching up.

June brought the yearly Open House of Star Roses and Plants in West Grove, Pennsylvania. I've never been a rose guy, despite having sold beaucoup starters of miniatures and the game-changing Knock Outs. My spinster Aunt Agnes was besotted with roses. I accompanied her on pilgrimages to Conard-Pyle's erstwhile West Grove retail store to enhance her fussed-over beds.

Old roses seemed problematic: disease-prone, high-maintenance and OUCH! painful to weed around. But one of retirement's unexpected benefits is not having to peer through a perennial-biased marketing lens, enabling a greater appreciation of

ornamentals of all kinds. Even roses. Even annuals.

I liked the cheerful bright flowers, and loved the name, of Gaillardia Guapa Flamenco Bicolor. "Guapa" is Spanish for "pretty;" the masculine guapo = handsome. Much of my hort career involved botanical Latin, but after six years' study decades ago, I can still converse, clumsily, in Spanish. One rarely gets to chat in Latin.

Lens stowed, I admired the trademarked 2026 intro Martha Stewart Rose ('Meiffable' PP 33,753), whose striking flowers are absolutely stuffed with more than 100 fragrant pink petals. Part of the Bloomables brand, it's a hybrid tea that will reach 3 ft.

Martha's name arouses strong emotions, negative and positive, but wherever you fall on the spectrum you must admit she was the original influencer, decades before that overused noun was coined. And, it says here, she has done immeasurable good for our industry.

Annuals included an unfamiliar Australian genus, Grevillea Spirit of ANZAC, from the Droughtables brand. Grevillea is a tender shrub, hardy only to Zone 9, but an interesting container plant elsewhere. It likes dry, nutrient-poor soil, meaning gardeners are more likely to kill it with kindness, i.e., over-watering or -feeding, than with neglect. Refrain from those sins and you'll enjoy a long season of unusual blooms.

Spirit of ANZAC was introduced in Australia a decade ago and in America by Star in 2018. Yet this was my first encounter. A little homework revealed the significance of its name: That 2015 Aussie intro marked the centennial of the ill-fated WWI Gallipoli campaign. Its red flowers honor the blood of 11,000 Australian and New Zealand Army

Corp (ANZAC) soldiers who died in those battles.

Which brings to mind William Tecumseh Sherman's famous, "War is all hell." And returns us to roses.

The Peace Rose was not on display, but you almost can't discuss Star without acknowledging its legacy. The Peace Rose originated in France, like many great Star intros, in the 1930s, just before all hell broke loose—again—in Europe. Luckily, breeder Meilland had sent it to Conard-Pyle. It survived WWII and was formally introduced in April 1945 when Berlin surrendered.

Its fame spread worldwide. In 1975, The World Federation of Rose Societies declared it the World's Most Famous Rose. In 2018, the U.S. Postal Service put it on a Forever stamp. My aunt had one.

I've known the Star story for many years, but learned more from an unexpected source: a magazine article, "Chester County's Garden Legacy," by local historian Jennifer Green, who limned the trajectory of the Conard-Pyle Company and its previous owners, three generations of the Hutton family. Ball Horticultural bought Star (formerly Conard-Pyle) from Steve Hutton around 2015.

So a random magazine article and a little internet sleuthing brought me belatedly to an epiphany: I had stood on horticultural hallowed grounds, face-to-face with a living tribute to a wartime disaster, in the spiritual shadow of a living celebration of another war's end, with a sprig of family history for garnish.

Which evokes another quote, this one by William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It isn't even past. All of us labor in webs spun long before we were born."

Many thanks to my hosts at this cool yearly event, which featured tours, a trade show tent and a good lunch. If you can wangle an invitation, go. It's an education. **GP**

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