



GRAHAM THOMAS (AUSMAS)
Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



THE DARK LADY (AUSBLOOM)
Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



HERITAGE (AUSBLUSH)
Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



Photo by Andrew Durrbridge

Several varieties of David Austin English Roses can be seen at Old Westbury Gardens, left, where they are placed in borders along with other flowers. The formal rose gardens are reserved for hybrid teas.

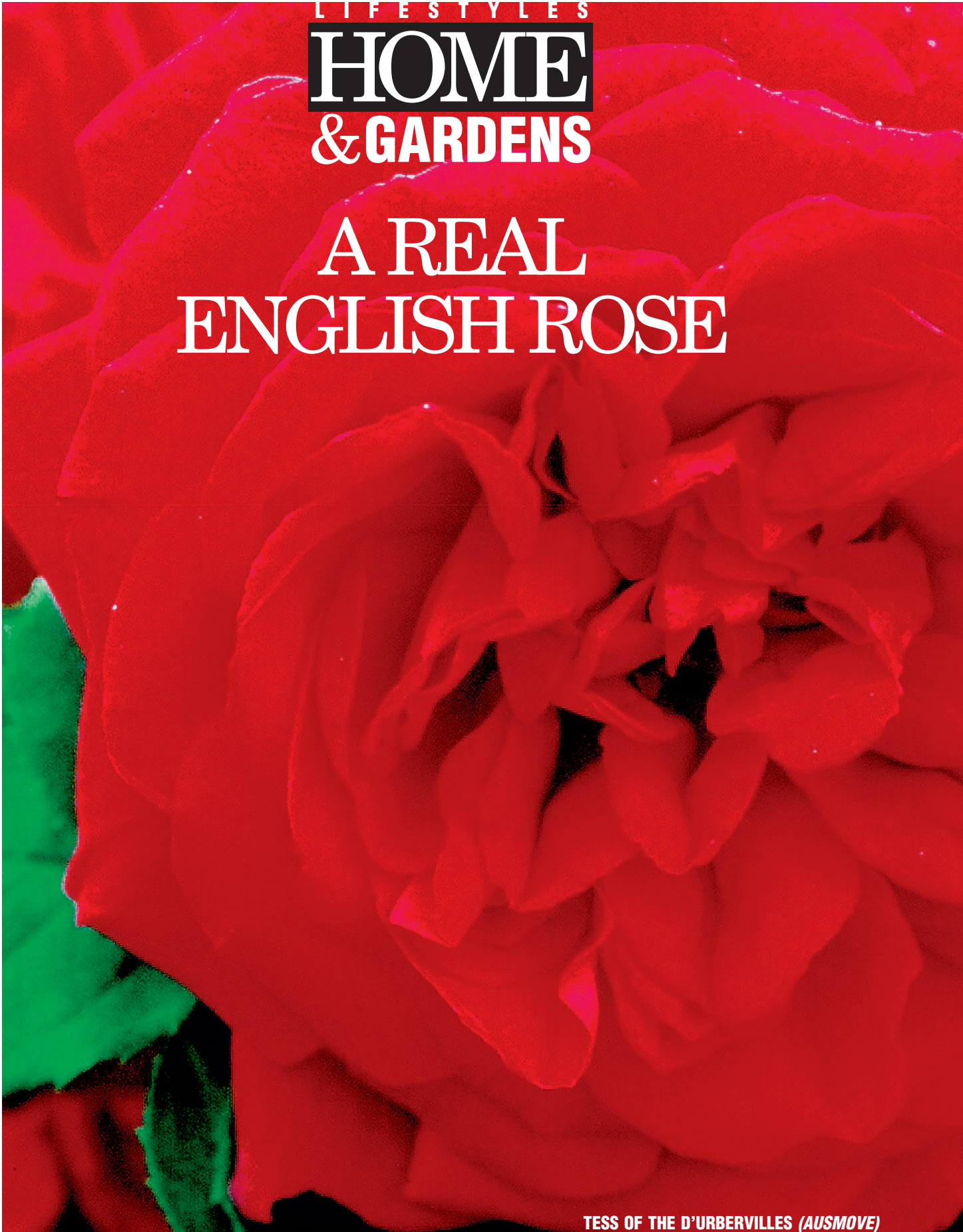


GOLDEN CELEBRATION (AUSGOLD)

Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses

LIFESTYLES
**HOME
& GARDENS**

A REAL ENGLISH ROSE



TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES (AUSMOVE)

It was during a college year spent abroad at the University of London that I first became entwined with Thomas Hardy and his ill-fated working-class heroes and heroines, often victims of a cruel aristocracy. Poor Tess Durbeyfield, deprived of her beloved and fated to die as a murderess. Or hey, Jude, who made me cry as he succumbed to his passion for the joys of the flesh and the false hope of the bottle.

So how could I not be pleased to know that these fictional victims of Victorian morality have been given some measure of sweetness and light as roses — a bright crimson bloom named Tess of the d'Urbervilles and a sturdy yellow flower called Jude the Obscure that has a fragrance reminiscent of guava and sweet white wine but that, interestingly enough, thrives in a dry environment.

More to the point, how could I not nurture a tender passion for David Austin roses? Their names alone conjure up triumph and tragedy, love and mystery, and infinite romance — velvety red William Shakespeare 2000, for instance, as well as soft yellow Blythe Spirit, warm pink Ann Boleyn, pure white Fair Bianca, dark crimson The Dark Lady, orange-red Benjamin Britten, and magenta-pink Noble Antony.

But they are more than just pretty names. Also known as English Roses, they are the creations of David Austin, a

David Austin improves and nurtures the queen of flowers as only a Brit could

Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



**Irene
Virag**

Shropshire farmer — no wonder a peachy pink is named A Shropshire Lad after A.E. Houseman's poetry collection — who started hybridizing as a hobby in the 1950s. He was enchanted by the fragrance and flower form of old roses, but bemoaned their flaws — a brief blooming season and the absence of yellows or apricots.

His solution was to cross old roses with latter-day hybrid teas and floribundas, producing what he calls “new roses in the old tradition.” To put it more specifically, blooms that have the charm and perfume of old roses but flower throughout the season. David Austin English Roses took their place in the sun in the 1970s and have been garden stars ever since. David Austin, now in his 70s, is still breeding roses. Last year, 150,000 crosses resulted in 450,000 seeds, about half of which germinated. A handful of these eventually will make it to the market — and that's only after eight or nine years of seeing how they do in trial gardens.

One of the places you can see these English Roses in the field is Old Westbury Gardens. That's where I caught up with Michael Marriott, the technical director for David Austin Roses, and Andy Durbridge, who until recently was the director of horticulture at the garden. Michael was on a nine-

Michael Marriott, technical director of David Austin Roses in England, was at Old Westbury Gardens recently to check out how his company's varieties are doing.



Newsday Photo / Ken Spencer



**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE 2000
(AUSROMEO)**

Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



MARY ROSE (AUSMARY)

Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



THE MAYFLOWER (AUSTILLY)

Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



JAMES GALWAY (AUSCRYSTAL)

Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses



EGLANTYNE (AUSMAK)

Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses

ROSES from B21

states-in-10-days tour of the United States, checking out his company's roses in places as varied as Detroit and Virginia Beach and Phoenix and Long Island. It was a little while before bloom time, but Michael and Andy could identify each variety by looking at the buds and branches. Sometimes, of course, they also looked at the labels.

"That has to be one of yours," Andy said as we walked along the flower borders in the walled garden.

"Crown Princess," Michael said. "Oh golly good, see all the flower buds. They'll be a rich apricot orange with a fruity fragrance. In time, it'll be a 6-foot-by-6-foot shrub."

There are other David Austins in the perennial borders of the walled garden and among the climbers scrambling up the wooden pergola that surrounds the rose garden. But what's interesting is that you won't find them in the formal boxwood-bordered beds of the rose garden itself. Basically, that's because Old Westbury remains true to the old-fashioned philosophy that rose gardens are places for neatly spaced hybrid teas.

As you might expect, Michael is no traditionalist. "This idea that you have to plant your roses three, four feet apart is rubbish," he said. "What you end up with is a rose, then soil, then another rose, then more soil. What's the point? Why is that attractive?"

Michael's thinking goes beyond the rose garden. He espouses the vision of the Shropshire lad who shook up the accepted notion of roses as pampered prima donnas that could only be properly displayed in a bed of their own. David Austin's contention is that roses don't just belong in the rose garden — they belong in the garden.

"You can use English Roses virtually anywhere," Michael said. "The only place you wouldn't use them would be by a pond. And they may struggle a bit in the woodland — the notion that roses need six to eight hours of sun a day is rubbish; the reason they hate being under trees is because of the root competition. But in the mixed border, as bedding plants, tree roses, climbers, hedges, they're fantastic."

Andy Durbridge pointed to a border leading to the lily pond in the walled garden that was redone to make the most of English Roses. Each end of the border is anchored with a grouping of three pure yellow Graham Thomas roses — named for the famous British garden writer — which have pale green, disease-resistant leaves. The Dark Lady flourishes in the middle of the row — it's a full-flowered, dark crimson beauty named for the mysterious beloved of Shakespeare's sonnets.

In a traditional formal rose garden the green foliage is all that precedes and follows the bloom time of the flowers. In a border such as the one in front of us, the English Roses are integral to the seasonal show. In the early spring, as the roses start to leaf out, pink and yellow tulips stand in the foreground of the border amid a carpet of white candytuft. Then peonies and irises herald the roses. In late summer, dahlias and tibouchina form a stunning backdrop.

Call me a rose populist, but I like the idea of democratizing the queen of flowers. Hybrid teas and floribundas and old roses all have their place in the garden, but I'm also very taken with English Roses. David Austin has made roses less intimidating. And, to my eye, often more appealing — his roses are large, fragrant blooms that grow on easy-care bushes.

Some, such as Graham Thomas and Tess of the d'Urbervilles, make excellent climbers because they produce

The Real English Rose



Photo Courtesy David Austin Roses

The Renaissance Garden in England, above, and a closeup of Golden Celebration (*Ausgold*), below.

side branches that flower along the entire length of the stems, even the lower sections. I have a pink grandiflora called Queen Elizabeth on one of my arbors that gives me a royal pain because it blooms its head off along the top of the arbor but its legs stay bare.

Also, English Roses are not finicky and uptight. They get by without complicated pruning or a lot of spraying. I'm trying them in combination with lilies and clematis, and I dream of transplanting some monster lacecap hydrangeas outside my den windows and replacing them with a hedge of Mary Rose, whose virtues include a delicate fragrance reminiscent of honey and almond blossom. Mary Rose, which produces bouquets of loose-petaled rose pink flowers, is named after Henry VIII's flagship, which was brought up from the sea after more than 400 years.

And I'm very interested in a new David Austin rose that's being introduced this year. I like the fact that it's supposed to be resistant to black spot, powdery mildew and rust. "There's never been a spot on it in all of the years of its trial," said Michael. "It's been trailed for nine years in the U.K., and we have 10 plants scattered around the U.S. It's never been sprayed. Never. Anywhere."

One of this new variety is at Old Westbury Gardens and, according to Andy Durbridge, it's doing beautifully.

Oh, yes, I like the name of this new deep-pink arrival. It's called The Mayflower.

William Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy, and now The Mayflower. Perpetual blooms and sweet perfumes and roses amid the flower borders. That's progress, pilgrims. ■

