



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

**RBG 175<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY BOOK LAUNCH**  
**Thursday 2 September 2021**

**Ms Chris Trotman**, Chair, Royal Botanic Gardens  
**Professor Tim Entwisle**, Director and CEO, Royal Botanic Gardens  
**Ms Catriona Rowntree**, Master of Ceremonies  
**Messrs Peter Wilmoth and Leigh Henningham**  
All the contributors to 'Wonder'  
**Distinguished guests**

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to Aunty Carolyn and any other Elders here with us.

Tony and I are delighted to join you for the launch of this special book that marks our much-loved RBG's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

It is a particular pleasure for me because the Victorian Governor's connection with the Gardens goes right back to the beginning. In fact, to before the beginning!

It was Charles La Trobe, our first Lieutenant-Governor – a keen botanist and naturalist himself – who, in 1845, chose this land to be used for Botanic Gardens for, as he put it, *'the public advantage and recreation'*.

I am absolutely sure that, at that time, he could never have imagined this particular celebration.

For a start, not in this virtual setting! Mind you, until a short while back, we couldn't have imagined it either. And, although we wish it weren't so, we can be grateful that technology at least enables us to celebrate together.

But Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe could also never have imagined that one day the Gardens would have evolved across two magnificent sites. That, (except during a global pandemic), more

than two million visitors would enjoy them each year. That they would exhibit plants from 98% of the world's countries, house the Victorian Conservation seedbank and that they would host many major public and private events.

It is interesting to note that the early Directors disagreed on the vision for our Botanic Gardens.

The first full-time Director, Ferdinand von Mueller, saw the Gardens' primary purpose to gather the world's plants, with an emphasis on the science of their diversity.

His successor, William Guilfoyle, for his part, emphasised that a garden of science was of importance but that it '*need not clash with the picturesque*'.

In his Introduction to the book that brings us together this evening, Professor Tim Entwisle, the Gardens' current and much-admired Director, describes the Gardens as places '*in which the realms of nature, culture and science naturally coexist, weaving narratives of the past, present and future in unique ways.*'

Deftly, he resolves the vision with fine balance, and welcomes us into this aptly named book, *WONDER*.

*WONDER* is **beautiful**. It's **informative**. And it's **evocative** for the stories that it holds.

When it comes to natural **beauty**, the human eye is usually hard to beat as the finest lens through which to view it, but the photographs in this book are truly exquisite.

They capture both the grandeur and the intricacy of trees and plants, the breadth of the landscape and the delicacy of the small details, as well as the full variety of the seasons and colours.

This attractive book is also **informative**.

Informative about the design and the planting, its variety and how it is tended, and about the history and development of the Gardens: most particularly, the long history of this land, its

importance as an aboriginal ancestral meeting place, and the acknowledgement of times of suffering, sorrow and sadness.

Informative too about species, conservation and the impact of climate change.

And it's **evocative** – in its disclosure of public and private stories and secrets.

Some contributors talk of the Gardens as a surrogate back yard. A playground. Others talk of them as a welcoming place when newly arrived to our city.

We meet the philanthropists who have invested their vision as well as their generous financial support – in some instances, through several generations.

There are those who've celebrated important life stages: marriages, birthdays, anniversaries, or sad farewells. First memories. Inter-generational picnics. The stories of poignant memorial chairs.

We learn of the dedicated band of volunteers, most of whom stay for many years, who have led tours, helped to name all the camelias or to curate the collection at the Herbarium, or to engage with visitors one on one.

Some of us won't be shocked when others have admitted that, in the past, the RBG was a convenient venue for nearby schoolboys and schoolgirls to head, for a sneaky after school cigarette!

And I think we will find commonality in the realisation that so many of us visit to seek inspiration for our own gardens. It was described by one gentleman as his '*university of gardening.*'

Contributors to the book use words like mysterious, magical, immersive, contemplative, celebratory and relaxing.

They talk of the thrill of what lies around the next corner.

The site and the sounds of birds you don't usually see in the city.

Their favourite trees, (how happy I was to see our particular favourite – the Cockspur Coral Tree – on the cover), and favourite places.

So many stories. Including that Kevin Sheedy AO planned Essendon Premierships at his self-appointed 'Gardens office' in the Terrace tea rooms. (We are so grateful – at least, some of us are!!).

Amongst the beautiful personal reflections in this book, there is one that particularly touches my heart.

It is the story of an innocent young woman, taken to the gardens on a first date by a charming young man, whom she later discovered had taken many others before her on such first dates, in identical format.

The story arc was gripping, with the happy ending that they went on to marry.

And so, may I say here publicly: Tony, I completely forgive you!!!! I am glad that our picnic there was your LAST first date in the Gardens!

And what a joy it is each time that we sit together on the Taxodium Lawn where you took me for that (by then, perfected) picnic, and what a privilege it is now to be the RBG's nearest neighbours for a while! We certainly never imagined that that's where our first date, with the majesty of the Government House tower framing our picnic, might lead us!

It's a beautiful thought that well after us, others will build their own memories here and at Cranbourne.

I have no doubt that, with the passage of these 175 years, Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe would be proud.

So too Ferdinand von Mueller and William Guilfoyle.

Indeed all the Directors across the years. All the Board members. The staff. The volunteers. The Governments. The suppliers and designers. Sculptors. Artists. Victorians and visitors alike. And hopefully, the Indigenous Australians who are helping to tell the long story of this land.

Everyone, past and present has much to celebrate as such a significant part of the heart and soul (as well as the lungs) of our State turns 175 years old.

Happy Anniversary to our Gardens. And what a perfect marker of this special occasion we have in this book, *WONDER*, which I now have the great pleasure to officially launch.