

Descanso Gardens

2021 | Annual Report





Getting Back to Normal Getting Ready for the Future

Last fall I was at Descanso for the opening night of Enchanted Forest of Light. (The event had been closed the previous year because of the pandemic.) As I stood in the Courtyard I could see that the families were back and the children were excited. I couldn't wait for them to enter the garden where the tulips were dancing, and Tom Fruin's art glimmered in the Rose Garden. Maybe we weren't "back to normal" but we were getting there.

Our Mission

Descanso Gardens is a unique Southern California landscape distinguished by its specialized botanic collections, historical significance, and rare natural beauty. Our mission is to practice exemplary stewardship of Descanso's distinctive character and assets; offer people an experience close to nature; and cultivate understanding of the natural world and people's place in it through inspiration, education and example.



The accomplishments of 2021 were different than I expected them to be. After approving a Master Plan in 2020 we predicted that the future was one of nonstop projects and growth. While we are continuing down the path of making Descanso better than ever, last year we concentrated on getting back to normal and getting ready for the future.

One bright spot was when construction began on the new Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center. Located above the lake, the nursery will expand our nursery operations significantly, including plenty of space for plant propagation, materials storage, and educational opportunities.

Along with Enchanted Forest of Light, we also saw the return of Carved. The Halloween celebration was completely rethought and was so much fun. We hope that many families will make this part of their fall traditions. The Sturt Haaga Gallery also reopened in 2021, when it hosted *Castle Garden* and *Full Circle: A Return to the Land*, which explored the cultures and people who lived and cultivated the land that is now Descanso Gardens.





The Education and Programs Department also got creative. With growing visitorship and membership they thought about programming that could be enjoyed by many visitors no matter when they came to the gardens. One of the highlights were the special moments created at Nature's Tables that allowed young visitors to learn about pollinators.

In 2021, Descanso continued to be a place to relax and reflect. Nature is important and we were happy to be a destination for families and friends to bond and explore. All of this is only possible with the support of our donors, members and visitors. I look forward to the coming years as we continue to grow and inspire.

Juliann Rooke

Juliann Rooke
Executive Director

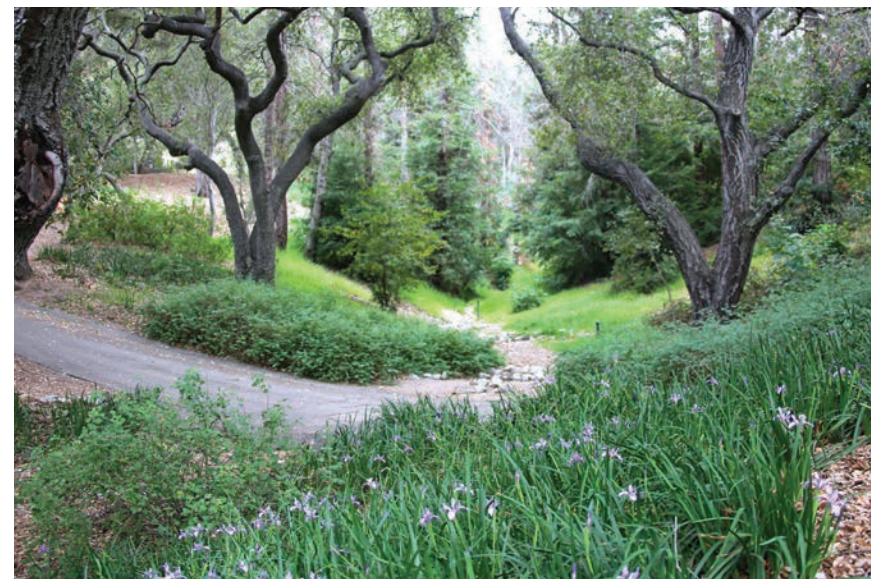
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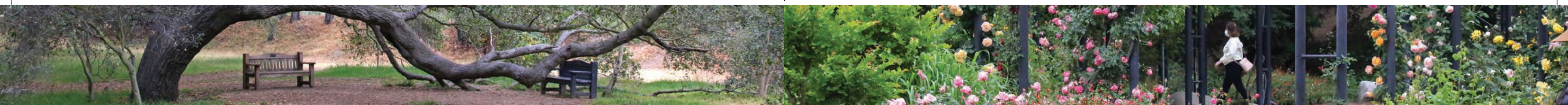
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Staying Grounded but Moving Forward

At Descanso Gardens we are continually cultivating experiences in nature. Although 2021 saw us getting back to normal, we were not standing still. We welcomed more visitors than ever — more than 750,000 — as we continued to grow and expand our natural areas while providing interesting and fun programming.



Laying the groundwork

The Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center will give Descanso’s plants a place to grow. Located above the lake, the new nursery will include plenty of space for plant propagation, storage, and education. The nursery is possible because of a generous gift from the Anna and Harry Borun Foundation and is built in honor of Ruth Borun and her love of nature.

Embracing family in nature

Fall in California may not be as colorful as in other places, but it’s just as fun. Descanso has hosted many Halloween/fall events, but nothing like Carved. In 2021, the gardens reimagined Carved and it was bigger and better than ever. While some fan favorites like the pumpkin house and hay maze returned, there were new areas to discover including a Dia de los Muertos display, hundreds of jack-o-lanterns in the Camellia Forest, and a giant moon that rose over the Oak Grove.



Seeing things in a different light

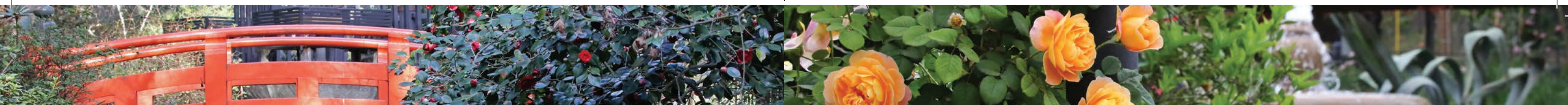
Enchanted Forest of Light celebrated its fifth year, after a year off. Along with favorites like Flower Power and the Lightwave Lake, there were new experiences. Artist Tom Fruin created a village of “stained glass” houses in the Rose Garden, and the popular spinning geometric works of HYBYCOZO, which have been in the Rose Garden in years past, moved to the Main Lawn. This display showcased new sculptures including a large 15-foot design that visitors could walk in.



Old plants, new areas

The cycad collection expanded this year thanks to the generosity of Katia and Frederick Elsea, who have donated dozens of cycads from their private collection to Descanso and helped establish the Ancient Forest in 2015. Cycads, date back to the Mesozoic Era and are often called “living fossils.” The cycads are displayed in groupings, mimicking their natural habitat in Australia, South Africa, and South America. The sunlight shining through the redwood canopy acts like a spotlight that emphasizes the amazing variation in texture and color of the garden.





Rethinking our history

Wendy Cheng, Associate Professor of American Studies at Scripps College, researched the history of the Descanso camellias and what she found made us reconsider how we talk about our collections. Descanso had long said that E. Manchester Boddy acquired the garden's famed camellia collection from local Japanese growers before the families were sent to Internment Camps during World War II by paying "a fair price." Cheng found that not only were the growers not given fair market value but that Boddy also acquired camellias that he renamed and credited to himself and his collection. In response, Descanso has pledged to continue learning about its history and begin to tell the true history of the camellias. Camellias developed by F.M. Uyematsu are now marked with red plant labels so the impact of his plants on the landscape is more visible.

Welcome new friends

Inviting schools to visit is important for the garden's mission. During the pandemic, the school visits were suspended. We knew school groups would have to transition back to traditional field trips, so the education department had to be creative. They welcomed back school programs with flexible and adaptable nature stations. Kids can visit each station and learn something from a docent stationed there. The stations have succeeded in providing educational opportunities for self-guided school field trips, and keeping volunteers engaged.



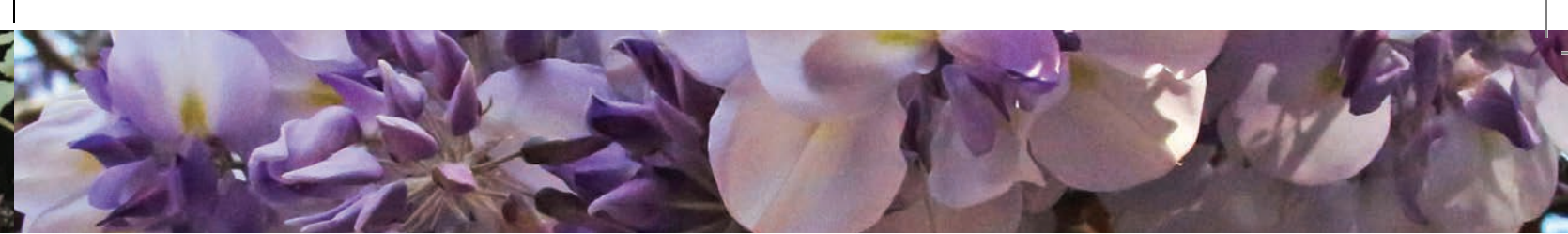
Helping Hands Return

Descanso was happy to welcome back its volunteers. They are essential to our work. The crew of over 150 volunteers not only welcome and educate visitors, but spend countless hours working with the horticulture team. In all, the volunteers spent more than 7,500 hours in the garden.

The gallery reopens

After a year-long closure, the Sturt Haaga Gallery reopened with two shows that explored land use. *Castle Garden* used contemporary artwork, videos, and historic materials to explore how, over the centuries, plants and gardens have played a vital role in communicating our identity and culture. *Full Circle: A Return to the Land* looked at each of the new cultures that arrived in Southern California; Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American, and examined the effect they had on the existing land and/or culture. The interweaving of history, art, and ethnobotany from largely unheard perspectives fostered a deeper understanding of how Descanso Gardens and much of Southern California evolved from pre-European contact to the present time.





Growing a legacy

A gift from the Anna and Harry Borun Foundation honors Ruth Borun and her love of nature.



When Ruth Borun was a child she would go on walks with her mother. On these walks, they would often talk about the plants they saw and take snips of the ones they liked. Back at home, they would use the snips to propagate their own plants. They created a little plant nursery in their yard.

Ruth's love of plants and nature continues at the new nursery being built in her honor at Descanso Gardens. The Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center is possible because of a generous gift from the Anna and Harry Borun Foundation. It will be a place not only where the horticulture staff will be able to grow and nurture plants for the garden, but where children and volunteers will be invited to learn.

"The nursery is exactly what she would have wanted," said Dr. E. Raymond (Ray) Borun, Ruth's husband.



Through their generous donation the nursery operations, the backbone of the garden, will flourish and grow. Located above the lake the new facilities will more than triple from the current nursery from 7,000 square feet to 25,000. The greenhouse space will jump from 528 square feet to 6,000. And horticulture staff will be able to efficiently propagate the treasures of Descanso, and ensure their genetic heritage is preserved. This includes the Yoshimura camellia varieties, which are very rare, and the Lammert hybrid lilacs, bred and developed here at Descanso.

Ruth's love of native flowers will also be part of the nursery. It will be a place where natives will be propagated and grown for the California Garden and Promenade including Matilija poppies, red-flowered currants, and the beautiful filigree flowers of St. Catherine's lace.

We thank donors like the Borun family who help Descanso Gardens grow and thrive.



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For the 2021 audited financial report, please visit: descansogardens.org/about/governance



Waters, with its shorter days of sunlight foretold of colder days with no guarantee that the Sun would come back again and provide his warmth to regenerate Mother Earth with new life, so communities gathered at Winter Solstice to ceremonially "pull back" the Sun to regenerate the world, Toxangu, once again. Cold nights especially dominated as a reminder that one should slow down activities and reflect inward.

Thank you for your generous support

Annual giving in the form of memberships, donations, grants, sponsorships and other contributions has a direct impact on the work of Descanso Gardens. We are grateful for your support.

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