

# VISIONS OF ROSES

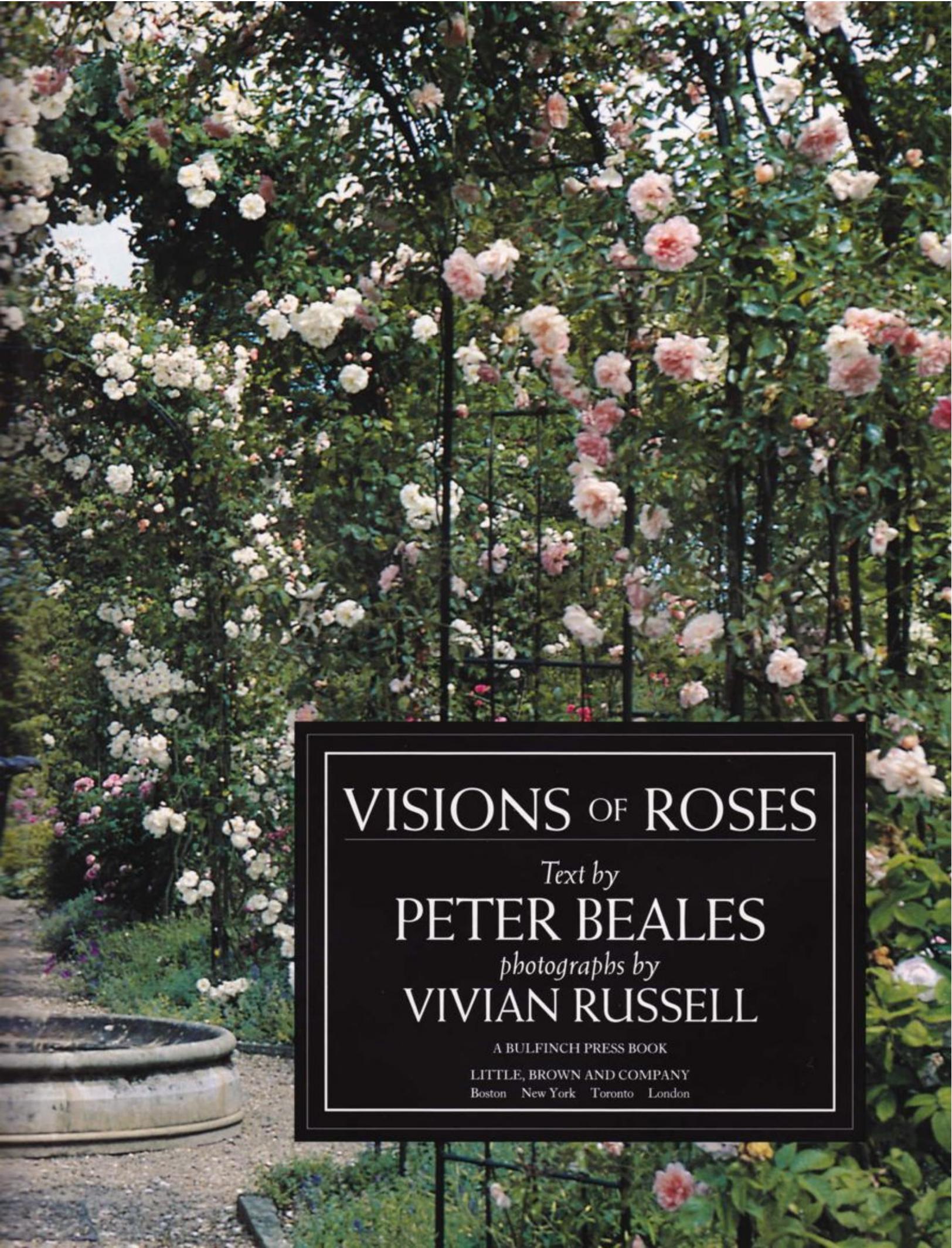
*By the author of CLASSIC ROSES*

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USING ROSES IN OVER 30 BEAUTIFUL GARDENS



VISIONS OF ROSES

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# VALLERANELLO

CASTEL DI LEVA,  
NEAR ROME, LAZIO, ITALY



*Roses burst from every part of the one and a half hectares that make up the rose garden of Valleranello, near Rome. This wonderful rambler, supported by a Judas tree (Cercis siliquastrum), is one of Maresa Del Bufalo's own raising, a seedling from 'Robin Hood' and named after her husband Luciano Del Bufalo.*



IT WAS EVENING WHEN I VISITED VALLERANELLO, WITH ONLY an hour or so of daylight left. It was raining a little too, but mild, so I was determined not to allow a few drops of Roman rain to spoil my enjoyment of the roses.

The garden is situated at Castel di Leva, about eight kilometres south of Rome in low-lying, open Lazio countryside. It extends to about one and a half hectares and contains an important collection of well over a thousand varieties of rose. 'I was first inspired to grow roses when I saw the huge collection of famous Italian Rosarian Dr Fineschi,' landscape architect Maresa Del Bufalo told me as she showed me her creation, the results of twenty-two years' work.

As we talked it soon became clear that this lady really loves roses, enjoys growing them and knows a great deal about them. She speaks reasonably good English but my Italian is nil, so Elena Pizzi, herself a lover of roses, who had kindly brought me here, acted as interpreter when, occasionally, language difficulties got in the way.

Although Maresa started her rose collection in 1973, she came to live here and started the garden when she married the architect and builder of the house, Luciano Del Bufalo, in 1956. Maresa showed me pictures of the house just after they moved in. It stood in a totally barren expanse of land without a blade of grass or a tree in sight. What has been achieved in only forty years is incredible, but then Maresa is a landscape architect in a family of architects, after all.

The property is approached by a long drive with wide, tree-scattered lawns on either side. The trees become more numerous as you approach the house, cleverly concealing it from full view – not that it can be seen easily from close range, as its walls are densely furnished with climbing and rambling plants of all types, especially roses. There is no formality, I was to discover, but, as expected in an Italian garden, no shortage of ornaments either; in fact, at the entrance to the garden two ancient marble columns, now a little the worse for wear, stand majestically erect as they did



a couple of thousand years ago in another place, when they formed part of a grand colonnade or supported a Roman portico.

As we walked Maresa told me that this was her real garden, the garden where she is free from the constraints of her profession of designing formal gardens for such clients as the City of Rome. 'Roses as plants are so individual that it is impossible to contain them in a line,' she said. 'In Italian-style gardens, if the line is more important than the plant, then roses cannot be used.' She went on: 'In my work when I use roses, I put them into beds and borders, but not in my garden – here they grow free.' As I soon discovered, for everywhere here roses more or less do their own thing.

In the time available it was impossible to explore every little nook and cranny, coppice or spinney, so with occasional diversions, we followed the wide grassed walkway which weaves its way through the garden from north-east to south-west.

Maresa has help from a gardener for only one day a week, so she attends to her roses herself all the year round, including week after week of pruning in winter. She believes that a garden, as well as being a labour of love, should be a place of enjoyment and somewhere to relax with her family, and soon we came upon a sizeable gazebo furnished with a suite of comfortable cane chairs and tables.

This gazebo is an attractive structure, hexagonal in shape and built of criss-cross trellising, open on two sides. Its covered roof is awash with a huge plant of the climbing China rose 'Cécile Brunner' in the peak of health with luxuriant foliage and

*A cascading cluster of the lovely 'Paul's Himalayan Musk' is captured among the branches of a Melia azedarach at Valleverano. There are many such unusual associations of roses and trees and shrubs in this garden.*



All the China roses, including 'Mutabilis', enjoy the climate around Rome. The whole garden at Valleranello is irrigated so that the roses, without exception, are in excellent condition.

copious flowers. Other hybrids of *Rosa chinensis* are planted in little groups around this area. I noticed the lovely soft yellow 'Perle d'Or' and the more vigorous replica of 'Cécile Brunner', 'Bloomfield Abundance', both looking in excellent shape, as was 'Mutabilis', which so loves the climate around Rome. Scrambling up into a sizeable tree near by I spotted the effervescent climbing form of 'Cramoisi Supérieur', which Maresa told me she had brought here as a cutting from the garden at Ninfa (see page 149). Also flowering away to its heart's content was a bush of 'Général Schablikine'; this, too, came from that same garden. Maresa knows Ninfa intimately, of course, and has recently published, in collaboration with friends Rita Biuso and Alberto Galli, a beautiful book on the garden there. Planted close by the gazebo I also saw one or two older varieties of Hybrid Tea. I was especially thrilled to find the bright crimson 'Soraya', which I remember from my youth. Near by a large group of several different varieties of Rugosa creates a haven for birds; they love to feast on the huge crop of succulent hips these thorny shrubs yield.

Each of the garden groups of old roses has been allocated its own space by Maresa. This is useful to anyone who is not familiar with the structure of the genus, for the different habits of each family are then more easily recognized. As if to make this point, on opposite sides of the walkway are two quite different groups, on the one side the ancient once-flowering Gallicas, with *Rosa gallica officinalis* and its historic sport, the striped 'Rosa Mundi', much in evidence and, on the other, the ever-flowering Hybrid Musks, including the semi-double bright pink 'Belinda' and a special favourite of Maresa's, the floriferous, scarlet 'Robin Hood'.

I remarked on how well all the roses looked. 'The whole garden is irrigated, and in high summer the irrigation is turned on at least every other day,' Maresa said. No wonder the ramblers and climbers all scramble so energetically high up into the trees, and the shrub roses grow with such exuberance. She also explained that every three weeks, starting in May, the whole garden is sprayed with fungicide and insecticide to keep at bay any dreaded blackspot, rust and aphids.

Sadly, I will probably never see this garden at its peak because it is at its best during the last ten days of May, dates which will always clash with Chelsea Flower

THIS ROSE was introduced from China in 1917. It is valuable as a garden plant, since it comes into flower a week or so later than many of the other tree-climbers. It is very vigorous, attaining a height of thirty feet or more without any difficulty.

The foliage is fine-textured, darkish green and glossy, but such is its speed of growth that its leaves are sometimes fairly wide-spaced. It blooms profusely on wood produced in the previous season, which makes it slow to begin flowering; however, once it does start, its large corymbs make for a spectacular display.

## SPECIES ROSE



## ROSA MULLIGANII

The individual flowers are about one inch across. Creamy-yellow in bud, they open to pure white, with a lovely boss of yellow stamens setting them off beautifully. They have a distinct perfume of bananas. Later they turn into small, orangey-red hips, themselves quite a sight up in the branches of a tall tree in autumn and early winter.

For some time, until the mid-1980s, this rose was distributed as *Rosa longicuspis*, so anyone who bought it under that name should re-name it *R. mulliganii*. The true *R. longicuspis* has much larger leaves and is similar to *R. gentileana* (1907).

Show; but, such is the abundance of roses that I can imagine its magnificence – especially the scramblers pouring out of every other tree, some six or more metres high. Among the many harmonious combinations, one example is the climbing form of ‘Souvenir de la Malmaison’, cascading from a *Prunus cerasifera* ‘Nigra’, the pastel pink flowers of the rose superb among the plum-coloured leaves of the tree; another has the bright pink blooms of ‘Blush Rambler’ drooping out of the purple foliage of *Malus × purpurea*. Less tall but just as effective is the golden-yellow climbing Tea rose ‘Lady Hillingdon’ contrasting with the bronzy-red foliage of a little copper beech tree.

As we neared the western edge of the garden, we found a large assembly of Bourbons, invaluable for autumn flowers – ‘Variegata di Bologna’, striped red and pink, and ‘Louise Odier’, bright pink – in fine shape among lots and lots of others of their kind. Next to these was a sizeable collection of Centifolias. ‘Bellissimo!’ Maresa exclaimed. ‘There’s the star of the garden,’ she said, pointing to a most prolific shrub of ‘Fantin-Latour’ in their midst. ‘Who can resist this most beautiful rose?’ None of us can; it is in every garden in this book. As we hurried on, for by now it was twilight, I saw a huge dense clump of assorted *Rosa pimpinellifolia* hybrids including the Burnets ‘Double White’ and ‘Double Pink’, ‘Mary Queen of Scots’ and ‘Single Cherry’, invaluable in any garden for their early-flowering virtues, autumn foliage and mahogany and black hips in winter.

Throughout this garden there is no shortage of species. I found a fine example of *Rosa roxburghii plena* full of flowers, and huge plants of both the lateish-flowering pink single *R. virginiana* and the early-flowering, mauvy-pink *R. californica*, as well as a large shrub of *R. hibernica*, repeating a few of its bright shell-pink flowers.

In the far western corner of the garden, making use of the tall wire fence surrounding a tennis court, is an interesting congregation of ramblers and climbers, especially yellows and whites. ‘The Garland’ and ‘Desprez à Fleurs Jaunes’ were outstanding as well as the lovable white ‘Félicité Perpétue’. Close by here, doing a magnificent job covering a water-tower three metres high is a huge plant of the pink, myrrh-scented ‘Ayrshire Splendens’. Next door, on an old tree and smothering it completely, is an inspired combination of the creamy-white flowered evergreen honeysuckle *Lonicera japonica* ‘Halliana’ and the soft apricot and milky-white flowered ‘Wedding Day’.

Farther along the drive we came to *Rosa mulliganii* performing one of the biggest feats of tree-climbing by a rose I have ever seen. I neglected to note the name of the over-burdened tree, but Elena Pizzi remarked how, in the fading light, the pair together looked like a giant mushroom. On our way back towards the house were yet more tree and rose liaisons – *Prunus sargentii* and the pink Bourbon ‘Blair No 2’, and *Acer saccharinum* with the pink free-flowering Wichuraiana hybrid ‘François Juranville’ were just two of them.

Chance hybridization has brought forth many a fine rose, and up to about the middle of the last century, this was the most common means by which new varieties came into the world. Maresa has such a rose which she treasures. She has named it for her husband Luciano. A seedling from ‘Robin Hood’, it is bright pink in colour and very vigorous. In only a few years it is completely covering a small tree. I have asked her to send me a cutting for trial.

Any serious student of ‘The Rose’ should see this garden. It is a fine collection. It is open during rose season, by appointment only.

## CLIMBING TEA



### ‘LADY HILLINGDON’

THE CLIMBING form of ‘Lady Hillingdon’ came along in 1917 and soon outshone its parent, the bush form (itself very popular), which had been raised in England in 1910. Its popularity was well deserved, for there were few yellow roses to compete with it for continuity of flowering at that time – a fact which holds true to this day.

Its flowers are rich yellow in colour, almost unfading, and are beautifully shaped in classical high-centred form, with a delicious, slightly fruity fragrance.

A special feature of this variety is its stems and thorns, which are a deep plum colour. Its foliage is dark green and heavily veined with purple.

The plant is hardier than many Teas and even in my garden in Norfolk, where we have quite cold winters, it grows to twenty feet on more sheltered walls. In less harsh climates it will perform well if grown up into trees, over arches and on trellis. The bush form, too, is a useful garden plant and is especially good grown in pots in a conservatory or greenhouse.

Both climbing and bush forms do not seem to mind being planted in poorer soils but, like most roses, flourish in heavy clay.