



Andrea Whitely

## Heritage, roses and art in leafy Subiaco

*Fairview* is a rare and well-preserved example of a late gold-boom-period home located in the Chesters estate heritage precinct in Subiaco, Perth. Image Gina Moore, *Fairview*, 1994, pen and ink on paper, 20 x 28 cm, from The Fairview Private Art Collection

It is said a house sometimes selects its owners rather than the other way around. That is certainly true of *Fairview* and the rose garden that envelopes her. There have only been four owners of this picturesque Queen Anne villa built in 1915, whose front entrance garden has been nominated for listing on the Local Heritage Scheme (LHS) for the City of Subiaco because of its strong links to the home's first three owners. This is the first time a rose garden has been nominated in the City of Subiaco, a suburb with a very high concentration of heritage homes. The scheme aims to identify and record places that are of cultural heritage significance.

### Heritage

Set in the leafy inner Perth suburb of Subiaco just a stone's throw from Kings Park and the City of Perth, *Fairview* is perched on the high side

of a cool tree-lined street. When being built, the elevated position was considered much healthier than a low-lying site. Here, one will often find Thomas Murrell, the home's current owner, tending his garden or entertaining friends, proudly speaking about the gardens, his art collection, the home or all three.

Heritage is about prosperity, curiosity and opportunity. For example, the first owner, John Kennedy, a Scottish immigrant, built *Fairview* at the peak of his career to tell the world he had achieved middle-class respectability. Kennedy was an engineer at the Perth Ice Works in the pre-refrigeration age. As a nod to his profession, he included snowflakes on the square corner timber brackets of the front veranda. He had real design flair.

Kennedy was obsessed with quality craftsmanship and wanted to create a stylistic whole that represented his importance and influence in society. The elegantly symmetrical verandah that frames the rose garden was placed perfectly in the landscape. The entrance hall was designed as a welcoming and impressive reception area. It is adorned with leadlight stained-glass windows of red roses and violet bearded iris designed by Arthur Clarke of



Barnett Brothers Glass Merchants in East Perth. The suburb of Subiaco has one of the most well-preserved collections of leadlight stained-glass windows in the world. Clarke was renowned for incorporating both flora and fauna motifs as well as his use of strong vertical and horizontal lines which, more than 110 years later, are still outstanding features at *Fairview*.

According to Murrell, *Fairview* is a fitting manifesto for someone who made good in late 19th-century Australia. Kennedy started out as an uneducated and inexperienced apprentice engineer who left the shores of Scotland with nothing but the clothes he wore and a small suitcase. Inspired by art, nature and classical Greek and Roman architecture, he built ice works all over Australia, becoming a prosperous and well-educated man of taste.

The second owner, John Pointon, who bought the house and all its contents in 1925, is linked to the success of Perth's iconic Boans department store, which was purchased by Myer Grace Bros in 1984. In the late 1890s, farm labourer John William Levi Pointon abandoned his wife and baby in South Australia to seek his fortune on the Western Australian goldfields, but being short of cash took a temporary job as a packer at Boans. He found the job so rewarding he spent the next 40 years with the retailer, climbing the corporate ladder and being appointed managing director in October 1941. By the time the now-prosperous Pointon bought *Fairview*, Boans had introduced their garden conservatory and plant listing, which included rose varieties recommended as suitable for West Australian growing conditions. There is a strong connection between Boans, their mail-order garden catalogues, the development of Perth's garden suburbs, including Subiaco, in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s and the establishment of the Rose Society in Western Australia in 1932.

## Roses

The foundation of the current garden at *Fairview* came later, with the modern rose bushes planted by the home's third owner, heritage activist Polly Willis,



who bought the property in 1970. Not long after she began living in Subiaco, there was a push for residential progress—the supersession of old houses in the area by more modern flats. This threat of widespread demolition was confronted by the joint efforts of Willis and the Subiaco Historical Society. They planned functions and engaged in historical research that fostered greater counteraction and involvement by the community as a whole.

Willis owned *Fairview* for 40 years. She would often be seen wheelbarrowing sand from one part of the property to the other, designing the garden beds and creating the bones of the gardens that still stand today. Five of her roses remain as her legacy.

The two hero bushes, now gnarly and 50 years old, are the variety 'Fragrant Cloud', an award-winning German-bred shrub, which was the world's best-selling rose in the 1960s. The pair continue to delight.

**Left** *Fairview*'s entrance hall, with Clarke's leadlight windows

**Right** The 'Fragrant Cloud' Hybrid Tea rose has a heady perfume and dark olive-green leaves, which are tinted red when young images  
Thomas Murrell

Fairview front verandah, with 'Fragrant Chloud', 'Mr Lincoln' and 'William Shakespeare' roses, image Thomas Murrell



Christine Cresswell, *William Shakespeare Rose*, 2021, watercolour on paper; 21 x 15.5 cm, from The Fairview Private Art Collection. Cresswell is a botanical artist and keen gardener from Margaret River in Western Australia.



'Thomas à Becket', as well as more red rose classics: 'Sir Donald Bradman', 'Summer Fragrance', 'Papa Meiland', 'Kardinal' and 'Black Caviar'. These beds are underplanted with blue bearded iris to mirror the design in the leadlight front entry windows. The rose gardens are currently framed on one side by a Japanese box hedge, offering a modern formality, and tough, sweet viburnum on the other.

## Art

Murrell has recently opened his home for people to view his Fairview art collection, which focuses on South Australian and West Australian women artists, including works by Marie Tuck and Jessamine Buxton. The collection also has a large holding of rose images created by established artists May Courtney O'Neill, Tasmanian botanical watercolourist June Rose Calvert, psychologist painter Dr Joan Janet Bayliss, botanical artist Christine Cresswell and emerging creatives Deborah Zibah and Jules Hancock.

'Art, roses and heritage have always been a heady mix and a passion for the owners of Perth's historic homestead, Fairview in Subiaco,' says Murrell. All four owners have been worthy custodians of such a beautifully preserved home set in a very special garden.

The third is a hard-to-find 'Scarlet Queen Elizabeth' is a hot-coloured orange-red flowering shrub released in 1963 that sits well behind the white picket fence. It is paired with another regal beauty from the 1970s: 'Princess Margaret', named after Her Majesty's younger sister – a rose which outshines the 'Scarlet Queen Elizabeth' in so many ways, with its larger, more classic-shaped pink petals set off against green leathery leaves. The fifth is 'Eiffel Tower', an extraordinary rose with upright, urn-shaped buds that are a cool medium pink and very fragrant. The rose won gold medals in Geneva and Rome after being released in 1963.

When Thomas Murrell moved into Fairview in 2007, he worked with a garden designer, Craige Matthews of Acanthus Green Design, to expand the rose collection, adding the classic, red, fragrant 'Mr Lincoln', David Austin's 'William Shakespeare' and

**Opposite**  
A 4m-high 'Pierre de Ronsard' climber on the western wall of Fairview makes an eye-catching October statement with its pink flowers and fragrant perfume, image Thomas Murrell

**Andrea Whitely** is a Perth-based garden consultant and writer. She was the WA chairman and co-ordinator of Australia's Open Garden Scheme and has served on the committee of the WA branch of the Australian Garden History Society. She is a regional director of GardenComm International.





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