



Roses by English breeder David Austin, like L.D. Braithwaite (above), combine the best traits of old and modern roses.

Barona resort is test grounds for 58 rose varieties



Kathleen Eagle oversees the garden at Barona for David Austin roses. John Gibbins / Union-Tribune photos

By Mary James
HOMESCAPE EDITOR

LAKESIDE — On a hot September day, as folks gathered to dedicate a new garden at Barona Valley Ranch Resort & Casino, some honored attendees from England basked in the blazing sun.

One, Michael Marriott, had endured a particularly cool, rainy summer in Great Britain and was delighted that his job as technical director for England's David Austin Roses had brought him to the summery West Coast.

The other Brits were roses — about 170 of them — all the lush, heavily perfumed English roses famed breeder David Austin creates. Planted in February, they were thriving in their new home on Barona's sun-drenched grounds.

The planting is a test garden, one of 10 for Austin Roses in the United States and the only one in Southern California.

Marriott, who had been touring the three other test gardens in the state, stopped here 10 days ago for ceremonies dedicating the Barona garden in honor of Barona's tribal chairwomen.

In addition to tribal dignitaries, guests included Kathleen Eagle, Barona's director of ornamental horticulture who oversees the garden, and Dick Stréeper, *Homescape's* "Rose Man" columnist and nationally known rosarian who was instrumental in locating the test garden in San Diego County.

"These evaluation gardens will help us find out what these roses do in the United States," Marriott said earlier in a phone interview. "The climate is so different from that in England. We want to learn as much as possible about what roses do best where and pass it along to our customers."

Since the 1960s, David Austin has been breeding roses that share the best qualities of old and modern roses. His English roses generally bear old-fashioned cupped flowers dense with petals and scent on shrublike plants with good disease resistance and repeat bloom. Their appeal has grown in recent years as the popularity of hybrid tea roses has

waned.

Today, Marriott says, the United States is the largest market for Austin roses outside of England.

"The great advantage to English roses is that they are great mixers in the garden," he says. "They mix beautifully with annuals and perennials, and they are fragrant. Fragrance is one of the things we select for in our breeding program."

The Barona test garden fills about a third of an acre and features 58 varieties planted in groups of three that eventually will intertwine. Familiar favorites like lemon-yellow Graham Thomas, rich pink Gertrude Jekyll and Mary Rose and coppery Pat Austin are mingled with newer introductions like deep crimson Darcey Bussell, shimmering pink Harlow Carr, golden Lady Emma Hamilton and sunny apricot Tea Clipper.

All are tended organically and watered via drip irrigation with reclaimed water, Eagle said.

Every two weeks, Eagle and her staff compile information on the roses — ranging from number of blooms to color, fragrance and height of the plant — and convey it to Marriott.

"Once we've learned what we need to know, or if certain roses aren't successful, we'll rope them out and add new ones," he said. "One of our goals is to make people familiar with more of our roses."

The Austin test garden is a short walk west of Barona's main parking structure. It is part of a larger garden that showcases the Barona Rose Collection of more than 200 roses, including many All-America Rose Selections winners over the years. Labels and free handouts make it easy to identify individual plants.

"We love to share these gardens with our guests and the community," she said. "The tribe is very supportive of horticulture and dedicated to care of the natural environment."

There is no charge to visit, and tours can be arranged for interested groups, Eagle says. To arrange a guided tour, call (619) 328-3370.