In Search of Shangri-La
Bill McNamara, Executive Director

Just exactly where is Shangri-La? Many have been wondering this for a very long time. James Hilton in his well-known 1933 novel Lost Horizon popularized the idea of a paradise called Shangri-La. It was a place of great beauty that was surrounded by high snow-covered mountains where a small group lived in peace and prosperity and aged very slowly. Cut off from the rest of the world somewhere in the Himalayas, the utopian community housed an extensive library of the world’s wisdom. It is commonly believed that Hilton based his idea of Shangri-La on the legendary Tibetan paradise Shambhala, and was inspired by articles written by Joseph Rock for National Geographic in the 1920’s. Rock was an eccentric, gifted, self-trained linguist-botanist from Austria. He spent almost thirty years in China, funded by various American organizations, collecting plant specimens and studying the cultures of the inhabitants of the mountainous regions of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Gansu.

In 2001, with the goal of attracting more tourism, the Tibetan county of Zhongdian in northwestern Yunnan officially changed its name to Xianggelila, meant to refer to Shangri-La. Local officials claimed that it was Zhongdian that Rock was writing about for National Geographic. However, officials in Sichuan, the province just north of Yunnan, argued that Rock was, in fact, describing remote regions of southern Sichuan. They have pinpointed two areas for Shangri-La that Rock did indeed write about and photograph in Sichuan, the small Tibetan town of Muli and the mysterious mountains of Konkaling. The Konkaling culminate in three massive peaks that tower over the surrounding gentian-filled alpine meadows and rich conifer forests. The highest of the three is Xiannairi at 19,790 feet, with the other two, Yangmaiyong and Xiaru-oduoji, rising to 19,547 feet.

I was fortunate to visit the Konkaling Mountains in fall of 1994 during an expedition with Charles Howick, from the Howick Arboretum, and Charles Erskine & Hans Fliegner from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Our guide from the Chinese Academy of Sciences called the mountains “Little Gongga”, after Sichuan’s highest mountain Gongga Shan at 24,790 feet. We were told at the time that we were the first foreign botanists to visit the area since Joseph Rock in 1929. Stunned by the magnificence of the mountains and the diverse flora surrounding them, I was determined to return one day.

Sixteen years later, in October of 2010, I was finally able to return. I was traveling with Andrew Bunting of the Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College, Andy Hill from the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden, and Christophe
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Crock from the Arboretum Wespelaar in Belgium. Konkaling is now a nature reserve and is called Yading. The small village of Riwa, where we had camped in 1994, was now full of new Tibetan style hotels built of stone. It had also changed its name to Shangri-La Village. What had taken us two days on horses before, to arrive at a scenic alpine meadow at the base of the highest of three peaks, was now possible in a 15 minute drive. A new road had been cut into the sides of the steep mountains to take hordes of tourists to a hotel complex for shopping and casual strolls for photo opportunities. Saddened by all the development, I was still pleased to know that the surrounding mountainsides were now protected.

During the long journey there and back we managed to make several important collections for Quarryhill, in particular oaks, maples, rhododendrons, and arisaemas. The travel was difficult as the roads were some of the worst that I have seen due to heavy summer rains, and the leeches were far too numerous. We also had to cross several very high passes, some well over 15,000 feet. However, I was especially pleased to find Lyonia ovatifolia, a delicate shrub with white bell flowers, Rhododendron rex, a large-leaved species with beautiful light pink flowers, and Piptanthus nepalensis, a curious legume with yellow flowers. We had hoped to collect seed of Magnolia wilsonii, Magnolia sargentiana, and Magnolia dawsoniana, but despite finding all three species, all were without seed. We also searched in vain for new populations of Acer pentaphyllum in Muli county. On our return we stopped at the three known populations of this rare maple in Yajiang, Kangding, and Jiulong counties. To our surprise and delight a large sign had been posted along the road at the Yajiang population declaring that the maple was protected. Some of the trees between the road and the river had been fenced off presumably to deter the gathering of firewood. Colorful Tibetan prayer flags lined the top of the fence. Although the existence of all three populations is still threatened, it was good to see that the Chinese had begun to take notice. Unfortunately, the plans to build dams that will submerge the maples have not changed.

Having seen the three sites in China claiming to be Shangri-La, I’m not sure the Chinese have found it. If the purpose of Shangri-La is to attract tourist dollars, then certainly Zhongdian and Yading could claim the name. Few tourists have yet found their way to Muli. But if Shangri-La is meant to be a secret place of great beauty, peace and harmony, none of the three measure up. Some say that Shambhala or Shangri-La can only be found by the enlightened or that it only exists in our imagination. Sometimes during my strolls through Quarryhill I think I have glimpses of Shangri-La. And I keep hearing from visitors that Quarryhill may soon no longer be the best kept secret in Sonoma Valley.

Welcome, Spring Interns!
Corey Barnes, Nursery Manager

We couldn’t have asked for a better lineup for our spring 2011 intern program. With both Matt Burgesser and Juan Martinez on board, this season will prove to be both very educational and productive.

Matt has had a lifelong passion for horticulture, especially plant propagation, and left a corporate position in 2005 to pursue his passion as a career. Matt is most interested in pursuing a career in botanical conservation, but would love to keep his hands in the nursery and is working toward admission to a professional horticulture program.

Matt has been spending a significant amount of time in the garden, continuing the work of Janet Parmer, one of our 2010 fall interns, collecting herbarium specimens. In the nursery, Matt is experimenting with different organic nutritional and mycorrhizal products, improving the uniformity of the automatic irrigation system, and studying both seed and vegetative propagation. Specific to propagation, Matt has been collecting data on an Acer pentaphyllum germination study and experimenting with different stem cutting treatments on several of Quarryhill’s rarest conifers. Both of these latter tasks were made possible by Joel Gallegos, our 2010 fall intern who set up the germination study and completed the construction of our new mist bench.

Juan Martinez decided to branch into horticulture after visiting Colombia with its rain forest climate. He has an appreciation for orchids, and is very interested in pursuing a career in South or Central America, with preference for his native Colombia, and has a particular interest in commercial fruit production.

At Quarryhill, Juan is primarily interested in vegetative propagation. He has nearly completed a remodel of our second mist bench, and his focus this spring will be on cutting propagation of magnolias, as well as seed and vegetative propagation of other Quarryhill specimens. He will also participate in data collection and analysis of a mycorrhizal study set up in our Acer pentaphyllum Conservation Grove.

Quarryhill’s interns are a valuable asset to us. In return for the applied horticultural experience that they receive, their assistance helps us further our mission.
June 4, 2011 10 am - 3 pm

Guest Speaker: **Sara Oldfield**
Secretary General, **Botanic Gardens Conservation International** & Author of *Botanic Gardens: Modern-Day Arks*

- Catered Lunch
- Plant Sale
- Silent Auction

Members: $45
Non-members: $55

This year the plant sale will extend through Sunday, June 5!

Quarryhill thanks Event Chair Yvonne Hall and Events Committee Chair Dana Dirickson for their efforts

Sponsored with generous support from

**Mechanics Bank**

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**Horticulture**

Explore the nature of our connection to plants
$10 Members, $15 Non-members

QBG Docents: Free
Space is limited, please call to reserve

Plants are ubiquitous. They are woven into the fabric of life - our clothing, shelter, diets; our oxygen, art, medicine, and indeed, our future. Please join us as we find these intersections, and with them, more reasons to conserve the flora of Asia.

- April 21, 2011 **Paul Discoe**
  Temple Builder & Author
  Reverence for Materials in Zen Architecture

- May 19, 2011 **Anthony Eglin**
  Author, English Garden Mystery Series
  *The Novel Garden*

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**Hanging Basket Workshop**
With Kathleen Bunte of Sonoma Valley Landscape

Saturday, April 9, 2011, 10:00 am
$40 Members, $50 Non-members
Materials included
Space is limited, please call to reserve

Join us for a morning lesson on hanging basket design and construction. Kathleen Bunte, owner of Sonoma Valley Landscape in Kenwood, and committed Quarryhill nursery volunteer, will be teaching us the fine art of hanging basket composition. Each participant will complete a basket to take home. If you have specimens you would like to include (no larger than 4" containers) please bring them along!
Over the past 25 years, the genus *Cornus* has been well-represented on Quarryhill’s yearly expeditions, resulting in a total of 29 seed collections. China, in particular, has provided a wealth of dogwood diversity, including 18 accessioned species, of which 13 are currently growing in the garden. Japan has also contributed to the collection with 5 species accessioned, including 3 planted in the garden.

*Cornus* taxonomy is quite complex and ever-changing, with continuing disagreement among scientists. Botanists in Japan, for instance, generally accept several other genera to represent some species traditionally found within *Cornus*, such as *Swida* and *Benthamidia*, and consider *Cornus* to be non-native in Japan. Chinese botanists, on the other hand, describe 25 *Cornus* species in China, with many also listed in Japan, out of approximately 55, worldwide. This can be problematic for a botanical garden striving for consistency in the naming of similar or identical species found in different geographic areas; in this accounting of the group, the Chinese names are used.

The genus *Cornus* includes shrubs and trees with a circumpolar distribution in north temperate regions, as well as two South American and one African species. Primary identifying characteristics of most dogwoods include: multi-stemmed branching of the trunk; strikingly deep red to purple red, or olive green stems on juvenile growth, providing heightened winter interest in dormant deciduous gardens; opposite leaves with 3+ primary veins curving parallel to the leaf margin from the base to the distal edges of the blade; and, on many species, large, conspicuous bracts (often incorrectly referred to as flower petals), colored white to light yellow, sometimes tinged with pink and red, that subtend innumerable small, sometimes inconspicuous flowers within. Flowering generally occurs in early summer, though one species, *C. oblonga*, is fall/winter blooming, from September through January. Fruits are fleshy drupes, frequently used as a food source and, along with bark and leaves, in industry and medicine. In one sub-group (or subgenus, *Syncarpea*), these drupes develop from tiny, tightly packed flowers and fuse into compound, many-seeded berries of considerable size.

One such example, *C. capitata*, native to China, Myanmar and the Himalayas, is Quarryhill’s most successful and ubiquitous dogwood, an evergreen shrub or tree reaching heights of 20 meters in the wild. Its blue-green, long-leaved foliage contrasts with a sensational display of white to light yellow, even pink-tinged flower bracts, May – July. In the fall, large, orange-red, edible fruits fill the trees with color.

*C. kousa* subsp. *kousa* from Japan and Korea, and *C. kousa* subsp. *chinensis* from China are smaller, deciduous, graceful dogwoods with rich, deep green leaves and brilliant white flower bracts, also occasionally tinged pink. The red fruits are similar to, but smaller than, those of their evergreen cousin and sometimes are used in China for making wine.

*C. macrophylla* is a deciduous tree or large shrub native to a wide swath of eastern Asia, from Afghanistan to Japan, and south to Myanmar. Its fragrant, white flowers are arranged in beautiful, large, delicate cymes or panicles, 8-12 cm wide. Quarryhill’s many specimens are from both China and Japan.
Dogwoods of Quarryhill

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C. controversa is the largest of the garden’s dogwoods and is also native to a large geographic area, including most of China, west to India, east to Japan and Korea and south to Myanmar. It is an upright, deciduous tree with alternate leaves (quite rare in the genus) and terminal cymes of 5-14 cm diameter loaded with a loose array of white flowers followed by purplish-red to bluish-black, 5-6 mm fruit, in the fall. Specimens at Quarryhill provide ample shade to the surrounding understory, lending a majestic and more mature look to an otherwise youthful garden.

C. officinalis, native to China and Korea, is of great importance to Chinese medicine. Its red to purplish-red, ellipsoid shaped fruits (“zhu ya” or “zao pi” in China), 1.2-1.8 cm long, are used in an astringent tonic for treatment of many imbalances. Wild-origin seed was finally acquired by Quarryhill in 2003 and resultant plants established in 2005. Its beautiful yellow buds adorn plants in the early spring, long before most dogwoods are ready to flower.

Another well-represented dogwood at Quarryhill is C. bretschneideri, a shrub or small tree with elegant corymbs of pure white flowers, endemic (native, exclusively) to China. Its decorative branches span the color range from deep purplish-red in younger stems, turning to light yellow with age.

Many other species of dogwood dot the garden in smaller numbers, including C. chinensis, C. elliptica, C. hemsleyi, and C. schindleri, all endemic to China, from which seed, fruit, bark and leaves are used in such products as soaps, tannins, astringents and food products. Finally, two species from other countries include C. walteri, collected in South Korea (and also native to China), with its unusually green young branches and fragrant white flowers, and an anomaly, C. austrolis, the only accession originating in Armenia and native to Asia Minor, considerably west of Quarryhill’s usual East Asian region of seed collecting. All told, the genus Cornus has become well established at Quarryhill, and is still growing in both diversity and stature among the garden’s 25 acres of Asian flora.

Garden Flower Surveys

Corey Barnes, Nursery Manager

In November 2010, our staff and volunteers resurrected a project that was initiated well over a decade ago: surveying the garden to note flowering periods of Quarryhill’s specimens. This project provides valuable information to our donors, allows us to update our database, and, over time, assists us in monitoring flowering period fluctuations that may occur (possibly related to climate change). We can use your help! Did you know that not all plants have flowers? Pines and their close relatives, for example, have cones, or strobili, and not all of our species have showy petals. After all, what is the purpose of a petal? Or color? How about fragrance? How might pollination occur in species without these qualities? No experience necessary. It’s a great opportunity to take a hike and explore the garden! To participate, please contact Corey Barnes at cbarnes@quarryhillbg.org, or 707-996-6027.

Quarryhill Donors

The staff at Quarryhill is incredibly grateful for the support of its major donors. Without your generous contributions we could not make our positive impact in the conservation, study, and cultivation of the flora of Asia.

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## Events Calendar

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<td>March</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Third Saturday Docent Tour</td>
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<td>Docent Training Course - 4 Saturdays in March</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hanging Basket Workshop - Kathleen Bunte</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>Horticulture - Paul Discoe</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Earth Day Celebration</td>
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<td>Hypertufa Workshop, Part 1 - Shigeo Kubota</td>
<td>$40/ $50 for the series</td>
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<td>Horticulture - Anthony Eglin</td>
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<td>21</td>
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