

The Japan Grand Prix International Orchid and Flower Show

CLARE and JOHAN HERMANS visit one of the largest orchid events in the world, held annually at the Tokyo Dome baseball stadium, this year with a new name and a new look, then visit a local orchid nursery



The Orchid Gate, a grand entrance to the show

Johan Hermans

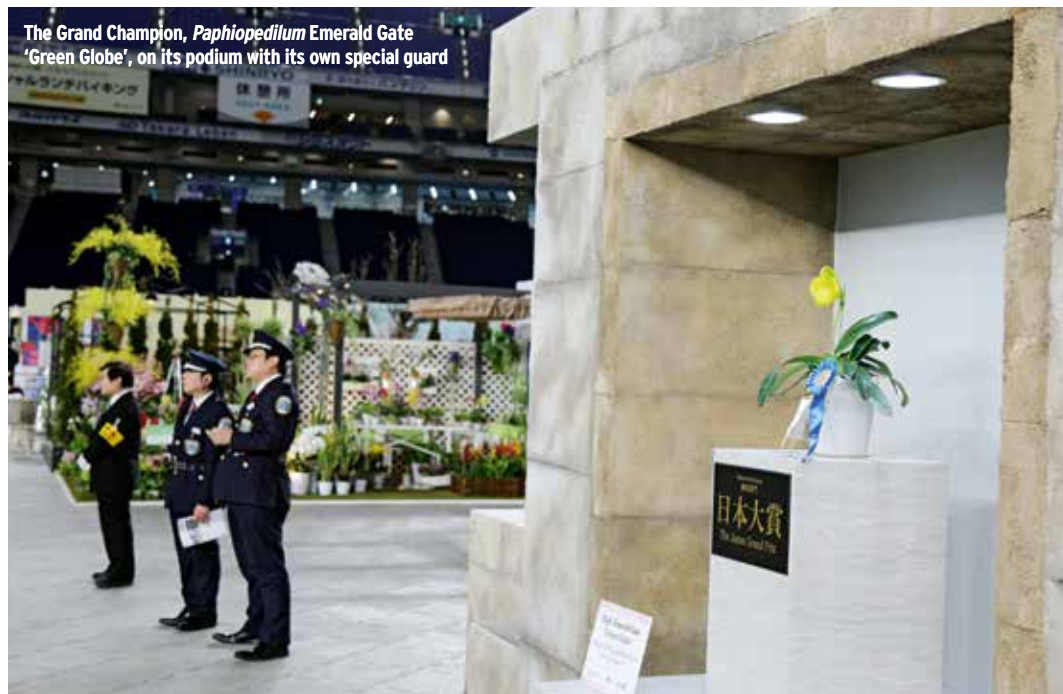
A highlight of the orchid calendar is the Japan Grand Prix International Orchid Show, held each February in the Tokyo Dome. This year, it was relaunched as a combined Orchid

and Flower Show (15 to 22 February), the range of displays and vendors broadened to include succulents, bonsai, *Nepenthes* and other garden delights. Other changes were longer opening times, including five nights

until 9pm, and both the judging and opening ceremony brought forward to add an extra half day to the event. The result was an 18,000 increase in visitors, reversing the downward trend of previous years, with more



Paphiopedilum Emerald Gate 'Green Globe' was Grand Champion Orchid



The Grand Champion, *Paphiopedilum* Emerald Gate 'Green Globe', on its podium with its own special guard



Above The magnificent *Cattleya schroederiae* var. *alba* 'Hercules', winner of the RHS Trophy, and Reserve Grand Champion, on its podium with its awards Below Just a few of the specimen's many attractive flowers

than 136,000 enjoying the spectacle. In another break with tradition, the show was opened by Her Imperial Highness Princess Tsuguko of Takamado, eldest daughter of Her Imperial Highness the Princess Takamado, a great supporter of the show who normally officiates but was in the UK this time.

Grand Champion Orchid Entrance to the 29th show was through a grand Orchid Gate festooned with plants – pink and white *Phalaenopsis* and bright yellow

Oncidium, with colourful *Lycaste* and *Disa* hybrids providing the carpet. The opening led into an avenue of greenery including large tree ferns; new for this year, class winners were displayed among the foliage rather than ranked on a podium.

At the apex was the dais for the Grand Champion Orchid, *Paphiopedilum* Emerald Gate 'Green Globe', owned by Mr Hajime Sakurai. The cross was registered by Tokyo Orchid Nursery in 2013 and the parents of the hybrid are *Paphiopedilum* Emerald Sea and *P. Shun-Fa Golden* (= *P. bangianum*

x *P. malipoense*). It was a fine example of a complex *Paphiopedilum* crossed with a primary hybrid and, despite being single-lowered, it was able to hold its own on the pedestal. As his prize, Mr Sakurai won a bright red Mercedes car and a cheque for ¥2,000,000 (about £13,500).

The rules of judging

This was the second *Paphiopedilum* Grand Champion Orchid in three years, reflecting their wide popularity among the Japanese. It had been selected by secret ballot from a table of 41 trophy winners which, in turn, had been chosen from the 677 entries, and they ranged from true miniatures to giant specimens. The 100 entries for the fragrance competition were excluded, as they had their own perfumery experts to judge them.

A new rule instituted this year meant that once someone has won the Grand Champion Orchid twice they cannot win again. This may seem harsh but there were unexpected

benefits; the huge specimen grown especially for the show by Dr Masahiro Saitoh, last year's four-time winner, now graced the exhibit of his local society the Tsukuba Orchid Society instead.

RHS Trophy winner

Happily there were still many large plants to choose from for the RHS Trophy for Supreme Excellence in Culture. It was awarded to Mr Ginbou, an amateur grower for a gigantic plant of *Cattleya schroederiae* var. *alba* 'Hercules'. The plant measured almost 2 metres across with approximately 180 open flowers. It was growing in a wooden basket and it was also the Reserve Grand Champion Orchid, with prize money of ¥500,000 (about £3,500). HG Reichenbach first described *Cattleya schroederiae* in 1888 as a variety of *Cattleya trianae* and dedicated it to Baroness von Schröder who was 'an enthusiastic lover of orchids', and whose husband had a fine orchid



An avenue landscaped with all the Trophy winners led to the Orchid Gate entrance



Her Imperial Highness Princess Tsuguko of Takamado giving her welcoming address during the Opening Ceremony



Above The exhibit by the Japan Orchid Growers Association titled 'Castle in the Sky' won the award for Best Exhibit in the Open Class, and included white *Phalaenopsis* and yellow *Oncidium* hybrids

collection. It was later made a separate species by Frederick Sander. Sander wrote about the *alba* variety in his monumental work *Reichenbachia*, calling it 'undoubtedly the finest white *Cattleya* known'. The species comes from Colombia and is quite strongly scented.

The cultivar 'Hercules' has an interesting history. It was first found by the American collector and nurseryman John Lager in the 1900s on mountain slopes in the Casanare River area of Colombia. He sold a division to a private

collector who probably sold it to Miss Eileen Low, daughter of orchid nursery owner and RHS Orchid Committee member Stuart Low, during one of her annual trips to the USA.

Stuart Low subsequently exhibited it at the RHS and it gained an Award of Merit from the RHS Orchid Committee in 1925, when it was painted by Nellie Roberts. Then the trail goes cold but, more than 100 years later, this plant was growing very happily in Japan, and gained an RHS Trophy.



Above A huge *Cattleya* specimen grown especially for the show by Dr Masahiro Saitoh, last year's four-time winner, now gracing the exhibit of his local society: the Tsukuba Orchid Society

A visit to an

On every visit to the show we take the opportunity to see something of Tokyo and the surrounding area. One of our favourite places, just a short walk from the Dome, is the Koishikawa Korakuen Garden. It was founded in the 17th century and is a peaceful haven, in sharp contrast to the bustle of the orchid show and the noise of the Tokyo Dome City's numerous amusement rides. This winter had obviously been mild as the 'ume' or plum blossom was further advanced than usual, with many different colours and forms already open and surrounded by numerous admirers.

Our trips further afield are facilitated by a good friend Ryoichi (Roy) Oba who kindly takes us out for a day. This year we had the opportunity to visit his nursery in the seaside town of Kamogawa, and the nearby University of Tokyo Chiba Forest, where we hoped to see some orchids in the wild. The drive itself was interesting as it passed along the Tokyo Bay Aqua Line, a 9.6km tunnel under Tokyo Bay followed by a 4.4km-long bridge. The latter provided splendid views across the bay and, if it had been clear, Mount Fuji would have been visible. Once across the bay the scenery changed from the heavily built-up city to forests on steep hillsides with valleys and rice paddies and scattered houses in-between. Everything was still in its rather drab winter dormancy but occasionally a plum tree could be spotted in full flower.

Roy's nursery had a warm and intermediate greenhouse and contained a mixed collection. In the greenhouse we were surprised to see some large, sturdy wooden boxes that held one or two orchids. They had been used to air-freight the plants to

orchid nursery by the sea in Kamogawa



Ryoichi 'Roy' Oba, owner of a nursery in Kamogawa

the subtropical island of Okinawa for ribbon judging at the earlier Okinawa Orchid Show and had just returned after a three-week round trip.

An interesting sideline to Roy's business was providing orchid board and lodging: a greenhouse was subdivided into individual 10m long x 2m wide x 2m high metal cages. Each held someone's precious orchid collection and there was a great variety – some were single genera or country specific, others were only species, still more were a mix. Roy provided the heat and water but the care of the plants was up to the owner and it was obvious who had been in

recently to tend their plants. The arrangement offers an easy solution for the many orchid growers who lack space. The plots for houses in Japan are generally quite small and gardens are tiny so greenhouses are uncommon; moreover, many people live in apartments so everyone's growing space is extremely limited.

Private growing space

A short distance away was Chiba Forest; it became a protected area in 1894 and was the first in the country. It now comprises 2,200ha, the majority of which is native forest, mostly broad-leaved trees including *Quercus* (oaks), *Zelkova* (an elm relative), and *Acer*, but part has been replanted with *Cryptomeria japonica* and *Chamaecyparis obtusa*. It is used for field studies in Forestry Science at Tokyo University and, although it is not open to the public, visits can be made by appointment and there are open days. A short track off the main road leads to the headquarters where there is a museum with a herbarium including specimens of the orchids located in the forest. There were 36 known orchid species on site, out of a total of about a 100 in the Japanese

flora. While February was too early in the flowering season we were hopeful that we would be able to see a couple. In fact, we were shown six species on a short walk close to the offices. The first was a large clump of *Dendrobium moniliforme* on a large tree trunk near to one of the original 19th-century buildings. Nearby were plants of *Bulbophyllum* species, *Vanda falcata*, *Gastrochilus japonicus*, *Liparis japonica* and, finally, leaves of *Calanthe discolor* growing in a clump by a woodpile. Sadly, it was too early for any of the *Cypripedium japonicum* to appear. The day ended in a small sushi restaurant in downtown Kamogawa where staff served excellent and very fresh sushi.

It is hoped that there will be a 30th Japan Grand Prix International Orchid and Flower Show in February 2020 and for those planning a trip to Japan next spring it should be a date to put in your diary. ■

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Left Individual cages within a greenhouse are used to provide orchid board and lodging at Roy's nursery - a boon for orchid growers with limited space of their own
Above *Vanda falcata* growing on a tree in Roy's own garden