

If I knew then what I know now[©]

J. Barnett^a

Bambina Rose NZ Ltd, PO Box 4327, Hamilton East 3247, Hamilton, New Zealand.

INTRODUCTION

Well what do I know now that I didn't know before? A LOT!! And I am still learning and know there is more to yet come. I guess that's a good thing, we should never stop learning.

I find it intriguing that anyone would be interested to hear what I know, for what I know now is probably what most of you have known a long time, which is—Don't get into plant importation if you want to make money (or at least not spend money) and stay sane!

I am Jan Barnett, the Managing Director of Bambina Rose NZ Ltd, which imports rose cultivars into New Zealand (NZ). We concentrate on the "tween"s sized roses. Shorter plants with largish blooms that make a stunning impact in the smaller sized gardens of today, some are highly perfumed. They have great looking and disease proof foliage.

I am lucky to be married to Paul (or PB), a man who makes a living as a building consultant and building project manager, which has been rather useful to me. Thank goodness he is very supportive of me and my dreams, plus he works hard in a practical way to help me build MY "empire." I have been his office manager for a long time and we have raised four children.

I am new to the plant nursery world, but not horticulture. My mother has always been interested in plants and as I grew up she taught me the names of plants in her garden. I had my very first rose pruning lessons from Mum who wanted help to prune hers when I was still at school. It should have been enough to put me off roses.

When I was a teenager Mum and Dad built a new house and had it professionally landscaped. Mum and I spent many happy hours poring over the catalogues choosing plants we could grow with an "empty" garden to establish. She worked in the Morrinsville Nursery for quite a few years.

I have always enjoyed reading the gardening magazines, like *New Zealand Gardener* and *Kiwi Gardener* so I am familiar with the columnists, the plants, the plant breeders and personalities. And I have met some of them along the way.

My grandparents had a rambling, romantic country garden with high hedges, a fish pond, and every type of flower and vegetable imaginable, but the roses were my favourite. Every Sunday afternoon we would visit my grandparents. Mum and Poppa would wander round the garden and I would follow listening to the discussions on the various plants and flowers. I was allowed to pick a bunch of flowers to take home and the car was loaded down with seasonal fruit and/or vegetables. I must have soaked up some knowledge because I find it strange that people can look at plants and not know what they are looking at. To me the gardens are populated with "friends", most of who are on a first name basis.

This particular grandfather is Allan G. Scott, MBE. Known to many people because he wrote the Rose Notes in the *New Zealand Gardener* magazine for 30 years, just stopping to write his memoirs 1 month before he died at age 97. He was a very intelligent and charismatic man who owned and farmed a 400 acre sheep and beef farm just out of Morrinsville. He won prizes for his animals and meat. He also became widely known and respected in the world of roses both in New Zealand and overseas winning many awards for his service to the rose.

For myself, once married and with my own garden, naturally I planted a few roses. I started off with a small rose garden, until the passion took hold and eventually I ended up with around 200 plants.

Now I grow and love roses, and grow them quite well with more than one champion rose to my credit. The First in 1992—I was still a novice exhibitor and actually had two champions at that show. The most recent was Champion of Champions at the National

^aE-mail:jan@amoreroses.co.nz

Spring Rose Show in 2014 hosted by Waikato Rose Society. This was probably my “swan song” as I am a bit preoccupied with other activities now.

I particularly love my miniature roses. After a large number of cultivars were introduced in the 1980s, the numbers of new miniatures declined and dwindled, then tailed right off, but I felt there was still a demand for roses of this size with the smaller gardens of today.

The first International Rose Convention I ever attended was the Inaugural World Rose Convention convened by my grandfather in 1971 when I was still young.

Held at the Claudelands Show Grounds in Hamilton, the wonders of that show are legendary with flowing streams full of live Trout and exquisite Floral Art Displays. The centrepiece of the show was a large white pergola that is now the centrepiece at the Hamilton Lake Rose Garden. But the roses—world class!

The second international rose convention I attended was in Christchurch in 1994, my Grandfather was alive and attended as well. Since then my husband and I have attended many International Rose Conventions and Tours as a chance to combine our love of international travel, sightseeing and meeting people, with roses. Attending these Conventions was integral to what we are up to now!

Since then

My interest in things to do with roses has evolved. After visiting other countries and seeing the roses available there I wanted some of them in New Zealand; as I previously described, shorter growing plants with larger blooms, in an array of colours which carried a better visual impact, some scented. All bred to be more disease resistant because of the ban on chemicals in Europe especially. Despite my interest in miniature roses I was convinced this type of rose was a much better garden subject.

WHY ARE THEY NOT IN NEW ZEALAND?

As Paul chatting sociably with breeders at rose conferences (not knowing, or caring, who they were) they griped that they couldn't get their roses into New Zealand.

This seemed to be why the New Zealand rose buying public were offered only a smattering of internationally bred roses, the rest are New Zealand bred roses by talented breeders like Rob Somerfield, BUT, even Rob knows that to create really novel and disease resistant roses there is needed new rose blood in NZ.

Much work has been done overseas by breeders looking to species roses with high disease resistance and thornlessness. Of course this gets technical with “ploidy” and remontancy, but breakthroughs have been made to overcome these problems. With this work done some New Zealand rose breeders are keen to access these genes and add them to their own breeding lines.

PB would ask the Rose Breeders “Why do you want to get them into NZ? It is such a small market in the scale of things”. “Because I want to and I am told I can't”.

We thought—“Is that true? How hard can it be”? Hmmm.

Back in New Zealand, we flew to Wellington for an appointment with the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI). We met with Brian Rose, who gave us the rundown on what was required. Brian was great; he spoke frankly and probably gave us more direction than he could have done in emails.

For me—having ready and willing breeders happy to send their creations to NZ—what next? “Bambina Rose NZ Ltd” was born. Next was the beginning of my steep learning curve.

We had business partners with a nursery willing to take care of that side of things, all we had to do was bring in the new roses and quarantine them. So we set about building quarantine units.

WHAT I KNOW NOW

How to build quarantine units

We started with a house in town on a ¼ acre gully section. We had to reconfigure our

section to have some flat space to build the units.

Knowing nothing about it there was quite a bit of collaboration with MPI. I had to study the MPI Standards and do the research:

- Greenhouse plans, what type? Glass, twin-skin, polycarbonate? What was available to quarantine standard?
- A building consent to apply for.
- Ventilation, cooling, heating, benches, shade, protection. How many taps and where to put them? How many power points and where to put them?
- How to feed the plants—a hydroponic system. Capillary, matting, drippers, flood and drain?
- Misting system.
- Erection of the units—our prototype was one house with three units.

The list seemed endless.

Once built, we obtained MPI approval for use. Finally, we could start importing.

Applying for a permit

Firstly, approval from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) is required. This turned out to be an enormous task both for myself but also for them. For every rose cultivar I wanted to import I had to provide a “Parentage List” which involved hours of research to build up a family tree of the forbears and provide proof these forbears are or were in New Zealand. Then, once the EPA had been furnished with the parentages of the roses, then they had to check them all off by doing their own research.

Researching roses in New Zealand was difficult to do, for roses introduced just after the war, for example, according to diaries he left, back in the day my grandfather just sent away direct to growers in England and the roses would arrive wrapped in burlap stored in the bilges of the boat that brought them in. There were no official records to track these taxa into New Zealand, therefore I had to look for mentions of roses in New Zealand gardens and in any New Zealand rose publication I could find. The old New Zealand Rose Annuals were invaluable and thanks to a senior Waikato Rose Society Member, Trevor McIlroy, who had kept a collection of all his Rose Annuals since he joined and let me borrow them.

The result of all this research is the invaluable database I now have of names of roses that have been grown in New Zealand, referenced to the publication where it is mentioned, its chapter, page number, etc. plus the scans of historic New Zealand rose books, New Zealand rose catalogues, New Zealand rose annuals, New Zealand gardening magazines. It has taken a huge amount of time, researching, recording and scanning, and it is still ongoing to keep the database up to date.

Of course I needed the co-operation of the rose breeders to divulge the parentage in the first place. Some breeders keep this very close to their chests and “seedling × seedling” without the parents, or parents of parents meant a dead end for me, so no clearance from the EPA to import this cultivar.

The countries New Zealand can import roses from are very limited. This is important because many beautiful roses are created in the United States or Canada and other countries New Zealand cannot import directly from, so we needed a go-between nursery in Europe willing to receive the budwood from the breeder, grow the plants for anytime up to four seasons, then prepare the budwood, dip it in chemicals, organise the phytosanitary certificate, pack it and send it on to us.

Exactly how to bring in a consignment

- Give advice to the foreign exporter so there are no delays at the border
- The process to be followed when the consignment arrives at the border, appointment for MPI inspection. Treatment of consignment if MPI deems it necessary. Applying for a Biosecurity Authority Clearance Certificate (BACC) and then release to me for quarantine.
- Preparation of the greenhouse before consignment arrives
- Growing understocks, having them well rooted and ready to take buds when a

consignment arrives.

How to grow them in quarantine

- How to bud roses —thanks to Wynne Johns, ex Wintec Horticulture Tutor, who personally gave me latex glove on hand lessons on this surgical technique.
- Now working out little tricks that improve the success rate with buds taking.
- Tricks that coax stubborn buds into life that have taken, but refuse to shoot away—the quarantine time doesn't start until the last live bud or cutting is showing leaves, so the quicker I can encourage growth the better.
- Rooting cuttings—what to root them in, little tricks that improve the success rate.
- Keeping records, tracking each cultivar as they grow or fail. Setting up spreadsheets, record books and databases with little idea at first what exactly I wanted recorded; I just recorded everything which has turned out to be invaluable.
- Names that everyone can understand. I am not a numbers person. A rose cultivar that is sent to me with a designated code number very similar to another cultivar with a similar code number is just too hard for me to “bond” with. A book of baby names comes in handy, the cultivars are given nicknames to make it easier to recall, record, discuss, and follow its progress. Like tropical cyclones, the same names are never reused so there are no mix-ups.
- Talking of names I have many unnamed roses that need a good commercial name that hasn't been used in the past, so if you have any suggestions I would love to hear them. Or, if you have a hankering to have a rose named after you or someone else, naming rights are available.

Once the cuttings are rooted and the buds are growing:

- The best growing medium to pot into for growing on.
- Keeping the units clean and free of slime and mould—thanks to marijuana growing websites!
- Calibrating the hydroponic system.
- What to do with used soggy growing medium when cuttings or bud grafts fail in quarantine.
- Record keeping, MPI Inspections, samples for testing by MPI Laboratory.

I am reasonably knowledgeable when it comes to common rose diseases and can spot the difference between black spot (*Diplocarpon rosae*) and downy mildew (*Peronospora sparsa*) for instance. But I have had to become a virtual “scientist” researching rose viruses. One or two non-regulated viruses have been picked up on some of the roses that have arrived in my quarantine. Studying the symptoms and descriptions, e.g., “epinasty”—sounds nasty. “Reading” the roses and looking for likely viral symptoms as I go about tending them. I hope the day never comes that something “new” to New Zealand arrives and I lose a consignment.

After the quarantine conditions have been satisfied and a BACC for clearance is received.

- Hardening off the plants.
- Planting the plants.
- Bulking up numbers if needed.
- Treatment of the greenhouse after release of plants.

TRIAL GARDENS

Things were rolling along, slowly at first. Breeders took the plunge and sent me a few rose cuttings. I learned how to do things—the hard way. Got consignments in successfully grown, cleared, released. Then things sped up a notch, and a bit more, then it became an express train and a runaway train.

There are ups and downs with any enterprise—unfortunately the wheels fell off the partnership, we had successfully brought in all these new roses but then had no way of getting them onto the market. What to do next? The answer was obvious—set up our own nursery—we had come too far and invested too much to stop now, I was not about to give up

the dream. These little roses growing in New Zealand conditions were proving to be fabulous and I really wanted to introduce them to the New Zealand consumer.

We quickly ran out of room trialling roses on ¼ acre. The gardens were filled with roses being trialled for New Zealand conditions, the lawns were dug up, there were roses in every available space, every nook and cranny of the section.

To pursue the dream we have had to sell the family home of 36 years and the holiday bach to purchase a small plot of land in Newstead just out of Hamilton. "Greenacres"—that old TV programme comes to mind, two townies learning how to be "farmers". We have had a lot of hard work, but some fun and some laughs along the way. We shifted all the imported roses and the miniature roses. I only took some of the personal roses with sentimental attachment that reminded me of special people in my life, not necessarily exhibiting roses.

Thus three new quarantine houses were erected and fitted out.

The three from town were moved out so now I have the ability to quarantine six house lots with the ability to lease out space if room is available.

Another propagation house has been erected and two shade/finishing houses will be added shortly.

One hundred raised rose trial garden beds have been erected and filled with the finest compost I could find and another hundred will be added soon. The roses are grown in a "no spray" trial to really test their disease resistance.

An unwanted triple garage was moved onto the property and this has been converted into an office. Another double garage that was already there is used as a storage and potting shed. There was already a barn we also use for storage and machinery.

I have had to learn how to use some pretty heavy duty tools: air compressors, leaf blowers, hedge trimmers. "Tim the Toolman" has nothing on me. Strip down and clean a complete hydroponic system. Buy and handle a tractor, with pallet lifter, post-hole borer, bucket, mower, grader blade.

To help increase my horticultural knowledge I have joined the Nursery and Garden Industry Association of New Zealand and attended conferences. I have also become a member of the IPPS New Zealand Region and have enjoyed studying the published papers to glean what information I can from them.

I attended a chemical spray course to get accredited to use some heavy duty sprays. Not that I have needed to use them, I am not allowed to spray without permission from MPI in quarantine and my imported roses are in a spray free trial, as such they are supposed to be disease resistant so no spraying necessary.

And a first aid course to get accredited.

For the business I have had to write a business plan, a business action plan and a strategic plan and write an Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) plan. Thanks to the new MPI Import Standards I am presently writing an operating manual for the quarantine houses.

I also have to get my head around:

- Contracts with breeders and agents.
- Royalty payments.
- Plant Variety Rights forms, trade marking.
- Rose trial entry forms.
- A website first and now Facebook® and Instagram®.

As you people well know, we have to be psychic, look into the future and try to be ready for it. I am always assessing in my trial fields and take copious notes and photographs of all the roses. This helps in February when I am looking at cultivars to have budded in the field trials. What may I want to send to the trial grounds next year? What might be released for sale? How many to have budded? What to take cuttings from and how many? What will the customers want and buy?

AT PRESENT

We haven't got to the market yet, the cogs are turning and we are getting closer. Still trialling rose plants and building up plant stock numbers.

- Still building infrastructure. Thanks to Peter Fraser (Growing Spectrum Nursery, Kihikihi, New Zealand) for his invaluable advice.
- Still learning what has to be done to create a workable nursery.
- Timing.
- Presentation of the product.
- Getting product to the people.
- You people will all know this, what works best for you.

I have to mention that all of this was not accomplished by me alone. Apart from Paul of course, I have had help from many quarters; family first, and friends, associates, and acquaintances. Some have also taken on board my vision and been so much help I doubt I would have got this far without them.

Our daughters, Melanie and Briony, are also Directors of Bambina Rose NZ Ltd. Our son Greg, the Pilot, enjoys being a farmer on his days off now and again.

At the moment I think I am very fortunate, living the dream, I think Paul just feels exhausted!

If we can, we like to travel—Europe is a must in June/July for their summer and escape our winter to visit our eldest son Tim, his wife, and two children who happen to live in Poland.

We have been attending International Rose Trial Judging Events which is a chance to meet and talk to rose breeders and talk business. Or we visit them en-route. We have been treated as VIPs “all the way from New Zealand” and introduced to the local Mayor or MPs and dignitaries and photographed with them.

We are hosted by rose friends worldwide, have made personal friends with many of the rose breeders whom we meet when we are travelling and they visit us when in New Zealand. Needless to say we have a fine old time for two “nobodys” from Hamilton

To create “shopping lists” of new roses we like to:

- Visit other trial grounds in Europe to take many photographs of roses with potential and the award winners.
- Visit rose nurseries and growers in Europe—I collect and study their new rose catalogues.
- Study rose trial awards results.
- We like to call in to the go-between nurseries in Europe to see how the roses are doing in the field.
- I like to visit rose shows as an International rose judge for exhibiting roses—I can judge anywhere in the world at rose shows, so now I like to when I can.

You may well ask WHY??? Why did we start this? Rank naivety? Maybe. Then maybe it was because we could and nobody else would.

If I knew then what I know now—would I still go ahead and do it? Maybe not—I could be fishing, PB would like that. But then maybe, Yes. It is hard work, but very satisfying and even exciting to see a new to New Zealand variety start to root, then grow, then flower for the first time. Then look at what we have accomplished so far. Life is an adventure.

I am personally gaining an education, knowledge, travel, best of all I am bringing into NZ beautiful new roses. I would like to add in future...and making money. Wouldn't that be nice? Sam McGredy says to Paul “Better keep your Day Job PB!”