

Profile: John Maurer



John Maurer, and the garden of his former Armidale residence, Yarrobindi II.
Photos courtesy of John Maurer

AGHS's public officer on the national management committee has an ideal background in public education. In fact, he was elected a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators for his contribution to teacher education and international education.

Tell us about your background

I worked at the University of New England in Armidale in teacher education, and in clinical practice as a psychologist. During that time I developed an interest in mentoring and in rural education in Papua New Guinea.

How did your interest in heritage and gardens develop?

More than a quarter of a century ago my wife and I purchased Yarrobindi II, a 1914 blue brick residence in Armidale which needed much restoration. Several original trees provided the framework to build a garden suited to cold-climate conditions and the shade of mature deciduous trees. Within days of settling in, we planted a picking garden of hybrid tea roses. Thereafter, English roses, some heritage roses and early hybrid teas formed the basis of the shrubs. With winter temperatures down to minus 10 degrees celsius, the garden was filled with European and North American perennials and many winter and spring bulbs. Some rose trellises were laced with clematis. The garden was open as part of the AGHS 2013 Armidale conference, and for the former Australian Open Garden Scheme. It has been a fundraiser for AGHS and various charities. We used thousands of *Buxus* plants grown from cuttings to create miniature box hedges edging the garden beds. Thirty years on, some of our early

cuttings are now mature topiary. The house won heritage awards for restoration and sympathetic additions and, later, for landscaping.

How did you bring yourselves to leave Yarrobindi II?

Ann and I moved to Sydney 12 months ago, to be closer to extended family. It was a huge move, leaving a garden we loved and moving away from AGHS friends, but the change was made easier by volunteering with Heritage Roses in Australia. The Sydney group has monthly working bees on rescued heritage roses at the Rookwood Necropolis. The group also prunes at the Rumsey Rose Garden near Old Government House in Parramatta.

Tell us about your continuing involvement with AGHS

I was on the organising committee for the AGHS 2013 conference in Armidale, and am chair of the subcommittee for the AGHS Heritage Rose Garden at Saumarez Homestead near Armidale. Stage 1 of this garden opened in October 2015 — it is a collaboration between the Northern NSW branch of AGHS and the National Trust. One of the things I've done to help publicise the garden is the development of digital visual presentations.

And how do you see the future of AGHS?

I continue to chair the heritage rose garden subcommittee at Saumarez and enjoy my involvement, even though this now happens at a distance. I have a particular interest in renewal and succession within organisations such as AGHS. This is especially important to ensure that projects like the Saumarez garden are maintained and valued, once those who have developed them are no longer around.