

**Book review:** John Elliott. 2005 **Orchid Hybrids of Singapore 1893-2003**. The Orchid Society of South East Asia, Singapore. ISBN 981 05 1752 1. Price: Singapore dollars \$120 (about £40 British pounds)  
Orders to ossea@pacific.net.sg

Three hundred and four pages in hardback with stunning, glossy, pictorial dust jacket, containing text written with eloquence and flair; 750 beautifully rendered colour photographs with brief and elegant annotated descriptions of 2,100 orchid hybrids raised in Singapore. Wow! This is a landmark book, not only in tracing the history of orchid breeding in Singapore, the history of the Orchid Society of South East Asia through 77 often turbulent years and the rise of the orchid cut-flower trade, but also (and especially) for recording and documenting these hybrids with the fascinating minutiae of their disputed parentages, their raisers and whom they were named after.

If I may begin at the end; the genius is in the index where the orchids are listed in alphabetical order of the hybrid (grex) name. This a real bonus at a time when the names of genera and hybrid genera are in the process of being changed more frequently than a butterfly flaps its wings. The new names given to the hybrid genera containing *Paraphalaenopsis* have not been accepted, and the old names that commemorate famous names in the history of Singapore's orchid history have been retained. John Elliott cogently argues the case for a reversal of the International Orchid Registrar's recent name changes which may become even more confusing to ordinary growers when the status of *Euanthe*, *Papilionanthe*, *Ascocenda* etc., are revised in the next edition of *Genera Orchidacearum*.

The glory is in the main text, where the hybrids are listed, illustrated and described by genus, in chronological order of registration so one may the more easily see the changes in breeding over the years since *Vanda* Miss Joaquim was registered in 1893. Information, information, information is the joy of the reviewer. While it is a magnificent 'coffee-table book' it is so full of information, from the origins of *Vanda* Miss Joaquim (was it an artificial or a natural hybrid?) to the recording of great dedication (Christiera Ramiah commemorates a gardener, Muthiya Pillai Ramiah who worked for 50 years in the Singapore Botanic Gardens' nursery) that every page is worth reading as well as admiring.

There are biographical vignettes of the great Singapore orchidists of the past - Holtum, Galistan and Laycock and we are introduced to the orchidists of today: Dr Tan Wee Kiat VMH (Victoria Medal of Honour of the Royal Horticultural Society, Gold Medallist of the American Orchid Society); Tan Jiew Hoe (generous sponsor of this book, son of Tan Hoon

Siang past-President of OSSEA and raiser of Vanda Tan Chay Yan 'Pride of Singapore' FCC/RHS); Peggy Tan (Vice-President of OSSSEA) who designed it and who with Wendy Chew compiled pictures and information; Syed Yusof Alsagoff (past President of OSSEA; raiser of 154 hybrids including the only FCC ever awarded by OSSEA, and the inspiration behind this book); Dr Yam Tim Wing (Senior Researcher, Orchid Breeding) Singapore Botanic Gardens, who carries on the Gardens' long tradition of orchid breeding) - but one can, as the author notes, only list a few.

What a galaxy of talent must exist in Singapore to produce such beautiful hybrids, and such a book! I loved it. Buy it. Treasure it. Imitate it (if you can).

**Henry Oakeley**

Chairman

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