

Coral Gables news

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HPACG event guests get rare look at Montgomery Botanical Gardens

BY KARELIA CARBONELL

Recently, the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables hosted its spring fundraiser at a very private 120-acre garden that opens only twice a year to the public — Montgomery Botanical Center, a nonprofit garden established in 1959.

A limited number of guests — ladies wearing elegant colorful outfits and gentlemen sporting crisp linen and guayabera shirts — enjoyed a special afternoon surrounded by palms, rare species of cycads, the *Ceiba pentandra* (common name Kapock), and free roaming peacocks adding color and sound. Champagne and jazz rounded out the idyllic setting.

The garden off of Old Cutler Road also is home to one of the tallest ylang ylang trees in Florida and beyond. Legend has it that Coco Chanel asked perfume maker Ernest Bo to create the ideal scent for a woman's perfume. In 1921, he gave her a series of samples to try. She chose the fifth, made up of sweet essences of rose, jasmine and ylang ylang flowers — thus Chanel No. 5 was born.

Colonel Robert H. Montgomery — one of the founding partners of the accounting firm Lybrand Ross Bros. & Montgomery known today as PricewaterhouseCoopers — was a lover of plants. In 1936, he founded Fairchild Tropical Garden. He and his wife, Nell, donated the 83-acre tract of land and funds for developing the plant collections. Upon Robert's death in 1953, Nell inherited the Coconut Grove Palmetum. She wanted to perpetuate her



A limited number of guests had a very special opportunity to tour the Montgomery Botanical Gardens with Director Patrick Griffith (kneeling in front of group).

late husband's name in association with the plant collections and the estate and created the Montgomery Foundation Inc. in 1959, as a private, non-profit, operating institution devoted to advancing the science of tropical botany. In 1998, the name was changed to the Montgomery Botanical Center.

VIP patrons arriving at the property were welcomed with a champagne reception and spectacular views of the palm-lined skyline. Included in the VIP experience was a private guided tour of the historic gardens and a brief history of the 1930s property by director Patrick Griffith. All guests delighted in fresh made-to-order crepes al fresco and spectacular sunset vistas while listening to classic jazz reper-

toire with a youthful twist led by Sam Hart — a jazz alto saxophone player and YoungArts finalist attending the University of Miami as a Stamps Scholar.

The annual fundraiser also included a small silent auction with original artworks, books, and even a pet gift basket. Proceeds benefit historic resources and their preservation in Coral Gables and beyond.

Established in 1991, the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables (HPACG) is a 501(c)3 non-profit with a mission to promote the understanding and importance of historic resources and their preservation. For additional information or to become a member, visit <www.historic-coralgables.org>.