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The bush garden ethos in South Australia, notwithstanding the state's dearth of water, poor soils and Mediterranean climate, has been slow in evolving.

Even today, the logical Mediterranean philosophical arguments of Trevor Nottle, expressed in Gardens of the Sun, are passed over in favour of struggling or often over-watered gardens containing ubiquitous 'Iceberg' roses, an eclectic exotic collection of plants, and the odd umbrageous eucalypt.

Differing views
In the 1880s the prominent South Australian Conservator of Forests (1876-1890), John Ednie Brown, castigated the use of eucalypts in ornamental and street tree roles. His exception, and that of botanic gardens director Richard Schomburgk, surveyor-general George Goyder and other senior bureaucrats, was the use of South Australian Blue Gums (E. leucoxylon), Sugar Gums (E. cladocalyx) and River Red Gums (E. camaldulensis) in shelter-belt plantings and where economic forestry was occurring. Even long-standing City of Adelaide City Gardener (1899-1932), August Pelzer, claimed that 'a tremendous mistake has been made in planting too many gum trees; ... with the progress of Arboriculture gum trees will have to make room for Oriental, Mediterranean, and South American species.'

The contradictory voice came from South Australian individuals, often with Quaker associations, who instigated innovative native plant propagating and revegetation projects. In the 1920s - 40s, they established what could be successfully grown in the public domain in South Australia. Leaders in this endeavour included:

- Edwin Ashby (1861-1941) at Blackwood
- William Burdett (1871-1940) at Basket Range
- Ken Stuckey (1910-1991) at Furner in the South-East
- Kenneth (1924-1951) and Roy (b.1927) Gray, the sons of Alfred Gray (1896-1981)
- Albert Morris (1886-1939) with his Quaker wife, Ellen Margaret née Sayce (1882-1957) at Broken Hill

Their passionate inquiry into semi-arid and Mediterranean-environment conducive Australian and South African species has resulted in a wide selection of non-exotic plants relevant to South Australia but little used and respected.

An enlightened conservationist, Ashby experimented with alternative methods of propagation and watering systems, developing the 'Ashby deep penetration system'. He also contributed to Australian Gardening of To-day (1943), based on weekly articles in the Express & Journal, and advocated that 'native shrubs can be grown on the Adelaide Plains at less cost of time and labour than ordinary gardening'. Alison Ashby (1901-1987) and Enid Robertson (b.1925) continued the family passion of this inquiry. The Burdetts laid out a 'wonderful private garden ... of wilderness and garden art combined', where contoured paths meandered through over 1,000 species including eucalypts, erica and protea spp.

Stuckey was a pioneer in Australian plant cultivation and an avid collector, activities that resulted in an extensive private collection of proteaceae including numerous Grevillea, Banksia, Isopogon, and Dryandra spp.

In the 1930s Morris initiated and guided the development of revegetation plantations and parklands in and around Broken Hill, NSW, comprising an area of 13km called the Common. He concluded that species grown from seed collected from local native flora withstood drought conditions better than introduced species and that 'if the land was fenced from stock and rabbits, the area would regenerate naturally.'

Instead, eucalypts were romanticised. This love, albeit in aestheticism, was also embraced in an acceptance of Hans Heysen paintings of the South Australian landscape, and a fondness and admiration for the creation of national parks and national pleasure resorts to protect semi-natural landscapes as well as the grand River Red Gums. The majesty of the tree was celebrated by the community and its leaders but not its acceptance as a feature in the garden or in the public park.

Raising the profile of Australian plants
Australian Plants Society veteran Ivan Holliday raised the profile of these plants in Growing Australian Plants, and landscape architect Allan Correy sought the use of them in every private and public project he was involved in while in South Australia (1964-67). Correy, and...
landscape designers Ray Holliday, and Robin Hill were the main proponents of native plants in design applications in the 1960s often laying the acceptance of them for use in 1970s projects. Correy’s private gardens in Burnside, Loxton, Leabrook and Rostrevor, with their richness of native trees and shrubs, and perhaps the first use of railway sleepers in a public landscape project in South Australia, are still treasured by their often long-standing owners. While in charge of the West Lakes landscape, Holliday pioneered mangrove propagation and continued to argue and use native plants in his design projects. Hill, with prominent architect Peter Muller, successfully explored the possibilities of Adelaide-relevant plants in the Michell residence and the former IPEC headquarters. At the same time Highways South Australia was often chain-sawing eucalypts in the ‘name of progress’.

The native plant planting philosophy of time echoed the values of Correy: This philosophy, echoing [Chicago] Prairie School ideas, was exhibited in … plants [that] were used to provide strength, verticality, colour and texture. Eucalypts, particularly Lemon-scented Gums, South Australian Blue Gums and Ironbarks, were extensively used. Shrubs tended to highlight tree colour and texture. Ground covers, including Creeping Boobialla, Purple Coral-pea, and Hypericum patulum, were used in masses rather than as decorative features, drawing inspiration from [Lawrence] Halprin’s [west coast USA] work. Local rock and stone, often in conjunction with second-hand railway sleepers, were applied as edges to accentuate topographical changes and as textured focal points.

In the Dunstan period fascination with, and use of, native plants was at its highest in South Australia. Amidst its green gentrification led by prominent architect and mayor, Brian Polomka, the suburbia of Norwood was ‘invaded’ with Ironbarks (E. sideroxylon), pocket parks, Grevillea spp., Acacia spp., and street closures. Monarto was designed with a semi-arid environmental agenda with assistance from Geoff Sanderson and Peter Bulman aided by Holliday, Tract from Melbourne, Walling, and Professor Pryor.

During these years a ‘hallmark’ palette of native plants was draped over South Australia. Central were the Ironbarks, South Australian Blue Gums, River Red Gums, Lemon-scented Gums (E. citriodora) and a choice selection of Acacia, Grevillea, Eremophila spp. River Red and Jarrah railway sleepers became commonplace garden features whether as edging, walling or steps. There was also stone masonry - with Mintaro slate, Carey Gully and Basket Range sandstone for lawn edging, low wet and dry retaining walls, and crazy paving. Highway South Australia’s attitudes to native species were also to change markedly in the 1970s as witnessed along the South-Eastern Freeway and in the innovative revegetation work, led by John Beswick, along the Dukes Highway. The River Torrens Linear Park, the largest integrated urban stormwater project in Australia, managed by Land Systems Ltd and subsequently by Hassell Ltd, drew together an array of disciplines. There was a common acceptance that the use of natives was preferable for the entire tract of the river as they were part of its aesthetic, and they enabled quality water cleansing and watercourse stabilisation, and thereby reduction of flooding.

These hallmarks continue to delight yet still contribute to emotional community planning debates in South Australia. It is more often the tree, and the native tree especially, that is the crux of political debate. Indeed, the design and gazettal of recent significant tree legislation has been driven by chain-sawing of 100-500 year old eucalypts in prosperous leafy eastern and southern suburbs. A similar passionate debate between Spotted Gums (E. maculata) and exotics is currently stifling the North Terrace Urban Design Project.

The real ethos of bush gardens in South Australia has yet to be realised. It will only be addressed when the reality of water use, cost, and quality is fully understood in the community, and where a shift to Mediterranean planting strategies occurs.

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4 Brown, Schomburgk and Goyder are featured as entries in the forthcoming Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens (2002).
6 The Ashley, Budlett, Morin, Stuckey and Gray families are featured as entries in the forthcoming Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens (2002)
8 Lothian, N & Holliday 1964, Growing Australian Plants: Adelaide: Rigby.
10 Correy, Hill and the Hollidays are featured as entries in the forthcoming Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens (2002).

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