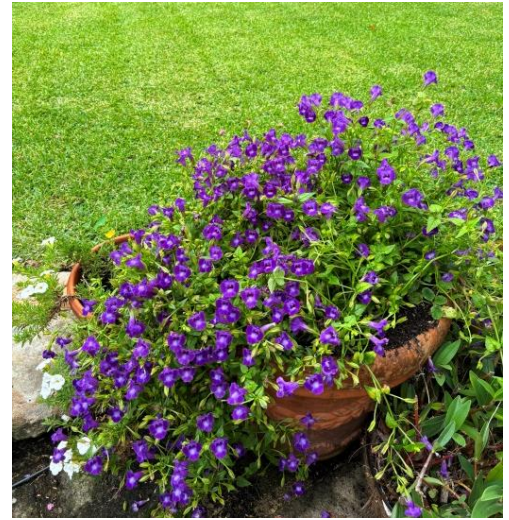


## Helen's garden – Angela Morgan

From the street Helen Meares' garden is hidden behind quite a high fence and trees, so that one expects to see a shady garden. However the garden sits in warm sunshine, with a deep green lawn surrounded by bright flowers in beds and pots, and roses blooming beside sandstone steps.



*A front view of Helen's home*



*Potted purple torenia, beside the driveway*

Helen remembers being always interested in gardening, but it was her friend Judy Andrews who fostered her interest in heritage roses. Judy was an early member of HRIA, and one of the group who founded Barbara's Garden in Rookwood. It was through Judy that Helen also joined HRIA, and began adding heritage roses to her garden.

Helen feels heritage roses have a charm of their own, loves the way they are so hardy and disease resistant, and wonders why anyone would be crazy enough not to grow them!

Her first deliberate purchase of heritage roses were all Tea roses: delicate silvery pink **Comtesse de Labarthe** (often sold as **Duchesse de Brabant**) (1857), apricot blend **G. Nabonnand** (often sold as **Jean Ducher**) (1874) and **Mrs Dudley Cross**, light yellow with pink or crimson highlights (1907). All three of these roses are rated as 'Excellent' in *HelpMeFind Roses*, so Helen chose well.

There was another early rose which Helen saw growing wild near Merriwa (in the Upper Hunter Shire). A single white rose which Helen found irresistible. She took a cutting which struck and flourished, covering her front fence in her previous home. The flowers resembled the **White Rose of York**, a strongly fragrant Alba, white with yellow stamens (1623). Helen left it behind with regret, and decided to return to see if another cutting would strike. Alas, it was gone, all the garden gone too, and a redevelopment in progress.

In this original garden Helen also grew popular old Hybrid Teas like **Peace** (1935). **Comtesse de Labarthe** and **G. Nabonnand** remain to this day in Helen's lovely garden in Killara, but **Mrs Dudley Cross** has been overgrown. The apricot Tea Noisette **Crépuscule** (1904) is now flourishing along the driveway.

*Left: A single bloom of Helen's G. Nabonnand*



Photo: Susan Wade

Which rose is Helen's favourite? Such a hard question! Perhaps that single white rose ... flowering in memory and imagination? To choose between **Comtesse de Labarthe** and **G. Nabonnand** is difficult too, but Helen decides on **G. Nabonnand**.

*'It's so hardy, so willing, so beautiful. It grows the best here, and is very rewarding. I love painting it.'*



Photos: Susan Wade



**Crépuscule**

– overall bush and a single bloom

**G. Nabonnand** grows on the north side of the garden, climbing high, delicate blooms glowing against mellow brick and timber-framed windows, the essence of romance.

It was this rose which Helen painted for her first exhibition at the gallery in the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, part of a fund-raising effort organised by the Foundation and Friends of Botanic Gardens of Sydney. She was introduced to this group by her friends Elizabeth and Jeff Davis, who provided the frames for many of Helen's paintings. This first exhibition was a great success, with all of Helen's paintings sold, and a happy relationship established, lasting for more than thirty years.

#### ***G. Nabonnand, against a window***

Roses and flowers feature inside Helen's home as well as in the garden outside. Helen and her daughters are all artists, and the paintings reflect their individual styles. On our recent visit (8<sup>th</sup> March, 2025), members of Sydney HRIA group had the delightful opportunity of seeing Helen's bright and airy studio above the garage, looking down onto the eastern garden.

Helen's rose cards – prints of her watercolour painting of a collection of heritage roses – have also been a long running fundraiser for our Sydney HRIA group.



Above: Helen's painting of nasturtiums  
R.: Helen's studio, above the garage



The collection of heritage roses featured on Helen's cards

This eastern garden is a warm secluded space, with lime and lemon trees, bright salvias, and a white mandevilla flourishing in a pot against the garage wall. The creamy white Shrub rose **Sea Foam** (1963) has turned itself into a small climber against a background of greenery on the high fence. Every possible space along this side is occupied.

Helen has found that her membership of HRIA has long provided friendship with a group of people who are easy to bond with, sharing a common interest.



Photo: Susan Wade

*White mandevilla in front of the garage and **Sea Foam** – growing along the back fence*

Thank you, Helen for opening



**Helen, in her back garden**

your garden, art, home and studio to us, sharing your stories, and for being such a supportive member of HRIA for so many years.

*Unless otherwise acknowledged, photographs are by Angela.*

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