



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia Welcomes you to **MANDALAY**

Saturday 8th & Sunday 9th May, 2021

MANDALAY – CHAPTER TWO

Over the past 6 six years we, Donna my sister, Kumiko her partner, and I, have been transforming the house and garden at Mandalay from a private family home into an exclusive and elegant wedding venue. Growing from 3 weddings in the first year to 20 plus in the past 3 years (excusing the rather rude Covid interruption) has been a task almost as challenging as the first huge journey of creating the original garden from ground zero.

But now the vision is much bigger. The weddings are a means to an end – well several ends really:

Firstly, the income offsets most of the cost of running the property and maintaining the garden.

Secondly, they give the property a social and cultural purpose and function.

Thirdly, and I think now most importantly, they have become a vehicle/means for underwriting the re vegetation of the whole property - all 480 acres of it! Big dreams but why not? That's how we got here in the first place, after all.

Not so long ago, this land was native bush on the hilltops flowing down to open woodland along the hillsides and dense scrub and reed beds along the creek lines.

Sadly, over the entire property one can see the ring barked stumps of huge old eucalypts.

These trees were apparently cut down and used to make sleepers for the Adelaide to Melbourne rail system and also, I've been told, to fuel the Kanmantoo copper mines. While I am certainly not an extremist or "anti-progress" it is terribly sad that, in Australia, we seem to have indulged in the idea of taming and controlling the land, and all of its inhabitants, when a more sensitive approach may have resulted in a lot less pain and destruction.

Mandalay was once described by a rather sharp-witted acquaintance as a 'folly'. And it is, or rather was - using far too much energy, in every medium, in the eventually successful attempt to turn a desert into an oasis.

Open Gardens South Australia Inc: is a not for profit organisation opening private gardens to the general public. The purpose of Open Gardens SA is to educate and promote the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in South Australia and to build strong public support for the development of gardens.

Web page: <http://opengardensa.org.au/>

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Anyway, here we are. Folly having followed folly... but ...maybe now... with the oasis spreading beyond the house, beyond the inner garden, beyond the wetlands and embankment planting we can actually do something meaningful for the land.

A combination of planting and natural revegetation, carefully managed to avoid excessive fire risk, could return these hills into something quite beautiful again. Then the garden will become a tiny hidden gem enveloped by vibrant, bird-filled woodland rather than the 'oasis in the desert' that it is currently seen as.

Everywhere that we have removed stock on the property, blue gums and redgums quickly self-seed. Acacia and Casuarinas fight to be pioneer plants. And the elegant peppermint box start to reassert their ageless presence.

Getting the balance right in this journey has been an overarching challenge. One I haven't managed as well as I would have liked. Attention over the past 12 months has been focused on creating and improving wedding infrastructure - things that will hopefully deliver a better product to our clients and add income to the bottom line. Because of this, some areas of the outer garden, in particular, have suffered from a bit of neglect.

Over the next two winters there will be significant indigenous planting taking place on this property both in the outer garden and in the paddocks. So ... we invite you to think of the garden you see today as the 'before' and imagine a new 'after'.

Continuing deep and sincere thanks go to the evolving Mandalay team.

Deb Schultz