

In a garden on the edge of suburban Claremont an extraordinary bloke produces some of the world's finest bulbs

A miniature world of daffodils

Rod Barwick, like many of his vintage, left school at the age of 16, untroubled by concerns about "higher education". He went to work at "EZ" as the Electrolytic Zinc Company – Hobart's largest private employer – was known. His daily journey to work took him past a bookshop in which he noticed a gardening magazine. This led him to order by mail a number of

daffodil bulbs. In those days the supplier would include an extra bulb or two (a grower's "dozen"?) a practice that Rod has continued for his own clients.

It was this serendipitous event that determined the course of the rest of his life.

Rod takes the idea of the "self-made man" to another level. He has constructed a life for himself around his

passion for gardening, good food and the friends he has made over the years. He values all three equally.

His house is the residence of a happy man. Although it is located on the edge of suburban Hobart, if you look to the south and south-west your field of vision is filled by the towering Mt Faulkner and in the foreground by native bush. The sounds are those of

Left: Quartet of musicians from the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

Right: Miniature Cyclamineus hybrid

Opposite page left: Miniature hoop petticoat daffodil, 'Fyno'

Opposite page centre: One of Rod's new pink cup seedlings

Opposite page right: Daffodils underneath the weeping willow

Lilia Weatherly





the native birds of Tasmania with the lazy hum of busy insects attracted to his garden. It is a place of peace and calm. Rod owns quite a large property, much of which will always remain bushland. Glenbrook is virtually invisible from the roadside. There is no ostentatious sign. There is no telephone.

On the three-and-a-half hectares that are cultivated he grows his superlative

daffodils, tulips, liliums and hellebores. There are also anemones, fritillaria, cyclamens and crocus.

He shares his life with an assemblage of livestock: farmyard ducks, "special" black ducks, geese, peacocks and a donkey. (The donkey occasionally wanders into the house seeking company.) He still mourns the recent loss of his horse, a companion of

more than 20 years. There is a friendly, nonchalant dog that seems as informal as the human occupant of Glenbrook Bulb Farm.

The house is constructed of oiled vertical boards – something of a time capsule. The interior decor and furnishings are a separate excursion; you can find interesting artefacts and objets d'art. There is also a battered piano and a



beautiful organ purchased when a local church closed for lack of numbers – this is a house often filled with music. At one of Rod's social events expect a string quartet of musicians from the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, an enthusiastic bunch of young choristers, a tuba quartet or any number of other permutations of passing musicians. Great Tasmanian food is always on



Rod Barwick

offer and sobriety is seriously frowned upon.

He is an accomplished artist and produces exquisite pictures of ... but this is a story about a garden.

The big league in the world of daffodils is in the USA. This year in its journal the American Daffodil Society recorded the results of 41 shows held across the USA in 2003. Ten of the winners of Miniature Gold Ribbons (presented for miniature bulbs) were bred at Glenbrook. The winners were Angel's Whisper (three), Angel's Breath (two), Mitimoto, Mortie, Spoirot (two) and Smarple. It is safe to assume that Ms Agatha Christie enjoyed daffodils.

In spite of his international reputation Rod rarely ventures far from Claremont these days. In a sense the world comes to him, and his bulbs speak for him.

In September some of the world's most distinguished cognoscenti from the world of daffodils assembled for an evening at Glenbrook Bulb Farm: visitors from the USA, UK, New Zealand and from the rest of Australia. They had gathered to share their common interest in something beautiful and to meet and enjoy the wisdom – gardening and otherwise – of their host.

The food, as usual, was the best of Tasmanian fare: Tasmanian goats'

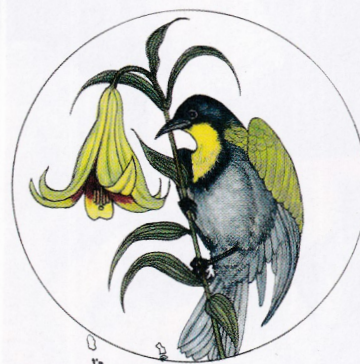
milk cheese, roast wallaby, rabbit stew, crayfish and a range of local premium wines. I spoke at length with a visiting American daffodil expert from Chicago who told me she "mistakenly thought she had come to Glenbrook for the bulbs". During the meal that lasted for the duration of the evening they were treated to some very talented young musicians – a most accomplished string quartet.

Without introduction Rod began to speak about his life as a plant breeder to an enraptured audience. There was just a hint of background noise – the cheerful clink of glasses.

"Producing a new breed of daffodil," he began, "requires a great deal of patience. From a seedling it takes four or five years to get a first flower, then three or four years to verify the characteristics of a potential new breed: effectively eight years to confirm that the plant has the stability and qualities to be worth breeding from. If the plant is a 'success' yet another four years will elapse until it reaches the market."

After eight years Rod habitually cross-pollinates his plants to multiply the chances of producing new varieties. "Next year I will have flowers from third generation plants from two sets of eight-year plants," he declared. "I am confident that I will have yellow-petalled, red-cupped, fertile and stable miniatures; this will have required 18 years. It's a good thing I started young." No one at this gathering doubted that Rod will achieve his goals.

Rod's brothers are a very tough and accomplished bunch of Australian Rules footballers. He could easily have spent a good deal of his life in pursuit of a pigskin ball rather than the perfect bulb. A large number of people in many countries who have derived endless hours of pleasure from his blooms would be thankful that he made this choice, if they but knew. **40**



THE TRUMPETER

A Periodic Newsletter For

Lily Gatherers

Issue Number 1 Autumn 2002

Cover of *The Trumpeter*: "A very small circulation journal", edited by Rod Barwick who also painted this cover picture

Master bulb breeder, Rod Barwick, and friend

