

## Book Review

**Botanica Magnifica: Portraits of the World's Most Extraordinary Flowers and Plants.** Text by W. John Kress and Marc Hachadourian. Photography by Jonathan Singer. 2009. Abbeville Press, 137 Varick St., New York, NY 10013. 356 pages. \$135. Baby elephant folio 31 x 39 cm. Slipcased hardcover. 251 color plates. ISBN 978-0-7892-1033-3

The original elephant-folio edition of this beautiful book was limited to 10 copies, the first of which was donated to the Smithsonian Institution Libraries. This baby elephant folio features 251 magnificent color photographs of rare or exotic plants and flowers by Hasselblad Laureate Award winner Jonathan Singer. The text is co-authored by W. John Kress, Curator of Botany and Research Scientist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, and by Marc Hachadour-

ian, who is the Curator of Glasshouse Collections at the New York Botanical Garden. Together, they have produced a handsome book that is a joy to view and read. As Jonathan Singer relates his goal for his images, "My aim is to make the viewer forget he or she is looking at a photograph and begin a deeper journey into the botanical world."

This massive volume weighing in at 4.85 kg is divided into five major sections: Orchidaceae—The Secretive and Seductive Marvels of Orchids; Floriegium—The Unseen Realm of Flowers; Proteus—Revealing the Hidden Architecture of Adaptations; Zingiberaceae—The Rich Biodiversity of Ginger; and Botanicus—The Botanical World, A Compendium of Exceptional Species. Each section contains 50 glorious plates relating to its subject. Plate 251, *Canna liliflora* Warz. ex Planch. is the frontispiece.

The plates are mostly full pages, some are slightly less, and five plates at the beginning of each section are double pages. Miniature versions of each plate along with taxonomic details and interesting comments are at the end of the plates in each section. For exam-

ple, Plate 51 depicts *Cynara scolymus* L., the globe artichoke of the Asteraceae family that is native to the Mediterranean region and is an herb up to 1.5 m tall and the flower up to 16 cm in diameter. Brief comments of the history and uses of the globe artichoke and its close relative cardoon, *Cynara cardunculus* L., are included. Unfortunately, the aforementioned plates are many pages from the descriptive material that necessitates constant shuffling back and forth—no easy task in a volume of this size. Perhaps including the botanical identification in the borders of each plate would have solved some of this shortcoming.

Exquisite photography and interesting text make *Botanica Magnifica* a book that many horticulturists will want to own. The list price may frighten some prospective purchasers, but they can be eased with a careful internet search.

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