

## Place Maker:

### John Fairey of Peckerwood Garden

In the early 1970s John Fairey established Peckerwood Garden on property he owned in Hempstead, Texas, about fifty miles from downtown Houston. Open to the public since 1998 under the auspices of the Peckerwood Garden Conservation Foundation, this is no ordinary garden. Here Fairey has combined his experience as a plant hunter, former nurseryman, and artist to create a place that is unique in its ability to instruct and inspire visitors. Few can make a similar claim, for only a small number of other gardens, such as Dan Hinckley's Windcliff on Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound, can be said to rival Peckerwood as a plant hunter's self-created paradise.

When I asked Fairey to tell me how he discovered his destiny as a plant hunter-cum-nurseryman-cum-garden designer, he replied that in 1988 he had accompanied Lynn Lowrey, a legendary Texas plantsman, on a trip to the Sierra Madre Mountains in northern Mexico – an adventure that proved to have a profound impact on him. As the two men collected seeds and cuttings from rare and endangered plants, Fairey became obsessed with plant hunting. In the years that followed, he made almost a hundred more collecting expeditions. The experience of discovering plants in the wild and then cultivating them domestically helped shape his approach to garden design. His imaginative style can best be characterized as one based on contrasts of light and shade, foliage and bark, rock and water, and innovative combinations of floral color, leaf shape, and surface texture.

Because Peckerwood is located at the convergence of three climatic zones, Fairey has been able to integrate more than three thousand rare specimen plants from Mexico, Asia,



and the United States into a relaxed, 39-acre landscape composition. From the outset he was committed not only to making a beautiful garden full of rare specimens but also to sharing seeds, plants, and knowledge with nurseries and research institutions. Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum; the University of California, Berkeley; the University of California, Santa Cruz; the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew; North Carolina State University; and Chollipo Arboretum Foundation in Korea are among those that have benefited through collaboration with Peckerwood.

In addition, because of its location in southeast Texas,

Peckerwood Garden forms a botanical bridge between Mexico and the United States, raising awareness on both sides of the border about the importance of biodiversity and threat of plant losses due to overgrazing, overdevelopment, and climate change. Moreover, by serving as both a plant showcase and a tour de force of landscape design that is open to the public, it has influenced gardeners and horticulturists from across the country and around the world.

It is for his botanical passion, intrepidity in gathering exotic plants from remote corners of the world, horticultural skill in propagating and bringing them into cultivation, and generosity in converting the landscape around his Hempstead home into a garden of learning and delight that the Foundation for Landscape Studies will honor John Fairey at its annual Place Maker / Place Keeper Luncheon on May 11, 2016. For information on purchasing tickets for this event, please visit: [www.foundationforlandscapestudies.org/news](http://www.foundationforlandscapestudies.org/news).  
– Elizabeth Barlow Rogers