

American Cattleyas **by Courtney Hackney**

Readers of the ROA Bulletin should recognize the name of Courtney Hackney as the writer of the “Growing Tips” column. In his role as Professor of Biology at the University of North Carolina – Wilmington, he has published extensively, however, with *American Cattleyas: Species and Outstanding Clones That Define American Hybridizing*, we see a labor of love.

Different portions of this book will appeal to different audiences. The chapter on “Growing Cattleyas” will be most familiar to those who read his monthly columns. It provides a great deal of information on orchid culture and dealing with the problems of growing orchids. Although the emphasis is on Cattleyas, the advice and information is far more universalistic.

There were three chapters that provided a wonderful historic overview of the cultivation of orchids and several selected American hybridizers. One of the vignettes relates the story of how much of the Sander’s collection was sold and shipped from Belgium the day before Hitler launched the Blitzkrieg through that country in 1940.

The core of this book is the chapter entitled “Exploring the Palette.” By far the longest chapter, it is split into 12 smaller sections, each detailing important developments within a specific color (e.g., white, lavender, yellow, blue) or type (e.g., splash-petaled, miniature, multifloral or novelty of *Cattleya*). Furthermore, there are 76 pages containing 362 photographs of Cattleyas, some of historic clones and hybrids that have not (or in hard-to-get sources) been published before. The pictures alone are roughly half the book’s content.

The remaining chapters are also important, but except to clarify some of the concepts discussed in “Exploring the Palette,” they are really designed for a more specialized audience. “Species Important to Modern Hybrids” provides background into understanding why certain *Cattleya* species were important for early hybridizing. “Hybridizing Strategies and Orchid Genetics” discusses the general principles of genetics and how they can be applied by orchid hybridizers. “Duds or Studs” provides insight as to why certain hybrids were propagated and others were not; for example, in the cut-flower business, it was far more important to know what to expect in the flower (color, size) than to know it could sometimes be dazzling – dazzling might entice a hobbyist, but the uncertainty would have made it a dud in the cut-flower business. “The Exhibition and Judging of Cattleyas” raises some of the issues surrounding the AOS judging process, and why *Cattleya*’s have not fared well in that process in more recent years. Finally, “American Hybridizing in the 21st Century” discusses the author’s perception of where *Cattleya* hybridizing needs to go to satisfy the pot-plant market, and that many are concerned that chasing this market niche will be at the expense of the traditional quest for improved form, colors, and the like demanded by those who exhibit plants. In sum, *American Cattleyas* is an interesting read. Nonetheless, the book is pithy, and regardless

of the level of expertise of the reader, every reader should walk away with new ideas and concepts by reading Hackney's book.

- Jim Creech