

An artist's impression of the new Gardens by the Bay, with its impressive conservatories, facing the Marina Bay Sands Hotel & Exhibition Complex where the 20th World Orchid Conference will be held in November





Practice makes perfect

JOHAN HERMANS reports on how Singapore is preparing for the 20th World Orchid Conference



Cranes dwarfed by the towers of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel, continue construction of the exhibition centre and art gallery

Jochem Hermans



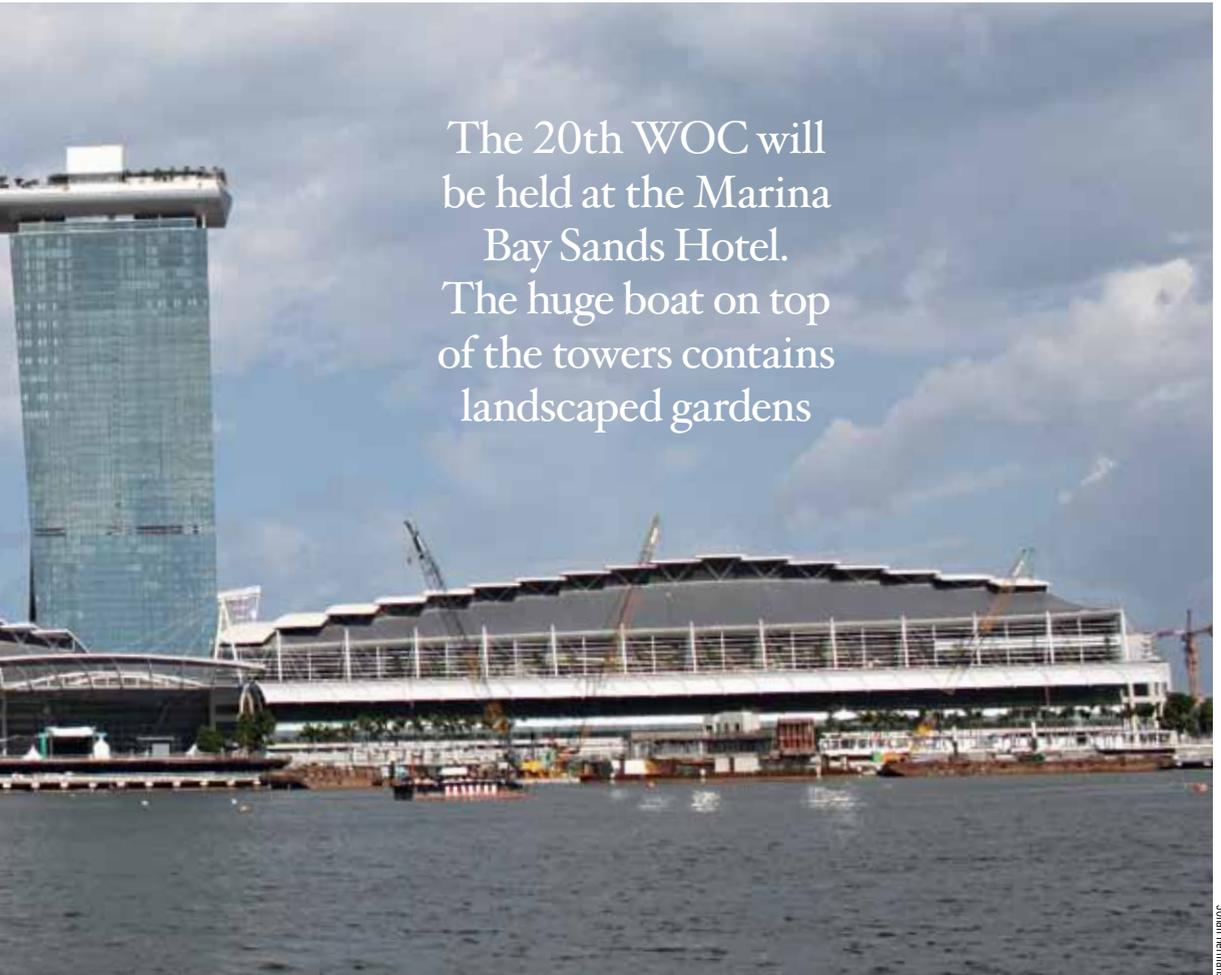
Chinatown in Singapore

EVERY YEAR, about one month before the event, Singapore has a real-time dress rehearsal for its Independence Day celebrations. Tanks, the army in full uniform, massed bands, the parachute regiment and thousands of extras are all wheeled out to practice for the Independence Day celebration in central Singapore. There is a fly-past and a full set of fireworks in the evening, all to practice for an event some weeks later. This mass effort, to achieve sheer perfection on the day, can also be seen in the years of preparation for the 20th World



Orchid Conference (WOC), which will take place later this year, 13 to 20 November. Over the last six years, as part of the preparations, the WOC organisers have held three very large international orchid shows in conjunction with the Singapore Garden Festival – more of which later. But first, let us take a look at the scale of the construction projects for the 20th WOC venue.

The Marina Bay Sands Hotel
The brand new Marina Bay Sands Hotel & Conference complex is an amazing three-towered building with a boat on top. It is now appearing in



The 20th WOC will be held at the Marina Bay Sands Hotel. The huge boat on top of the towers contains landscaped gardens

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The cool dry conservatory under construction

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An artificial Supertree taking shape

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Above Natural sculptures are being amassed to adorn the new gardens; fossilised trees, cave interiors, massive rocks and sculptures will be another attraction for the visitor
Below Artist's impression of the overall view of

the new Gardens by the Bay
Right Baobab trees being prepared for the gardens in a vast nursery, along with huge quantities of fully grown trees and rare plants from around the world, including many thousands of orchids

Courtesy of the National Parks Board, Singapore



Singapore advertising. It offers bright exhibition space and all the facilities a modern conference could wish for (www.marinabaysands.com). The Marina Bay Sands is the dream of architect Moshe Safdie and opened in June 2010. It has already emerged as the landmark of the city with its futuristic, 200 metre towers topped by the huge SkyPark – a boat with landscaped gardens, an avenue of trees, observation deck and infinity pool from which guests at the hotel can enjoy the views over the Singapore

skyline. The site has more than 2,500 rooms, but many other hotels in all price ranges are within easy reach.

The Gardens by the Bay

The hotel complex overlooks the new Gardens by the Bay. The WOC will coincide with the opening of the first phase of the Gardens by the Bay project. The conference dinner is planned to be held in the new cool dry conservatory, under a grove of bottle trees. The 54 hectare gardens are built on reclaimed land. Two



giant conservatories designed by architects Wilkinson Eyre with the Singapore National Parks Board as the client, will be a new landmark for Singapore. Environmental conditions within the conservatories will be a challenge. The planning team are aiming for 25°C with a maximum relative humidity (RH) of 60 percent, and a night-time drop to 17°C at 65 percent RH at night in the cool dry conservatory. Four times a year the night temperatures will be reduced for a month to create a flowering



The WOC dinner is planned to be held in the new cool dry conservatory, under a grove of bottle trees

stimulus for plants. In the cool moist house RH will be maintained at 80 percent, again with a stimulating drop some of the time. Huge amounts of cooling will be needed: double glazed sections are suspended from a fin-truss arrangement to a support of gigantic steel arches, there will be no internal supports. An absorption chiller will use waste heat to generate cooling, and liquid desiccants in vast quantities will help remove water vapour from the internal environment. The cool moist dome will house the

world largest indoor waterfall. Biomass of Singapore, such as fallen leaves, will provide energy for cooling the conservatories, making the project carbon neutral.

Groves of Supertrees will be another highlight of the new gardens. These are gigantic artificial structures clad in epiphytes, including thousands of orchids. The tallest Supertree, 50 metres tall, will have a bistro on top. At night the structures will be illuminated, providing a spectacle on Singapore's waterfront. This billion dollar project

will add another world-class green space to the island and is likely to be one of the most talked about horticultural projects of the century.

The WOC organisers

Singapore has a long, rich history of orchid cultivation. Two experienced partners will be involved in making the 20th WOC a success, the Orchid Society of South East Asia (OSSEA) and Singapore's National Parks (NParks). OSSEA was founded in 1928 and their first national orchid



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Above: A colourful display from Papua New Guinea, using traditional tribal masks, was greatly admired at the 3rd Singapore Garden Festival & National Orchid Show

Left: *Dendrobium Hiroshi Tokunaga*, winner of the 2010 World Orchid Conference Trust Trophy. The plant was shown by Woon Leng Nursery of Singapore

Right: Winner of the Best Floral Window Trophy was this fine display by Premium Orchids of Singapore



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show was held in 1932. They are one of the most active societies in the region with a committed membership, a respected journal and a shared passion for the region's orchids.

They are one partner of the organising team, under the leadership of Dr John Elliot and his formidable group.

Singapore's National Parks Board is now responsible for everything green and cheerful on the island. Their latest venture is the Gardens by the Bay project. NParks grew from the first National Garden, started when Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore, developed a garden at Fort Canning. The present Botanic Garden was developed on a new 63 hectare site in the city. It envelops the National Orchid Garden, which boasts the largest display of orchids in the world, a fabulous cool house and masses of species and hybrids. The garden's famous orchid breeding programme started in 1928 and is now one of the most sophisticated. There is a botany centre, library, herbarium and micropropagation facility. NParks manages more than 50 major parks, four nature reserves, and extensive streetscapes that form the backbone of this 'city in a garden'. It is one of the few cities in the world where orchids grow by the roadside.

Orchid Show dress rehearsals

By way of perfecting the WOC, Singapore has held three international orchid shows during the last six years. The 3rd Singapore Garden Festival & National Orchid Show, held last July, took 18 months to organise and was very impressive. More than 200,000 plants from Singapore and around the world were brought together in the Suntec Centre. There were remarkable naturalistic and fantasy gardens by top designers, but community and educational projects formed the backbone of what has become the most popular horticultural event in



The picturesque pavillion in Singapore Botanic Garden

Singapore hosted the 4th World Orchid Conference almost 50 years ago, in 1963

Singapore. The real gem was an entire floor of the exhibition centre devoted to the Singapore Orchid Show.

There were many local exhibitors, and excellent displays from Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia and China. As well as the large landscaped displays there were also a number of very fine, small Floral Windows, where amateurs and professional could show their smaller, more delicate plants. The standards of showmanship and plant quality were even superior to previous shows. Innovative displays from local schools were a highlight and it was interesting to observe that the school teams were even more competitive and ambitious than the hardened professionals. The cultural lectures and workshops

offered useful information and were also entertaining.

New method for orchid judging

A new judging system for the area was trialled at this show and proved a success. Instead of plants being judged away from the displays, all plants in the show were eligible for judging. This could potentially have created a nightmare for Dr Chong Yee Khoo and his international team of judges but the plants were assessed very efficiently in 96 classes by more than 70 judges from 16 countries without major hitches. An ingenious barcode system was used to create final judging lists and all went well. This system will be used at the 20th WOC and Chong Yee and his team look forward to welcoming orchid judges from around the world in November. A fine social dinner with entertainment rounded off judging and the show in a very harmonious manner.

The last WOC held in Singapore

The 4th World Orchid Conference was held in pre-independence Singapore in 1963 when some of

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Above *Vanda* Miss Joaquim, the national flower of Singapore, is now grown widely all over the tropics. Huge plantations of it can be admired in Singapore's Botanic Garden

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Above *Dendrobium* Margaret Thatcher is one of the orchids created by the Singapore Botanic Gardens breeding programme to honour its distinguished visitors

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The National Orchid Garden is home to more than 1,000 species and 2,000 hybrids

the illustrious contributors included HM Burkill, Dr Gordon Dillon, GCK Dunsterville, Lewis Vaughan, Dr Holtum and Thomas Fennel Jr. About 650 delegates attended the conference, and the entire budget for the show was US\$12,000 – from this they even made a profit of US\$5,000. *Phalaenopsis* breeding was in its infancy and plant genetics was slowly becoming fashionable. Almost 50 years on, the 20th WOC will hopefully attract even more delegates, and *Phalaenopsis* breeding and genetics are likely to be far more prominent. But it is guaranteed that, under the leadership of Chairman Dr Kiat W Tan, the WOC team will produce an event that will be remembered for generations.

Other attractions in Singapore

The national flower of Singapore is *Vanda* Miss Joaquim and the tiny island state's predilection for orchids is legendary but Singapore offers a great number of other attractions; Chinatown, little India, the Arab quarter, Peranakan culture, wonderful museums, opera, endless shopping malls, the zoo, aquarium, parks, gardens, Sentosa pleasure island, a wide range of hotels and an endless variety of wonderful food await. English is spoken everywhere, transport is efficient and good value and it is always warm

Singapore is also a very convenient hub for exploring Malaysia and many other orchid-rich Far Eastern countries. Singapore's Changi airport is a destination in itself but also has direct connections to most major cities in the world, over 80 airlines call there.

Orchid tours after the WOC

There will be post-WOC tours of local and regional areas, organised by orchid nurseries, specialist tour companies, and by the WOC team itself. The four WOC organised



Arches clad with *Oncidium* hybrids in the National Orchid Garden

tours are: a 5-day tour of Sabah in northern Borneo, a 7-day tour of Sabah, a 6-day tour of northeast Thailand, and a 7-day tour of Peninsular Malaysia covering the Cameron Highlands, Alor Setar, Langkawi island and Penang island.

The 20th WOC, will have all the facets that make these huge events unforgettable. The theme of the conference is, Where New and Old World Orchids Meet. There will be a full programme of lectures, workshops and seminars covering all aspects of orchids, social events,

thousands of orchids will be for sale and much more. Early registration is highly recommended for everyone interested in orchids. All orchid judges are invited to apply for a chance to judge at what promises to be one of the biggest orchid spectacles. More information about the WOC and the post-WOC tours can be found on the conference website: www.20woc.com.sg. Register now for the 20th WOC, where new and old world orchids, and the people most passionate about them, will meet in Singapore. ■

WOC FACTFILE

Conference Registration has now opened, and can be found on the 20th WOC website: www.20woc.com.sg/site. There are options for full registration, companion registration, daily registration and student registration. All offer a comprehensive package of advantages. Early registration attracts a considerable discount, and must be booked by 1 August.

A draft programme and list of speakers can be found on the website, and includes Mark Chase, Wen Huei Chen, Phillip Cribb, Kingsley Dixon and John Elliot.

The WOC Banquet combined with the Gardens by the Bay Preview can also be booked on the website.

Bookings for the Marina Bay Sands Hotel and a wide range of other accommodation is also now open and can be found on the website.

VISITING SINGAPORE

- The currency is the Singapore Dollar (S\$), it is divided into 100 cents. Money and travellers cheques can easily be exchanged, and major international credit cards are widely accepted.

- The electricity supply is 220–240 volts (usually 230v), 50 hertz.

- Most foreigners coming into Singapore do not require visas for entry. However, it is best to consult your local Consular office for the latest information.

- Singapore is hot and humid most of the time. Temperatures rarely fall below 20°C at night and are usually 30°C during the day. November can be wet. Most restaurants, hotels and shops are air-conditioned.

For more information visit the Singapore Tourism Board website: www.yoursingapore.com

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