

VANCOUVER SUN STAFF BLOGS | VANCOUVER SUN COMMUNITY BLOGS

/ STAFF / Life / Gardening / IN THE GARDEN

VANCOUVER SUN BLOG NETWORK / STAFF
IN THE GARDEN
Remembering David Lam

November 5, 2015, 6:30 pm • Section: In the Garden

Share 6 | Tweet 0 | | [Share This](#)



David Lam with pelargoniums in his solarium

Increase Font Size | Print Page | RSS Feed

Posted by: **steve whysall**

RECENT POSTS FROM THIS AUTHOR

Remembering David Lam
Posted on Nov 5, 2015

Your guide to the poppy
Posted on Nov 5, 2015

Airfare now included in West Country England 2016 Tour
Posted on Nov 4, 2015

Seeing VanDusen through new eyes
Posted on Oct 29, 2015



Victorian rose garden at Government House in Victoria

In this month of remembrance, I will also be pausing to remember David Lam, B.C.'s first Asian-Canadian lieutenant-governor, who did so much to promote and build gardens here and to encourage gardeners to appreciate beauty.

Lam died five years ago from prostate cancer, on Nov. 22 in 2010, at the age of 87.

He especially loved ornamental cherry trees and to honour his memory and mark its own 10th anniversary, the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival is offering a special deal on cherry trees.

You can find how to order your special "birthday blossom" cherry tree by going to <http://www.vcbf.ca>. You order a bargain-priced tree now and pick it up for planting in spring.

But my goal today is to tell you some stories about David Lam that I am sure you have not heard.



David Lam died at 87 in 2010 from prostate cancer

I first met Lam when I interviewed him in 1991 about his plans to renovate and upgrade the gardens at Government House in Victoria.

My appointment was for 10 a.m. and I decided to get the 7 o'clock ferry from Tsawwassen.

As I waited in the assured loading lane in the dark on that wet and cold Tuesday morning in November, I suddenly saw the ferry sail away — they had placed me in the wrong lane and I had missed the boat.

In a bit of a panic, I raced to Vancouver airport and got a ticket for the next plane.

At the airport in Victoria, I rushed out carrying my briefcase and got in a taxi. "Government House as fast as you can," I said.

I think the taxi driver thought he had immunity or a James Bond movie.

At Government House, the driver raced up the gravel driveway, slammed on his brakes and skidded at least 15 feet, leaving a long set of tire tracks and coming to a dramatic stop in front of the porte cochère where which Lam was patiently waiting. I was like Garfield, clinging to the window inside the cab.

I apologized for my tardiness but, as gracious as ever, Lam brushed away my apology and told me how he had also missed the ferry once and was left sitting in his official car with flags fluttering on the fenders. From that point, we got on very well.



David Lam with pelargoniums in his solarium

As a businessman, Lam was hugely successful, but his real passion was not for money but for beauty, especially the beauty of flowers and gardens.

As a philanthropist, he gave \$2 million to help establish both the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden and the Asia Garden at the UBC Botanical Garden, two of Vancouver's finest gardens.

And he also paid from his own pocket the \$150,000 to renovate and upgrade the gardens at Government House. This included the cost of the new Victorian rose garden, a copy of the 19th-century one at Warwick Castle in England.

It was as we walked and talked about the beauty of the garden at Government House that we became friends through our mutual admiration of the power of beauty to change hearts and lives.

"The beauty of the flower is very difficult to describe," Lam told me. "To me, it is a tonic. No matter how difficult my time may have been, when I hear beautiful music and I look at beautiful flowers, half of my troubles are gone.

A few years later, Lam called me at work to ask if I would quickly pop down to the offices of the Vancouver park board where he was stuck in discussions over what tree to pick for the new park at False Creek that was going to be named after him.

I dashed there and found Lam in a conference room with a lot of exasperated officials, who clearly did not like the idea of waiting for me.

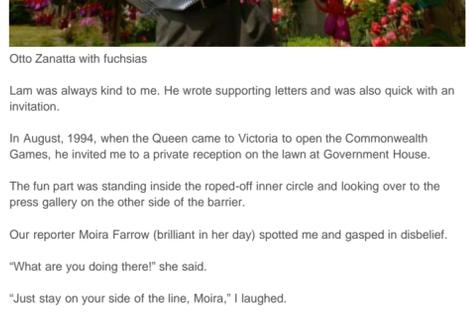
"Why can we not use only Asian plants in the landscaping?" Lam asked me. "There are some wonderful peonies and trees we could use.

"Imagine a Dove tree (*Davidia involucreata*) in full bloom. What a sight. What an attraction it would be. People would come from all over to see it. I want them to plant one but they say it is not practical. What do you think?"

I said I thought it was a beautiful tree, a perfect choice, especially appropriate because of the name and its Chinese origins.

And I added, perhaps to the chagrin of the listening officials: "It's your park, I think you can have whatever tree you want."

Today, there are two dove trees planted at David Lam Park.



Otto Zanatta with fuchsias

Lam was always kind to me. He wrote supporting letters and was also quick with an invitation.

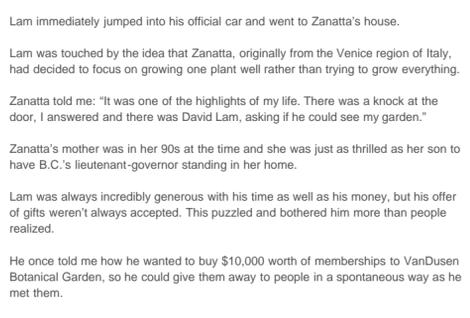
In August, 1994, when the Queen came to Victoria to open the Commonwealth Games, he invited me to a private reception on the lawn at Government House.

The fun part was standing inside the roped-off inner circle and looking over to the press gallery on the other side of the barrier.

Our reporter Moira Farrow (brilliant in her day) spotted me and gasped in disbelief.

"What are you doing there!" she said.

"Just stay on your side of the line, Moira," I laughed.



David Lam loved cherry blossoms

David Lam was an avid reader of this newspaper. One time, he read my story about Otto Zanatta, an East Vancouver gardener, who had perfected the art of growing humble pelargoniums.

Lam immediately jumped into his official car and went to Zanatta's house.

Lam was touched by the idea that Zanatta, originally from the Venice region of Italy, had decided to focus on growing one plant well rather than trying to grow everything.

Zanatta told me: "It was one of the highlights of my life. There was a knock at the door, I answered and there was David Lam, asking if he could see my garden."

Zanatta's mother was in her 90s at the time and she was just as thrilled as her son to have B.C.'s lieutenant-governor standing in her home.

Lam was always incredibly generous with his time as well as his money, but his offer of gifts weren't always accepted. This puzzled and bothered him more than people realized.

He once told me how he wanted to give \$10,000 worth of memberships to VanDusen Botanical Garden, so he could give them away to people in a spontaneous way as he met them.

But he told me, with a shake of the head, VanDusen told him they couldn't do it because there was too much detail involved in processing a membership.

Lam never understood the logic of their argument; he just wanted more people to discover the delights of the garden.

He felt pretty much the same away about the park board when he offered to give them \$1 million to buy 10,000 cherry trees and he was turned down. He didn't understand why they wouldn't snap his hand off to make the city more beautiful and make an even more dramatic cherry blossom heaven.

Part of the problem was exactly where he wanted the trees planted — all along the waterfront.

In the end, he did pay for some cherry trees to be planted, but not nearly as many as he had wanted. However, the story does demonstrate his big heart and generous nature.



Linda Poole, president of Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival.

In the last years of his life in his penthouse home at the foot of Comox Street, Lam turned decks into little gardens and filled a solarium with exotic plants.

He always thought B.C.'s horticulture industry could become bigger and more successful on a global scale.

"I want to help build up the nursery growers in the Lower Mainland," he once told me.

"Why can't we become the Holland of North America? We have the land, we have the people, we have the climate. Can we not become the growers for the Asia Pacific region and the rest of North America?"

Lam was a remarkable, generous man of vision and great kindness. His spirit of enthusiasm for gardens and beauty is still an inspiration to us all today.

swhysall@vancouver.sun.com



David Lam with pelargoniums

FEATURED PHOTOS
WEST VAN'S HISTORIC BINNING HOUSE...

Future of Flight
EXPERIENCE AVIATION
 PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE OF FLIGHT
 TAKE THE WORLD-RENOUNDED BOEING TOUR

For more information: 1-800-464-1476
info@futureofflight.org | www.futureofflight.org
[CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE!](#)

SEARCH BLOGS

GARDENING BLOG SECTIONS

- Honey Bee Zen** Last post Jan 10, 2013
- In the Garden** Last post Nov 5, 2015

LIFE BLOG SECTIONS

- Diversity** Last post Nov 3, 2015
- Fashion and Beauty** Last post Oct 23, 2014
- Food** Last post Nov 5, 2015
- Gardening** Last post Nov 5, 2015
- Parenting** Last post Sep 24, 2012
- Pets** Last post Aug 16, 2011
- Relationships** Last post Feb 22, 2012
- Videos** Last post Mar 21, 2014

STAFF BLOG SECTIONS

- Business** Last post Sep 15, 2015
- Driving** Last post Aug 16, 2013
- Entertainment** Last post Nov 5, 2015
- Environment** Last post Oct 23, 2015
- Health** Last post Nov 4, 2015
- Life** Last post Nov 5, 2015
- News** Last post Nov 5, 2015
- Opinion** Last post Nov 18, 2014
- Politics** Last post Oct 31, 2015
- Sports** Last post Oct 28, 2015
- Technology** Last post Nov 2, 2015

CATEGORY CLOUD

Art Seen | Awesome Sound | **B.C. Education Report** | Business | COMMUNITY | Community of Interest | Digital | Life | Economy | Fan-Attic | **In the Garden** | Medicine Matters | Now | **Puckworld** | Soccer | Shorts | STAFF | The Green Man | **The Real Scoop** | The Search Word | Mouth | Your Money

RECENT POSTS

- Game of Thrones S1 Steelbook unboxing and Dolby Atmos test (with video)**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015
- Remembering David Lam**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015
- Miley Cyrus bringing her Dead Petz to Vancouver in December**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015
- UBC genomic project aims to breed a better honeybee**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015
- I review Naka, a Laotian restaurant**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015
- The Gastown Sessions: DAVID GOGO**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015
- Nearly a Third of Unpaid Family Caregivers Are Stressed Out to the Point of Breakdown**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015
- Abby police frustrated with lack of cooperation from victim**
Posted on Nov 5, 2015

MOST POPULAR BLOG POSTS

- Five things about Harjit Sajjan, Canada's new minister of defence**
- Five things about Jody Wilson-Raybould, Canada's new justice minister**
- Five things about Carla Qualtrough, Canada's new minister for sport and persons with disabilities**
- Abby police frustrated with lack of cooperation from victim**
- Sophon Sek gets more than 5 years in jail**
- Nurses flunking tests is causing surgery delays at Vancouver's biggest hospital. But good news for on patient.**
- Metro Vancouver men charged in drug conspiracy**
- Cancelled Jeff Wall exhibition could mean catalog will become collector's item**
- Miley Cyrus bringing her Dead Petz to Vancouver in December**
- Thousands of Metro Vancouver mansion owners avoiding taxes**

Bundle & save over 50%
 \$59.90/mo. on Internet and Phone.
 Order now | **Shaw Business**

EXPLORE BY CATEGORIES:

Select by Category:

RECENT CONTRIBUTORS

- Ultra Nerdy** 37 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- steve whysall** 1754 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- Francois Marchand** 799 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- Randy Shore** 638 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- Mia Stainsby** 1279 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- Mark Yuen** 62 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- empoweredhealth2014** 26 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- Kim Bolan** 2892 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- Russell Berrisford** 610 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015
- Kevin Griffin** 616 total posts. Last Post: Nov 5, 2015

November 2015

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

« Oct

The Vancouver Sun 63,953 likes

Like Page | Liked | Share

News Feed

The Vancouver Sun 2 mins

The Vancouver police have cordoned off Station Street behind the Ivanhoe Pub to investigate the city's 14th homicide this year.



TAG CLOUD

and Media Arts B.C. Supreme Court | Beverages | **Breaking News** | British Columbia | Canada | Carl Robinson | China | Chinese Christianity | Christians | Cody Haevischer | Consumer Electronics | Culture and Lifestyle | Diversity | entertainment | Europe | Food and Cooking | gardening | Government and Politics | Gregor Robertson | health | Health and Fitness | Hockey | IHIT immigrants | immigration | Integrated | Homicide | Investigation | Team | Internet | James Cluer | **Kim Bolan** | Major League Soccer | Martin Rennie | mental health | mental illness | Murder and Homicide | Music | Muslims | National | hockey league | NHL | Pamela Fayerman | Medicine | **Matters** | Pamela | **Real Scoop** | religion | Roberto Luongo | **Russell Berrisford** | science | Science and Technology | Soccer | Shorts | social media | spirituality | sponsored | Sports | **Steve Whysall** | Toronto | Sun | Run | Surrey | Surrey Six | technology | toronto | Tunc Burrey | Tunc Burrey UBC | United States | University of British Columbia | **Vancouver** | Vancouver Canadians | Vancouver Canucks | Vancouver Police | **Vancouver Sun** | Vancouver | **Whitecaps** | Visual Arts | white wine | wine | wine club | wine education

FLICKR PHOTOS

