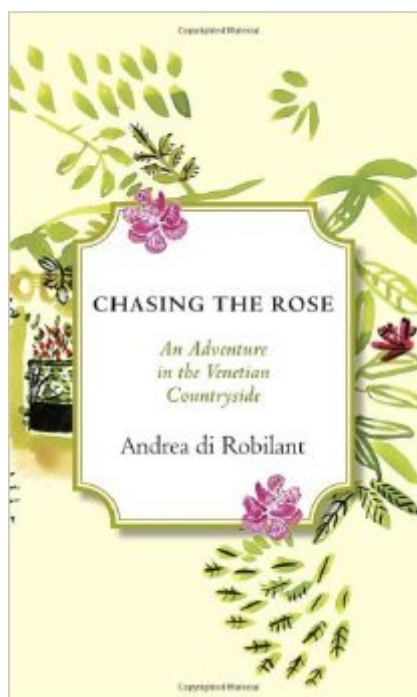


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Chasing The Rose: An Adventure In The Venetian Countryside



Synopsis

From the author of the best-selling *A Venetian Affair*, here is the charming chronicle of his search for the identity of a mysterious old rose. Andrea di Robilant's tale takes us back to the time of Josephine Bonaparte, as well as into some of the most delightful rose gardens in Italy today, brought to colorful life on the page in the watercolors of artist Nina Fuga. In his 2008 biography of the Venetian lady Lucia Mocenigo (his great-great-great-great-grandmother), di Robilant described a pink rose that grows wild on the family's former country estate, mentioning its light peach-and-raspberry scent. This passing detail led to an invitation for an audience with a local rose doyen, Eleonora Garlant. She and other experts wondered if di Robilant's unnamed rose could possibly be one of the long-lost China varieties that nineteenth-century European growers had cultivated but which have since disappeared. On the hunt for the identity of his anonymous yet quietly distinctive rose, Di Robilant finds himself captivated by roseophiles through time—from Lucia and her friend Josephine Bonaparte to the gifted Eleonora, whose garden of nearly fifteen hundred varieties of old roses is one of the most significant in Europe—and by the roses themselves, each of which has a tale to tell. What starts out as a lighthearted quest becomes a meaningful journey as di Robilant contemplates the enduring beauty of what is passed down to us in a rose, through both the generosity of nature and the cultivating hand of human beings, who for centuries have embraced and extended the life of this mysterious flower.

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Customer Reviews

This book wasn't what I expected. I have a few rose bushes, and at one point was very interested in

heirloom roses that you find nameless at cemeteries or old yards. I was hoping to catch some tips to make them bloom more lushly. Wrong. And I'm so glad! This is the true story of the hunt for the name of a variety of rose, gorgeous and unique, whose provenance is unknown. Christened the "rosa moceniga", the search takes dramatic turns even while it rests in a wild Venetian garden with other "orphan" roses. But the work delves much further into (to me) uncharted territory of the history of the celebration of the rose, and made me instantly take my garden roses far less for granted than before. First, China. "Of the two hundred known species in the world, half are native to that country....the Chinese had been cultivating and breeding roses for more than two thousand years." I had assumed that roses were a plant found as a native species with variations of color, style, and size all over the world. Actually, the shipment and collection of roses was far more complicated. Empress Josephine was a devotee, as was Lucia Mocenigo, a friend and royal acquaintance of Napoleon's ex. The family heritage travels towards today with the rose still a vital part of their history. But rather than tell it in a dry style, di Robilant uses family letters and ephemera to trace Lucia's life and travels. She is fascinating.

This book is about the quest by the author, Signor Andrea di Robilant, to determine the origin and source of a special rose that is found in his old family estate located in the small town of Alvisipoli on the mainland North of Venice. Anyone can visit the town by driving out of Venice to the North. Our author met with the caretaker of the old property who showed him the graves of his ancestors and - more important to this work of non-fiction - he was shown and given a cutting from a most intriguing and historically very special rose. He was unable to tell the caretaker anything significant about the rose. But, he gradually discovered that it was special and important to his family history and thus begins a botanical detective story. Andrea di Robilant ventures into the story of his family and some significant characters who had a connection to the Bonapartes, especially to Josephine. He provides background from historical periods of importance. His physical and mental quest takes him to England, to Paris, to China and to the USA as he seeks to unravel the mystery surrounding the "rosa moceniga". This book amplifies the text with nicely done color drawings. The Vine edition had black and white drawings. The story progresses like a studied conversation. Slowly and deliberately, carefully revealing lost secrets and testing theories about the rose against factual findings. This is not an exciting page turner. But, it is revealing of thought processes of rose fanciers and estate owners, rose sellers, art gallery people, family historians, and the ever present families of so many, many varieties of roses.

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