

A Rose for FDR

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Caption: Roosevelt roses arranged in a magnolia-leaf-covered container by Marcel Wolterinck at the Dutch ambassador's residence. PHOTO BY MARK FINKENSTAEDT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

By Adrian Higgins

While he was leading the fight against tyranny, Franklin Roosevelt still had time to smell the roses. He enjoyed watching the Flowers bloom outside his office and as president took a keen interest in revamping the grounds of the White House.

Today, on the eve of the dedication of the Roosevelt memorial on the Mall, FDR is immortalized in the world of gardening with the dedication of a new rose.

"Franklin Delano Roosevelt," a new hybrid tea, is to be christened today by the FDR's goddaughter, Princess Margriet, serve Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, at a ceremony at the Netherlands ambassador's residence on embassy row. Tomorrow, at the memorial dedication, the Princess is scheduled to present a bouquet of the roses to the first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The Rose is a large, high centered hybrid tea in a light apricot, as jaunty as its namesake. developed by Peter IIsink of the interplant company in Leersum, Netherlands. The Dutch are keen to claim the 32nd president as their own. Roosevelt's ancestors came from the Netherlands province of Zeeland in 1649, and his name, in Dutch, means "field of roses," said Dale T. Morris, spokesman for the Netherlands embassy. Roosevelt himself asked to be buried in the Rose garden of his family's estate, Hyde Park, on the Hudson River. Today's ceremony is part of a four-day floral celebration at the ambassador's residence on S Street NW, in which designer Marcel Wolterinck has fashioned more than 10,000 cut roses into an array of arrangements.

The ambassador and his wife, Adriaan and Françoise Jacobovits de Szeged, have called on Wolterinck twice before for floral extravaganzas here, one linked to the 1996 Vermeer exhibition at the National Gallery, the other for the dedication of a pink and white Tulip named for Mrs. Clinton. Members of more than 80 garden clubs in the Washington area have been invited to view Wolterinck's arrangements, Morris said.

Wolterinck, speaking as he was working on one of his creations, said he likes the open, natural form of old-fashioned roses but he nevertheless declared the Roosevelt rose "wonderful. Marvelous color, and it opens very nicely."

Among the arrangements were two huge domes of roses in the dining room and strikingly rich shades of red; A colossal centerpiece of Roosevelt roses; and cones of rosebuds in pastel shades, lighter

as the arrangements ascended. So classical, said Wolterinck, fortified by the strains of Dvorak, Grieg and Massenet.

But the show early didn't come off. When plant inspectors at Dulles Airport examined the roses last Friday, they found a Caterpillar. At first, they wanted the whole consignment destroyed but then permitted the embassy to truck the Flowers so the nearest available official fumigation center, in New York.

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The plants arrived back in Washington on Sunday, putting the floral designer two days behind schedule. A team of volunteers from the embassy staff, including the ambassador and his wife, spent five hours on Sunday removing thorns and leaves and cutting stems, plunging them into tepid water. The Flowers perked up; only a few were the worse for wear, said Francoise Jacobovits. Still, Ilsink arranged for more Roosevelt roses to be shipped from Holland to replace any blooms that fade today and tomorrow.

Ilsink said garden roses could not be ready in time for the pre-rose-season dedication, so he chose a cut-flower variety bred for the American, Italian and Japanese markets-- long straight stems, oversized flowers, a distinctive color and designed to last 10 days in the vase. The Rose is now being grown in America for florists; consumers will see it by the end of this year, Ilsink said.