

A Brief History of Lotusland

37 acres containing over 3,000 plant species from all over the world.



1882-1913: Stevens Era

- 1882, Ralph Kinton Stevens bought the estate and used the grounds for his home and a commercial nursery.
- Remaining species from the Stevens era include: California live oaks, Monterey cypress, mature palms, Asian lotus of the Japanese Garden, and olive trees.
- 1913, Long after his death in 1896, Stevens' widow sold the property to George Owen Knapp, who then sold it to the Gavit family three years later.

1916-1938: Gavit Era

- 1916, New Yorkers E. Palmer and Marie Gavit purchased the property and named it Cuesta Linda (pretty hill).
- 1919, They hired architect Reginald Johnson to design the main house.
- Architect George Washington Smith was then appointed to construct a perimeter wall, a pavilion, a stable, a swimming pool, the bath house and several other outbuildings.

1941-1982: Walska Era

- 1941, Madame Ganna Walska purchased the estate, renaming it "Tibetland," and ultimately "Lotusland."
- 1940s, Walska appointed Lockwood de Forest Jr. to install an orchard and a succulent garden. She also charged him with procuring new and interesting cacti to plant in front of the main house.
- 1946, Walska contacted Ralph T. Stevens (son of the original owner) to aid with her landscaping endeavors.
- 1946-1955, Stevens designed an entrance gate, the swimming pool and the beach area, the succulent wall, the Theatre Garden, the Blue Garden, the horticultural clock, and oversaw the conversion of the old swimming pool to a water garden.
- The Japanese Garden was created in the 1960s as a collaborative effort between Walska, Oswald Da Ros, and Frank Fujii.
- In 1966, Walska began her collection of bromeliads from a garden in Carlsbad and from orchid grower, Fritz Kubish. Kubish is responsible for the layout of the original Bromeliad Garden, which is now home to over 200 species. Also in this year, Merritt S. Dunlap promised his cactus collection to Walska, consisting at that time of over one thousand species. He expanded his collection for nearly four more decades before gifting it to Lotusland in 2001.
- 1968-1972, William Paylen installed the Fern Garden.
- 1973-1975, Charles Glass and Robert Foster renovated the Succulent Garden and the Aloe Garden.
- In 1977, in order to pay for the Cycad Garden, Walska auctioned off her expensive jewelry collection.
- In 1979 the Cycad Garden "opened" with over two hundred species – in 1993, a census ranked the Lotusland cycad collection as second in the world in a public garden after a garden in Naples, Italy.
- Walska passed away in 1984, leaving Lotusland to the Ganna Walska Lotusland Foundation.

1984-Present: Lotusland Foundation

- 1984-2003, the Lotusland Foundation oversaw vast restorations to the grounds, including in the Topiary, Cycad, and Cactus Gardens. An Australian Garden was also established at the Visitor Center.
- 2001, Dunlap had his cactus collection moved to Lotusland. Special boxes were constructed to protect the larger species during the trip from his home in Fallbrook to Santa Barbara. It took 12 weekly trips to transport the large specimens.