



Tomales Bay, California

Villa dei Fiori

Origins of Dale Pelton's gardens in Joshua Tree

After finishing my Master of Fine Arts from UCLA, I released *Death of the Red Planet*, the first commercially released film made by laser light, in Cinemascope and Quadrophonic sound which played with the rock film *Yes Songs* in 600 theatres in the United States. *Death of the Red Planet* was on the cover of *American Cinematographer*, featured in the Cannes Film Festival and a special screening in the 3700 seat Grand Amphitheatre of the Palais des congrès de Paris.

Since I had grown up in the country across from the woodlands of Mohawk Park near Yahola Lake, Tulsa Oklahoma, I have always sought to live in idyllic landscapes. Before entering the film industry to design for Glen Larson's *Battlestar Galactica*, I lived for a couple of years in Tomales Bay, California near Dillon Beach, writing a screenplay, *East of the Moon*, set in 12th century, Cornwall, Ireland, and Brittany France.



My garden in L. A. Canary Island date palms, *Phoenix canariensis*, and lemon tree.

Upon returning to Los Angeles, I located an apartment and garden near Wilshire Boulevard's Museum Row with massive Canary Island date palms, *Phoenix canariensis*, and began designing sets for Universal Studios. When Verna Fields, Universal Vice President, and editor of *Jaws*, screened *Death of the Red Planet*, she recommended that Glen Larson, producer of *Battlestar Galactica*, hire me for his show. As assistant art director, I showed producer John Dykstra and optical effects director of photography Richard Edlund how to make laser effects like those in *Death of the Red Planet*. Larsen assigned me to design the gambling casino and cabaret on another planet---a tension structure inspired by Frei Otto, German architect and structural engineer who developed high strength tensile and membrane structures, including the roof of the Olympic Stadium for the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, and winner of the 2015 Pritzker Architecture Prize. The casino which was attacked by the Cylon warriors, was constructed of nylon fabric held in tension by steel cables which stretched gossamer butterfly wings mounted on parabolic steel ribs supported by a center stainless-steel ring, the ribs and transparent wings radiating outward in a spiral pattern. The gambling tables were formed of undulating plexiglass with flashing strobe lights, manned by alien croupiers from distant planets---an homage to the bar scene in *Star Wars*.

The six sisters of my Scottish grandmother, Mary McCant Pelton, born in 1880, a pioneer who came to Oklahoma from Kansas in a covered wagon in 1898, moved to California in the 1920s. Revenna and Gwendolyn, the daughters of grandmother's sisters built homestead cabins in Joshua Tree during the early 1950s, drawing water from Celesta Hollinger's well, and pumping it to a water tank to provide gravity flow water to the house. When I arrived in California to attend film school in 1968, and visited my cousins, Revena and Gwendolyn, I fell in love with the boulder terrain of the Joshua Tree National Monument.



Twenty years later, I bought twenty acres on the boundary of Joshua Tree National Park and began creating two gardens in the boulders.



Coyote Dry Lake. View from Dale's Nature Preserve.

Villa dei Fiori



Dale Pelton's Garden in Joshua Tree





The Joshua Tree silhouetted before a melodramatic sky was saved from a construction site with adoption papers from the city of Yucca Valley, transported twenty miles by an eighteen-wheeler with a wide-load permit, and replanted on my Nature Preserve.



One enters the Wonderland of Rocks by hiking four miles directly from Villa dei Fiori.



Beyond the boulders over the pool lies a hidden valley adjacent to the National Park



The juxtaposition of boulders and trees is what makes the garden remarkable.



**One of the many caves of Villa dei Fiori.
On the other side, a hundred feet below, lies the national park.**



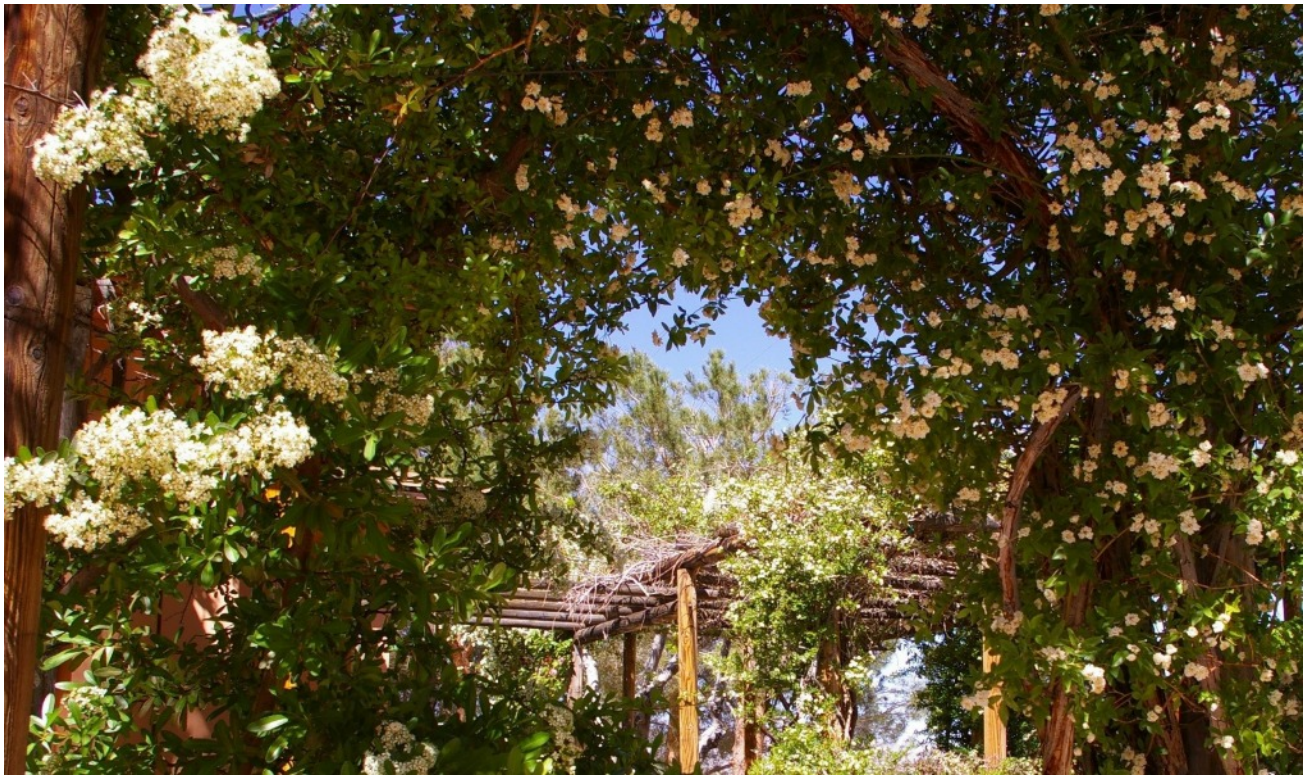


Amid the boulders, I planted Arizona cypress and Leylandii cypress, Italian Stone pine, Aleppo pine, *pinus halepensis*, Mexican Palo Verde, *Parkinsonia aculeata*, Blue Pfitzer Juniper, *Juniperus chinensis pfitzeriana*, French lavender, rosemary, pyracanthus, wisteria, and roses, Opuntia and Barrel cacti, and native plants, creosote, jojoba, Joshua Tree, Mojave yucca, cholla, and brittlebush.

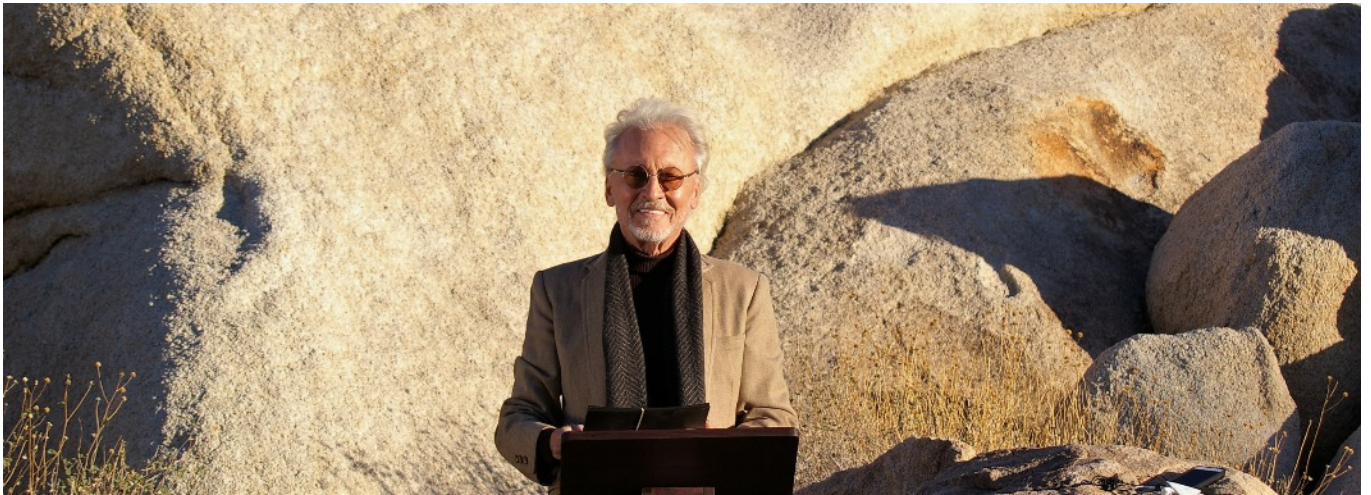




Jerusalem Thorn tree, *Parkinsonia aculeata* in bloom. Grove of Italian Stone Pines beyond.



Lady Banks' rose, *rosa banksiae*, and Firethorn Bush, *pyracantha*, in bloom.



Reading from *Celine on Fire* at Villa dei Fiori.



A herd of Bighorn sheep frequents the boulders of Villa dei Fiori.



Cholla cactus garden on the Nature Preserve.



Nature Preserve – Mexican Palo Verde, or Jerusalem thorn tree, *Parkinsonia aculeata*, blooms in May.



Pencil cactus, a variety of cholla, on the left. *Parkinsonia aculeata* in bloom, Aleppo pines at right.



A herd of Bighorn frequent the boulders above Villa dei Fiori's garden. The Bighorn sheep, *Ovis Canadensis*, originally crossed from Siberia over the Bering land bridge to North America around 750,000 years ago. The horns of a three-hundred-pound ram can weigh 30 pounds. When the Europeans came to America, there were millions of Bighorns. By 1900 they were reduced to a few thousand due to livestock diseases and over hunting, a fate it shared with the American Buffalo.





A herd of Bighorn sheep in the boulders above Villa dei Fiori.





The creation of the gardens has required the use of heavy equipment.





Boulders were moved, and the terrain terraced by bulldozers and tractors.





Moving boulders on the Nature Preserve. The mountain in the distance is San Gorgonio, highest peak in Southern California at 11,503 feet.





The boulders will create a grotto at the end of the swimming pool. A swimmer enters the cavern --- a narrow passage between the boulders suddenly opening to the sky.





Joshua Tree was saved by moving it from a construction site fifteen miles away.





Coyote Dry Lake at twilight. In the 1950's, the United States Marines decided to fill the dry lake so that troops on holiday could water ski. They filled the lake, the surface reflecting Copper Mountain. My kin folk, immigrants from Oklahoma in the 1920s, told me that one night everyone was awakened by a roar. At first, they thought it was an earthquake. But, no, a crevice in the bottom of the lake had broken open. The roar was water gushing into the earth. Coyote Lake was no more.



Cupressus arizonica in the foreground and eucalyptus beyond.



Opuntia cactus blooms in May.





My Library where much of "Celine on Fire" was written.





***Céline on Fire* was written in equal parts at: 1. My Miracle Mile apartment in Los Angeles.
2. Villa dei Fiori. 3. Writers retreat on the Nature Preserve.**

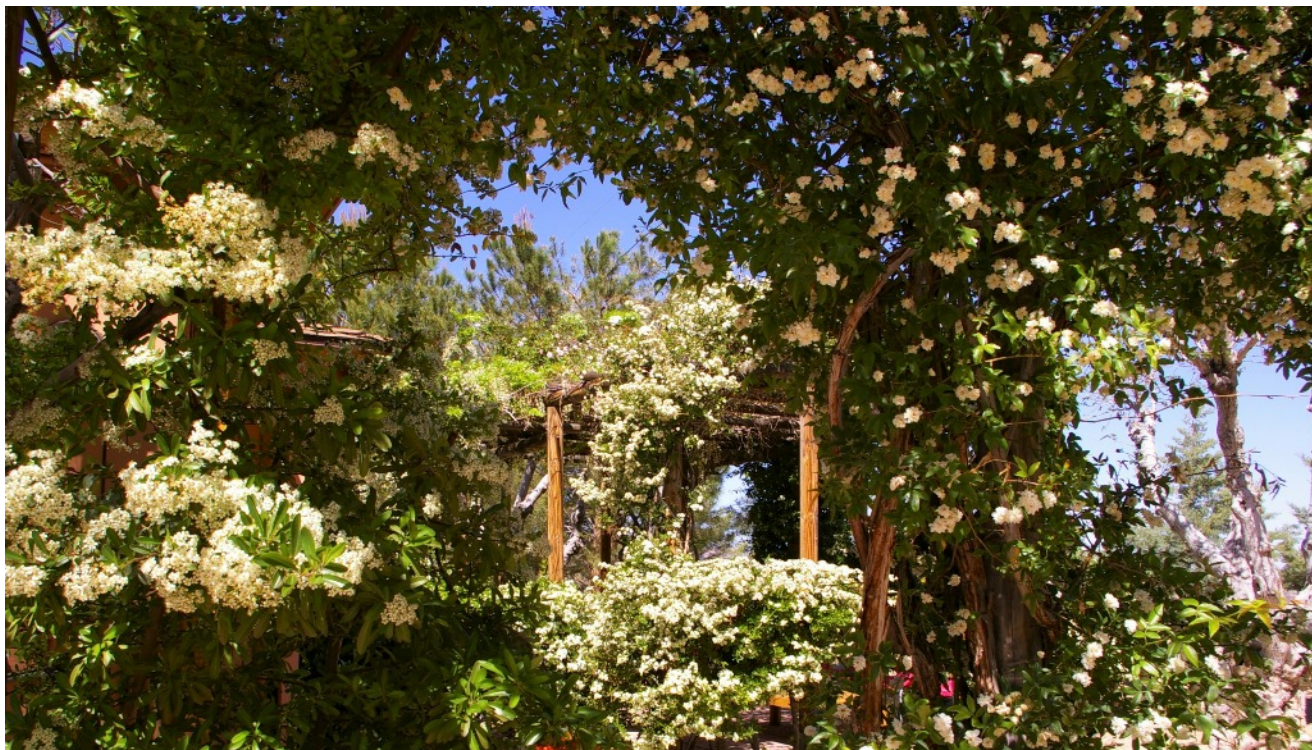




Indigo plant in bloom.



French lavender, Desert Bird of Paradise in bloom. Sabu, my chow chow, rescued after a hit and run driver left her to die on the highway in Beaumont, California.



Pergolas laden with Pyracantha and Rosa banksiae in bloom.



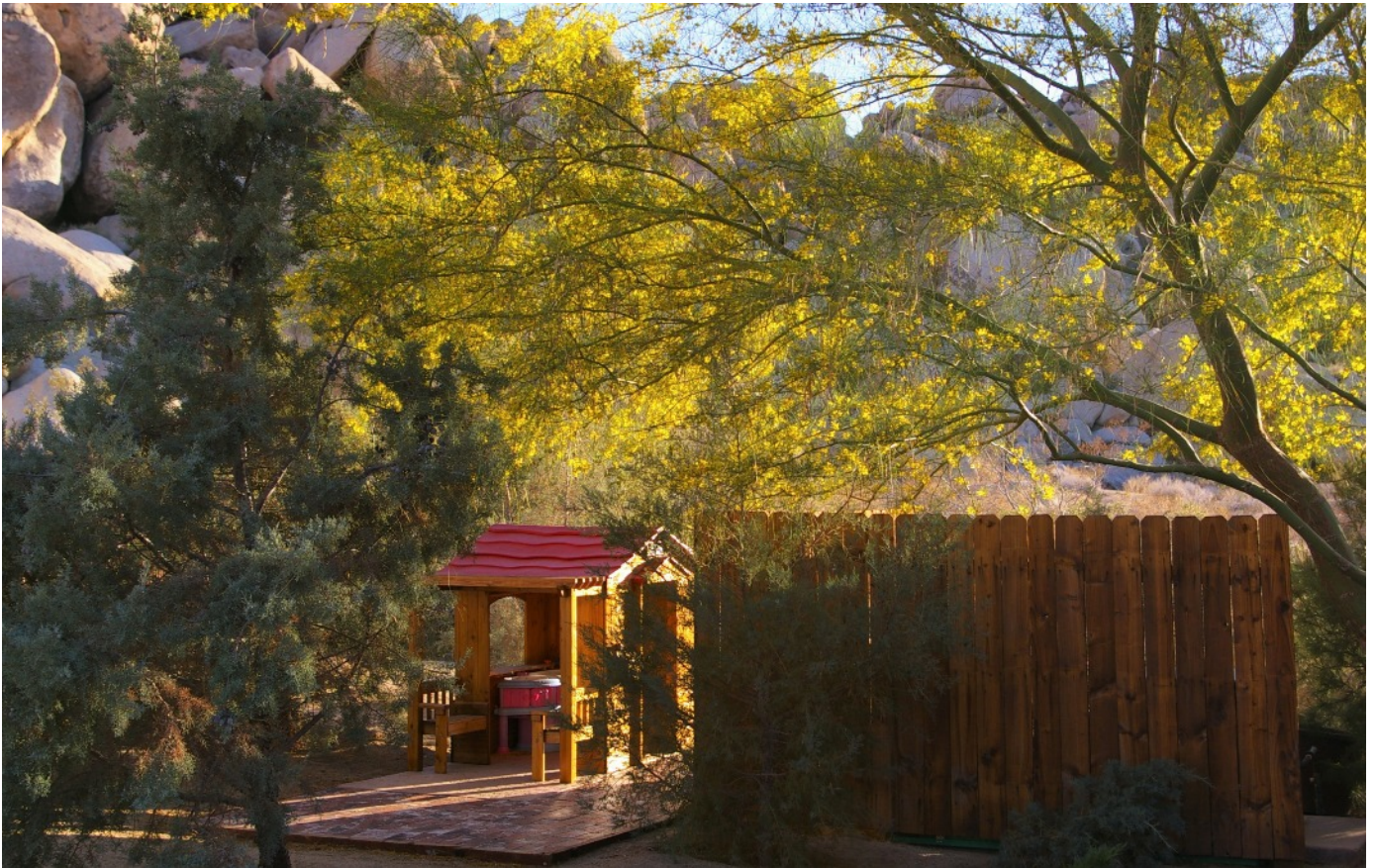
Bouquet from the garden of Villa dei Fiori.



Mojave Indigo Bush, *Psoralethamnus arborescens*, one of our most exquisite native plants.



Native Opuntia cactus in bloom.



Playhouse for little girl's tea parties.





Flowers from the garden, oil on silk tapestry by Michele Quence in Paris.



**One of only two original trees on the estate.
An unknown variety of tree, living even though both trunks are hollow.**



A pool with a dark bottom of cobalt blue and black pebbles reflecting ever changing cloudsapes.



Boulder sculptures are filigreed with caves to explore.



Joshua Tree was rescued from a construction site twenty miles distant, and moved by a backhoe, 18 wheel tractor trailer, and crane.



Electric power poles in the boulders, the price of civilization.



**Site for future performance space and art gallery,
Copper Mountain in the distance.**



**Wisteria Longissima Alba, Japanese White wisteria.
Mediterranean Fan palm, Chamaerops humilis.**



Brain rocks on the plateau above Villa dei Fiori's Valley of the Moon.





Valley of the Moon at Villa dei Fiori.





View of Joshua Tree National Park from plateau above Villa dei Fiori.

