

LOCOMOTIVE LANDSCAPES

BY KRIS SCOTT

TASTE & SEE GARDENS will have a
railroad theme this year that includes
OLD favorites & NEW attractions

If the miniature railway exhibit in the State Fair of Texas' Taste & See Gardens has traditionally been one of your family's favorite parts of the fair, you're in for an even bigger treat this year.

That's because Paul Busse, landscape architect extraordinaire and train enthusiast, is back with his particular brand of artistic genius.

Busse is known nationwide as the go-to guy when it comes to "garden railroading." He runs his company, Applied Imagination, with wife Margaret out of their 12-acre property in Kentucky. A train enthusiast since receiving his first American Flyer at age 5, Busse has been combining landscape design and locomotives for more than two decades.

He hit the big time almost 14 years ago, when he was commissioned to create the holiday train display at the New York Botanical Garden. His work is now displayed in gardens, fairs and parks throughout the country.

"He started this whole trend in developing these garden railways," says State Fair of Texas President Errol McKoy. "He's the best in the country at doing it."

Wanting to capitalize on the popularity of "garden railroad" exhibits, McKoy enlisted Busse, who has brought his talents to the Taste & See Gardens

for the past two years, to "greatly expand" on previous themes.

"We asked him to develop several different versions of the garden railways concept," McKoy says. "And what he has come up with is just amazing."

In addition to bringing back the five-track Texas Garden Railway that was last year's mainstay, Busse has created the Bavarian Castle Railway.

This structure, 27 feet at its highest point and 26 feet wide, features trains running in and out of mountains and through forests, with a Bavarian castle centerpiece, all constructed on a turntable that spins in the opposite direction the trains will run.

"All of it is set to a music box theme," McKoy says, "and it includes a lot of beautiful floral at the base."

You'll find the whole layout in the middle of Taste & See's new Garden Pavilion, an 8,200-square-foot tented structure housing a number of vendors and attractions.

Busse also has installed two new single-track operations — "each a little bit different and featuring unique elements," McKoy says. The Junction Mountain Railway is located in Handcar Junction next to the Whistle Stop Café, and the Mulch Gulch

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Railway is laid out near the Meadows Fountain.

Also new this year are small train cars, similar to the old hand-pump platforms, which kids will ride around an oval track. The pump-it-yourself experience is free.

"Everything we're doing in the Gardens this year is railway- and railroad-oriented," McKoy says.

The concept, says Taste & See coordinator Chad Cain, "attracts young and old alike."

To mark the Taste & See Gardens' expansion, you'll find a 38-foot archway bridging First Avenue across from the Band Shell. This serves as the exhibit's main entrance. There, experienced staffers man an information booth, passing out maps and brochures describing where all the attractions, old and new, can be found.

"This is our third year," McKoy says of the Taste & See exhibits, the cornerstone of the Fair's Fall Garden Exhibition. He says expanding on the concept was a natural extension of the garden show's growth.

"Home and garden — that whole category, the whole trend, is just extremely hot. That's why the show has gone over so well," he says.

"Quite honestly, we're going to continue to grow the Fall Garden Exhibition. Each year it will be bigger and bigger. We want people to come out and shop for landscaping ideas and new garden products, just as they come out and shop for automobiles."

To that end, many of the vendors in the Taste & See Garden's new tented structure are selling

garden accessories and outdoor furnishings.

Another featured attraction is the Bounty Basic Celebrity Kitchen. This showcase inside the Discovery Garden Station offers 45-minute cooking demonstrations every day at noon, 2, 4 and 6 p.m. The kitchen hosts more than 100 chefs from country clubs, noted area restaurants such as Maggiano's Little Italy and Smith & Wollensky, and top hotels such as the Adolphus and The Mansion on Turtle Creek.

Demonstrations include not only preparation of the chefs' signature dishes, but also "heart healthy" meals, thanks to a partnership with Medical City Dallas. Those demos — Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays at 2 and 4 p.m. — have been approved by a registered dietician and meet the criteria of a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet.

Also new at the Taste & See Gardens this year is the Whistle Stop Picnic Grove. Fairgoers can purchase picnic-style meals, complete with baskets and tablecloths, to spread out "wherever they want to sit down," McKoy says, on Taste & See's seven-acre site.

Artist Kathy Colon will be painting train-scapes every day in a nearby shaded area. The murals will represent scenes that passengers might see from an observation car.

Visitors to the Taste & See Gardens will be able to follow a well-marked route to each of seven railway stops. The eighth stop will be the Age of Steam Railroad Museum's gift shop, where people can purchase pins, whistles, engineer's caps, dining car china and more.