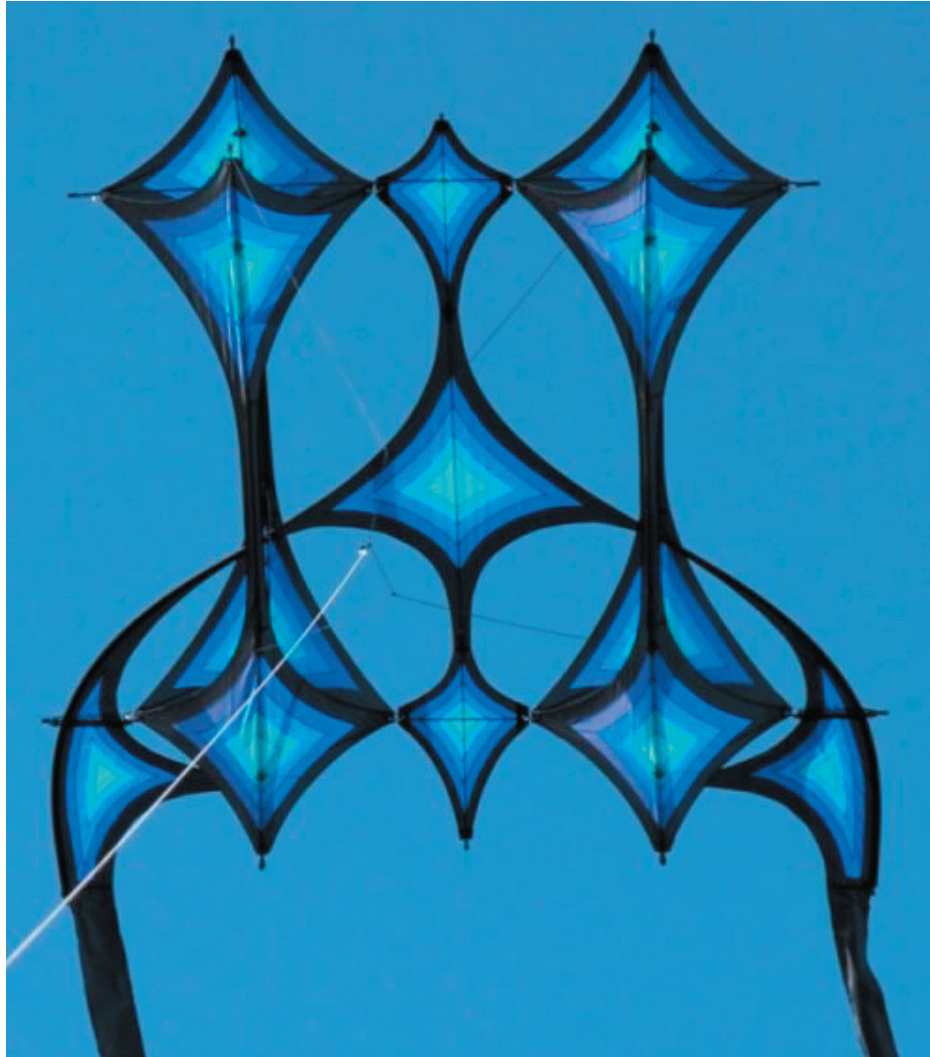


K I T E

THE DRACHEN FOUNDATION

J O U R N A L



Robert Brasington

Cathedral in the Sky

Living deep in the bush in Tasmania, Australian Rob Brasington manages to turn out cutting edge kites renowned among collectors worldwide. His Blue Cathedral is one of the Cathedral series he flies at international festivals, to universal acclaim. Gothic churches with their pointy spires, arch entrances, and flying buttresses are his inspiration. Brasington kites are notable not only for shape but color. The kitemaker uses hues close in the color spectrum to great effect. For more about this interesting kitemaker and his peaceable kingdom among strange Aussie flora and fauna, see Page 6.

The Journal Staff



Scott Skinner, president of the Drachen Foundation, is a former pilot instructor at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He has been a kite enthusiast for two decades—designing, making, flying, collecting, and teaching about kites.

Ali Fujino is the administrator of Drachen. A museum specialist since age 19 when she began work at the Smithsonian Institution, she has long been fascinated with anything that could become airborne. Fujino has recently been elected a member of the prestigious Explorers Club of New York City in recognition of her 25 years of cultural work in Third World countries.



Editor of the Drachen Journal, well traveled **Ben Ruhe** regularly contributes articles to special interest publications on subjects as diverse as boomerangs, tribal art and flint-knapping.

Note to readers: Articles in this issue of the Drachen Foundation Journal not bylined were written by editor Ben Ruhe.

Joining Spirit to Physical

The simple kite is a vehicle which speaks of the joining of the spirit and the physical. Kites are tools, mediums of expression in space, meditations on space: structures and surfaces, colors and forms interacting---visual, aural, tactile. The kite's flying line connects the human hand and mind with the elements. Kites offer artists unparalleled opportunity to play, to explore, to experiment, manipulating scale and distance, making an immense space visible, unlocking the imagination.

Art Volant symposium, Mallorca, 1995

How to Find This Journal

The Drachen Foundation Journal can be read online or printed out, as desired. To read it, bring up www.drachen.org, and click on Journal icon. An Adobe Acrobat Reader is needed for viewing or printing out the publication. It is available for a free download at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>

The Drachen Foundation:

Kite Archives, Science and Culture

The Drachen Foundation is devoted to the increase and diffusion of knowledge about kites worldwide. A 501(c)(3) private nonprofit corporation, Drachen views kites from the standpoint of art, culture, science and history. It uses an integrated program of exhibitions, education, research, collections management, and publications to promote learning about kites. The archive it maintains is freely open to the public for research.

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Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

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A Word From the President

After its first decade of existence this year, the Drachen Foundation continues to evolve nicely. With such a small, sharp focus on kites, one wouldn't think it would be so diverse. But almost every week we go "wow!" It continues to be exciting, there is always something new, something with questions we can't answer.

We have a track record now. We've established credibility in the global kite world.

I think it's exciting that we're really, truly an international organization. We've held events in Europe and Asia. We've sent representatives to kite events almost all over the world. We're continuing out photo documentation. We support serious research projects. We buy appropriate examples of kites. Drachen has encouraged people to keep their kite cultures alive.

While building our collections, documentation is our major focus. We've been given some wonderful archival donations-----from Holland, Japan, India.

Ali Fujino, the administrator, has a great ability to get information, to work projects through to a conclusion, to get real results.

The beauty of our organization is that we're small enough to do what we feel needs doing. We can do projects at a level of our interests. Our level of expectation is high, but achievable.

Between the various members of the small office staff, the foundation can now deal with several languages, including Japanese..

We've literally just begun our work. The kite is a common object in pursuit of the airplane. The kite was the first step. It's an important flying toy. It brings an understanding of aerodynamics and flight.

The future? We're working hard to get our information into manageable forms. In this day, that means digital formats. This permits retrieval and distribution.

Our long term goal is to make all of our information available via the World Wide Web. This is an achievable goal.

At the programming level, we are taking kites to a broader audience. We have held kite workshops where kites haven't penetrated before. Exhibitions and publications are a part of this diffusion of information. That's where we need to be----looking at the greater public.

Ten years after the foundation was established, I thought it would lead to interesting discoveries and projects, but I've been thrilled with the projects we're completed----publications, workshops, exhibits, research studies. All of them exceeded my expectations.

My greatest pleasure? How the world has opened up. There's always more out there to discover; to learn. And that's great fun.



*Scott R. Skinner
President of the Drachen Foundation*

About Scott Skinner

Born and raised in Raton, New Mexico, in the American Southwest, where his father was a lawyer, Scott Skinner, now 50, graduated from the United States Air Force Academy and served 7 1/2 years as a flight officer, achieving the rank of captain. Initially a KC135 tanker co-pilot, he returned to the academy as a pilot-instructor flying low and slow “bug-smasher” T41s. Leaving the Air Force, Skinner earned a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Denver and settled into a career as manager of family investments. He and wife Sheridan have three children, now grown. They live in Monument, Colorado, within sight of Pike’s Peak.

Skinner has been pursuing his kite hobby since 1975, “begun as a relief from flying planes and because of a continuing fascination with aerodynamics,” he says. He began making kites intensively after learning to sew. “Living in Colorado is conducive to kitemaking,” he says. “It’s cold and windy from October through February and that’s when I build kites.”

Skinner hit on the concept of combining traditional American patchwork bed quilt designs with traditional Japanese



Scott Skinner visits the Taj Mahal in Agra with one of his elaborate kites. Skinner hit on combining Japanese shapes, here the Sode kimono style, with the look of traditional American patchwork quilts.

kite forms to create a unique West-East hybrid. From this evolved the reproduction of images from Japanese paintings, such as fish or water motifs, that when pieced together in new combinations formed surprising, pleasing juxtapositions. A meticulous craftsman, Skinner's large Rokkakus, Edos, hexagons, octagons and, latterly, paper miniatures have won him widespread acclaim.

Early on, Skinner began collecting prime examples of contemporary American kites, starting with creations by his first kite friend, Reza Ragheb, of Aurora, Colorado, and this trove assumed an international character when Skinner made a 1988 pilgrimage to the kite capital of Weifang where he bought 25 Chinese traditionals. Since then he has acquired widely around the world and now has some 700 specimens, a significant number of which he judges to be of museum quality. Skinner's collection is quite separate from the collection being assembled by the Drachen Foundation, in Seattle, Washington, of which he is the president.

He collects memorabilia of the sport as well and has stamps, posters, enamelware, patches, books, periodicals, flying gear, kitemaking tools. His holding of Japanese prints with a kite motif is such high quality that a coffee table book of reproductions documenting the trove has been published. Artists such as Hokusai and Hiroshige are represented.

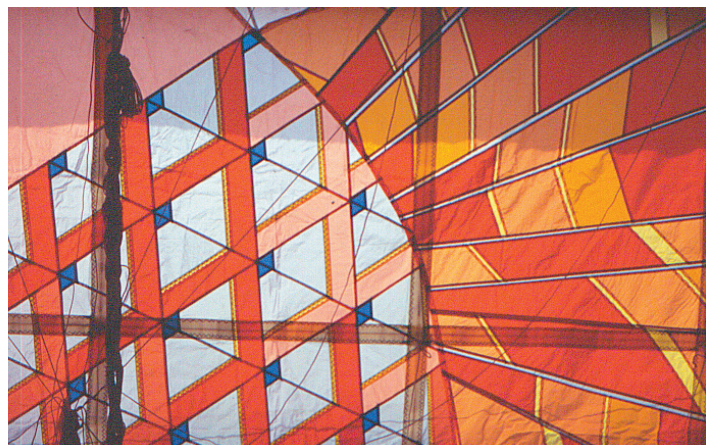
Wanting to share his passion, Skinner has exhibited choice kites at schools and elsewhere and has lent extensively to Drachen Foundation traveling exhibitions of kites. "I intend for as many people to see as many of my kites as possible," he says.

Bearded, tall, strong, exceptionally articulate, Skinner is noted for his sense of humor and general good cheer. He is a public speaker of note. He can also surprise with the appropriate gesture. When asked a while back to sing a typical American song at an embassy event in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in connection with a book on Khmer kites Drachen had helped fund, Skinner announced to the diplomats that singing was not his strong point, "but I do dance." He then proceeded to give a solo demonstration of ballroom dancing which drew him enthusiastic applause.

Asked about favorite kitemakers and kites, Skinner singles out George Peters, of Boulder, Colorado, Peter Malinski, of Germany, Martin Lester, of England, Peter Travers, of Australia. Also, Frank Schwiemann and Christine Schwarting, of Germany, Robert Trepanier, of Canada, and Anna Rubin, of Austria. In Japan, he thinks the bee kites of Sato and Hashimoto, the miniatures of Yoshizumi, and the Edos of Toki are outstanding. He feels there are too many wonderful kitemakers in China for him to make a choice. Malaysian and Indonesian, particularly Balinese, kites are among other favorites.

Skinner's extensive travels all over the world to kite events have enabled him to make valued friends and to acquire extensive knowledge about kiting. "In what appears to be a narrow and focused field there is such surprising cultural, artistic, and historical depth," he says.

Detail of a Skinner kite.



Gothic Cathedrals Fly in Tasmania

By Ali Fujino and Ben Ruhe

In 1993, Robert Brasington and wife Tracey had excellent jobs in England as horticulturists, he as production manager of a major firm, she as a department manager. They had saved up a fair amount of money, “enough capital to comfortably set us up in business,” he says.

There was a rub. Born and raised in Australia, the quality of life they had in England didn’t measure up for them. They decided to move back to Oz to live. They chose the island of Tasmania, southernmost of the Australian states and Rob’s birthplace and childhood home, and with their nest-egg were able to acquire 25 acres of mostly bush land several miles from a north coast fishing port, two hours from the city of Launceston. Included on the property was a modern brick house.



Robert Brasington

It was quiet country-living with a vengeance, just what they sought. Birds and animals----many exotic by Western standards----were everywhere. Neighbors were few. Peace and calm prevailed.

Having taken up kite flying and then designing some years before, Rob planned for Tracey and himself to support themselves making and selling kites. And they set to work, the pair producing production two-line stunt kites they successfully market in Australia and overseas, Rob working at night creating original single-line kites of a quality and range of imagination that have placed him in the ranks of the world’s foremost designers. He often works to commissions and also sells at kite festivals he attends around the world.

“We don’t have a mortgage and we don’t have children,” says Rob. “We have a simple life and we love it.”

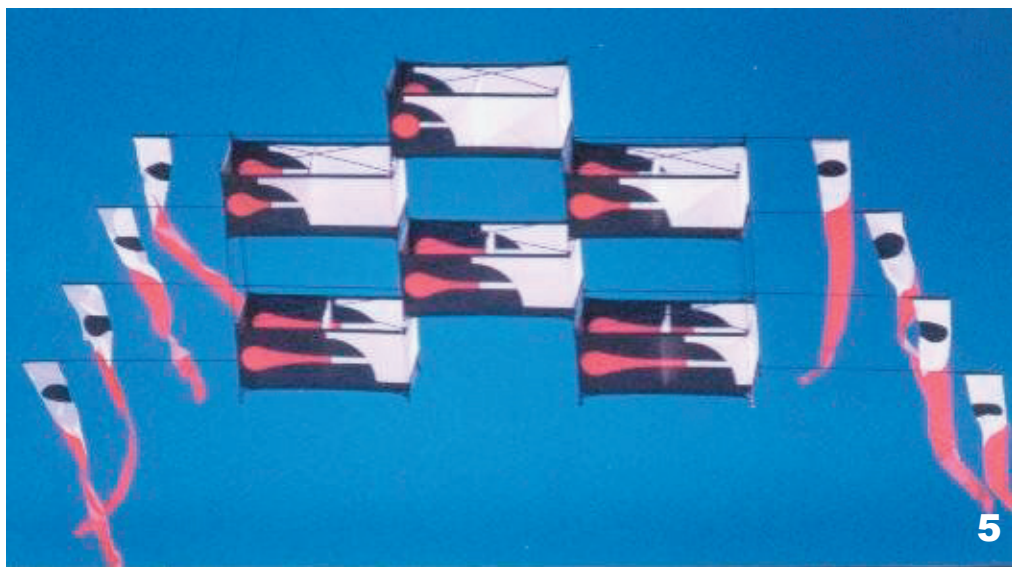
Bird and animal lovers drool over the resident fauna on the Brasington property. “We have parrots, cockatoos, several types of rosellas, blue wrens, flame robins, honeyeaters, firetails with blood red under their tails. The green rosellas have eight colors-----including a red patch and buttercup-yellow and kingfisher-blue bits.”

Four-legged fauna ranges from Tasmanian devils to wombats, marsupial possums to spiny echidnas----one of only two monotremes in the world. Monotremes, the other one is the duckbilled platypus, are animals that lay eggs. “We protect our two-acre garden of ornamentals----no vegetables----with a high fence to keep out the kangaroos and wallabies. Otherwise the three dogs, two whippets and an Italian greyhound named Lois, Roxanne and Simone, would leave too much blood on the track. They don’t kill the Tasmanian devils though, but when they touch them, the dogs stink too much. Too bloody right.”

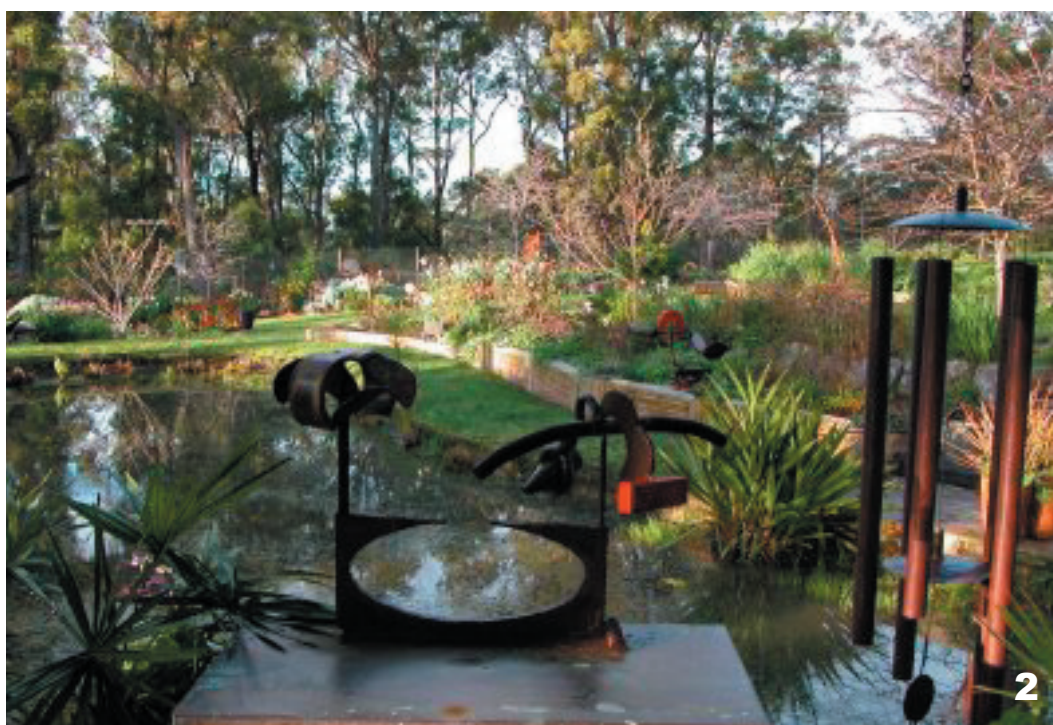
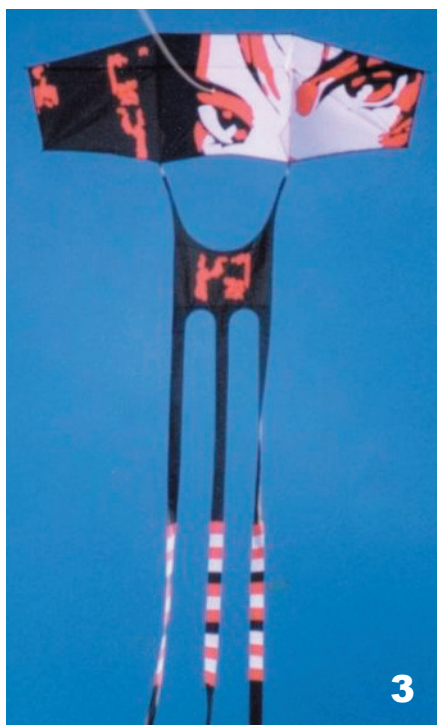


Brasington bird kites (from left): Welcome Swallow, Atlantic Puffin, Scarlet Macaw.

All photos by Kiyomi Okawa



1. White doves fly in a peace train. 2. The Brasington frog pond. 3. The Akira kite. 4. Rob Brasington and wife Tracey stroll on a beach near their home. 5. Brasington's version of a compound Hargrave Boxkite.



All photos by Robert Brasington



1. American Patrick Rock came to visit and left behind several dramatic steel sculptures. 2. The guesthouse overlooks a lovely collection of plants and trees. 3. "The girls"----two whippets and a greyhound, who join with a fence in guarding the ornamental garden from kangaroos, wombats, possums, and echidnas.



Because both Tracey and Rob are horticulturists with wide professional contacts, the garden is crammed with interesting plants-----bamboos, grasses, succulents (“not cacti,” says Rob with professional exactitude). There are ponds and stonework by Brasington. Sculptures crafted by Oregonian Patrick Rock “are in the Mark di Suvero mode,” i.e., odds and ends of metal welded together to create an expressive whole.

“We live in the Roaring 40s,” he notes, “so temperatures are cool.” The Roaring Forties is a band of latitude where the wind blows around the southern hemisphere almost unimpeded by continental land. “There are occasional land gales. I don’t worry. If we lose a plant, we just get on with it, plant something else. This is called ‘copping it sweet,’ which is an old Australianism and means taking things in stride. It’s probably rhyming slang. I don’t know the derivation but I’ll give you a good example of rhyming slang: An American is called a ‘sepo,’ as in ‘septic tank---Yank.’”

Since Tasmania faces Antarctica, the island has resident and visiting populations of penguins, and Rob visits the nearby rookeries to observe and be entertained. With tuxedo dress and pompous walk, penguins are a charm to watch.

Altogether, the many beautiful, strange birds have inspired him mightily and he has done a collection of kites documenting many of the Tasmanian species, and then, branching out, some of the endangered species around the world. These smallish bird kites are flown either in train or individually. Either way, they are snapped up by collectors for their beauty, craftsmanship, and flyability. Everything Brasington makes flies well. That’s a given with him.

Attracted to the Orient, another Brasington theme is fan kites. More recently, he has become an admirer of the work of the internationally renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava of New York City Trade Center fame and Rob’s small white Arch kite pays the Spaniard tribute.

Tending to work to a relatively few themes, the lean, energetic, good-humored, fiftyish Brasington is perhaps best known for a series of large, three-dimensional cellular kites he calls Cathedrals, because the Gothic cathedral with its pointy spires, arch entrances, and flying buttresses are the inspiration for them. Besides having eye-catching shapes, the Cathedrals are notable for their color. “I like shades, shading,” he says. “I’ll use five shades of mauve for one kite, five shades of blue for another. I use colors that are close in the color spectrum.” Brasington’s Cathedrals are a focal point of any festival fly----- large, gorgeous, dramatic, rock-steady in flight.

His kites tend to draw connoisseurs into conversation with the designer. An intellectual and an esthete, as well as an outgoing Aussie, Brasington proves a fascinating conversationalist. His drawl is distinctly Down Under----- “tails” is rendered “tiles.”

Brasington’s background is unusual. Having moved from Tasmania to Adelaide as a teenager with his two sisters and professional athlete father, a sometime greyhound trainer, as well as a plumber when serious money was needed, Brasington discovered surfing. Adelaide was three miles from the water. “For me, surfing became a way of life,” he says. “It was an absolute. It dictated the way you dressed, what you did. Drinking alcohol was very uncool. Surfing was a way of thinking, of independence. It was taking life really casually, not getting stressed out. It was dedication-----clothes and money were not important. It was like a religion. I went on surfing safaris every weekend. There were some competitions, but mainly I did surfing for surfing’s sake. This went on for years. What finally split us boys up was girls-----some of the guys took girls along. That ended things for me.”

Brasington eventually made the traditional Aussie budget land pilgrimage from Australia to England, including a \$60 bus trip from Nepal to Greece. He visited a sister doing an advanced degree at Cambridge, toured around, then returned to Adelaide to complete high school and begin university studies in math. Academics was not for him and he returned to Tasmania, met and married Tracey and the two emigrated to England where they became

horticulturists. Brasington discovered the four-line Revolution kite in 1989 and his conversion to the sport evolved from there, until it became dominant.

His take on the fabled Rev is interesting. “I think it’s a boring kite, just stop, start, no fluidity, disjointed exercises.” He switched over to two-line stunters and found he liked them a lot more. “They are sympathetic to the environment, more fluid. When I met kitemaker Tim Benson in England, I discovered what workmanship was all about. Compared to Benson’s kites, my Hawaiian Team kite was primitive. I learned how to craft kites from Benson.

“Two-liners became tedious for me after Tracey and I moved back to Tasmania. I had been to Long Beach, Washington, in the early ‘90s and I saw all the weird, wonderful shapes there. I was a dual-liner then. I put my stunter down and just wandered the beach, head skywards, bewildered by all those wonderful single-line kites appearing out of the mist. Great memories. All two-line pilots end up doing something with single-line stuff. It’s inevitable! It’s *written*!

“In 1997, I worked to put cell kites together into modern versions of Hargrave kites.” Invited to festivals where he consistently won prizes, he met innovator George Peters of Colorado in New Zealand and took in European styles in Dampf, Germany. “I now looked seriously at kites and decided to emulate Gothic buildings with their tall spires, clover windows, curved vaulting. That’s when I began making three-by-three-meter Cathedrals. They look very complicated, but they are not. They use stunt kite fittings snap-locked together. I stick with ripstop and carbon fiber. No bamboo for me.”

As to his future, Brasington says he wants to continue designing kites. “I don’t want an empire. As long as I’m creating what I want to make and there’s a small market for it, I’m a happy camper. At the end of the day, kiteflying has to be fun for me. And it is.”

Meteorologist at Blue Hill Dies; Recorded 2nd Highest Gust Ever

In a career spanning almost 70 years, meteorologist John H. Conover, who died recently at age 88, pioneered radar and time lapse photographic studies at the famous Blue Hill Weather Observatory in Milton, Massachusetts, near Boston, and was the observer on duty during a hurricane in 1938 when wind speeds of 121 mph were recorded over a five minute period and a gust of 186 mph measured, the second highest wind ever recorded in the world.

After serving as acting director, Conover was instrumental in saving historical and scientific items from Blue Hill when Harvard University withdrew some of its support from the observatory after World War II. The world-renowned library was divided between Harvard and various other repositories and historic instruments such as an original Hargrave kite went to the university.

Organized in the 1880s, Blue Hill for many years flew large kites in train with scientific gear on board to gather weather data. It was the scene of important experiments by William Eddy, inventor of the kite that bears his name.

In recent years, Blue Hill, which has never missed a day of work since its founding, has received some education aid from the Drachen Foundation. Scott Skinner, president of Drachen, serves on the Blue Hill board.

In retirement, John Conover wrote the definitive “The Blue Hill Observatory: The First 100 years, 1885-1985.” His series of articles beginning in 1952 “Are New England Winters Getting Warmer?” is being reprinted as a memorial to him by the observatory.

Bat Catching in Java

On a visit to the west coast of Java some years ago, Philippe Cottenceau of the French kite association Au fil des Vents saw a traditional, probably quite ancient use of a kite not many Westerners have reported on. He saw a kite being used to catch food. Bats, to be precise.

The scene was the village of Pangandaran, west of Jakarta, where an annual international kite festival is held.

"It was twilight, the end of the day, between dogs and fogs," says Cottenceau, a poet as well as distinguished kitemaker, "and the sky was black." Flying foxes, or fruit bats, had awakened and were streaming from their sleeping spots in trees and elsewhere toward food sites. They flew in a column stretching from horizon to horizon.

"Young men on the beach were flying large fighter kites, about one meter by one meter, and one guy got his kite up to the level of the kites, at this moment rather low, some 200 meters up the air," says Cottenceau. "The bats looked very big, because they were!" Flying foxes have a wingspan of six feet.

"For a while, the bats avoided the kite easily, apparently using their built-in sonar, but the guy let out line and flew the kite higher, well above the bats. Now only the line with its several attached fishhooks was on a level with the bats and they apparently couldn't detect the threat because it was so thin. Now was the moment to make the catch.

"Suddenly I saw a bat lurch. It was hooked and unable to fly normally. The kite line was pulled in swiftly. At 20 meters high, the guy stopped reeling in and the bat did pendulum swoops, trying violently to escape the hook.

"Two small boys who had been summoned dashed up and the man now pulled in the rest of the line. When the bat was at head level, the boys grabbed for the wingtips, one left, another right. They pulled the kite down flat on the sand, pinned it there, and the hook was cut. With each boy holding a wingtip, they immediately ran away with the prey, because bat-catching is now illegal. I understood they were taking the bat to a nearby Chinese restaurant, where it would be eaten as a delicacy.

"The flying fox had a face between a rat and a dog. With a body not much bigger than a rat, the bat appeared to be dangerous, as it snapped its teeth back and fourth viciously.

"The guy with the kite relaunched in a new try at bat-catching. Then the boys reappeared without the bat, excited and triumphant at the catch that had been made."

Cottenceau concludes: "I had just seen a little moment in old kite history re-enacted right before my eyes."

Plain Talk From Down Under

Editor's note: The author of the following essays is a noted kite designer and international exhibition flier. He lives in Ashburton, New Zealand.

A Benign Face of Islam

By Peter Lynn

The excellent Pasir Gudang festival in Johor State at the Singapore end of Malaysia is growing and getting better every year; there were more than 140 invited international fliers there last February. Festival organizers are rightly pleased with how well it's working and are committed to making this event even stronger in years to come. The chairman of the Johor development corporation in his address at the after-match function articulated a main rationale for this event as showing a face of Islam to contrast with the terrorist images that we are subject to day after day in the international media.

In this, the Pasir Gudang festival is completely successful, presenting a Malaysia that is friendly, outward-looking, and increasingly prosperous.

Developing friendships between international and local kitefliers surely makes it easier, on both sides, to put aside those dark tribal thoughts that seem to spring to mind unbidden when we are immersed exclusively in our own cultures.

I noted Malaysia is becoming prosperous. We met a Kiwi family who live near Pasir Gudang, as part of the joint New Zealand-Malaysian defense forces arrangement (they saw the New Zealand Flag kites flying and followed the line to us). Their next door neighbor in the high rise apartment they are supplied with has one parking space allocated to him. Consequently, since his Ferrari arrived, he's had to leave the Porsche out in the street.

The Great Race

Daughter Kerri Lynn, home from Wellington, decided to organize some extertainment down on the back paddock. Originally it was just to be a race between the old's mobility scooter and our ride-on lawn mower, but entry was soon opened to include a tractor, another lawn mower, Chris' derelict "push-me" motorcycle, a replica of the first-ever motor car, a bicycle, and, wait for it, a gas turbine-powered kite buggy. By the form card, the tractor had 65 horsepower, the buggy 60, motorcycle 15, lawnmowers 14.5, Benz 3/4th, and mobility scooter 1/2.

A crowd had gathered by mid-afternoon but the start was long delayed when the 1886 replica Benz wouldn't start (no spark and a stuck exhaust valve). These problems were eventually overcome and there is no truth to the suggestion that this delay on the Benz team's part was just an attempt to further confuse and befuddle the opposition by causing them to hang around longer in the "refreshment area."

The start was chaotic to say the least and there was no clear consensus, amongst spectators and competitors, even after the event, as to whether there had actually been one race or two or what the course had been. Nor was crowd control perfect, with the very young and the very old persons wandering amongst entrants even during racing, and disruption by rowdies encamped beside the track.



Peter Lynn

Ben Kuke



Start of the great race in Peter Lynn's back paddock in Ashburton, New Zealand.

Calls for the Rover gas turbine-powered buggy to be disqualified because its jet stream and noise were deliberately used to confuse and retard competitors to its rear, failed when the protest committee couldn't hear the protest on account of having become deaf. In another incident, one competitor abandoned his Massey Ferguson tractor, with front end loader, part way through the race and then made a strong finish on an old bicycle.

Who won and who lost? The Benz, with William Datlen, youngest competitor at 11 years on the tiller, acquitted itself well but lost marginally on acceleration and cornering. The mobility scooter, helmed by Bob Lynn, the oldest competitor at 89, won by competitive straight line speed, clearly superior cornering, and cunning strategy. The gas turbine buggy was clearly last on the day, having barely sufficient thrust to surmount even indiscernible slopes and required the occasional help from an ever attendant pusher. The theory wonks advise adding a nozzle and water injection to increase its thrust, but I'm not so sure. Then I'll have to add brakes.

Laser Problems

Having Scottish ancestry, as I do, can have consequences at times----like the apparently inescapable genetic programming by which hands are very reluctant to reach into pockets. Of course, the Scots aren't the only nationality with a reputation for being canny, the Dutch are also renowned for arms that become inexplicably short on occasion.

Anyway, I'm blaming a combination of ancestry and long association with the Dutch for a decision we made a few months ago to build a computer-controlled laser kite cutting table rather than buy one off the shelf. So, the laser head itself was ordered from the U.S. (second hand of course) and duly arrived.

Unfortunately, it was damaged in transit and wouldn't fire. The supplier said was the shipper's fault and the shipper said was the supplier's fault because the packaging was inadequate and its insurance company wouldn't even acknowledge the shipper existed; and at our end, Elwyn said that Jenny was sorting it, Jenny said Chris was, and Chris said it was up to Elwyn. After three or four months of all this duck-shoving----during which I played my usual supportive role by yelling at everyone indiscriminately----and with all other avenues exhausted, it was last resort time.

Yep, time to read the manual. So there was Chris, innards exposed (the laser's that is), the book propped open in front of him, poking around with a pointed thing to see what flinched.

No joy, sniff-er, sniff, SNIFF?----and what's that neat hole through the wall into the bathroom with smoking coming out of it that wasn't there a minute ago----!

Problem solved.

And an embarrassment. I had occasion to sort through some early photos, and came across pictures of a monohull I'd built about 1992 and completely forgotten about. It had forward steering, and an anti-heeling kite attachment system that is near to exactly the same system I developed for the latest monohull. It's bad enough inventing something then later finding out that someone has beaten you to it, but doing it to yourself! I must be losing my marbles, but maybe they're still there somewhere. If only my arms were longer, maybe I could find them.

Oh, and we've been trying out some kites in a new material----aluminum. Yes really, can't walk around here without tripping over them just now. But I'm not allowed to talk about this.

Patent Woes

What do you know about patents? Want to be depressed? Read on.

Originally monopolies over some product or service granted at the whim of royalty to those in their favor or for a cut of the proceeds (that is, a bribe), patents have evolved into a sort of social contract between inventors and the state. A balance has been struck. In return for being granted a limited monopoly (maximum of 20 years) on an original invention, the inventor is required to publish a complete description and ensure by way of manufacturing or licensing that sufficient are available to meet public demand.

Without some period of exclusivity, that is if every new thing could immediately be copied by anyone who wished to, inventing is uneconomic. And the rewards for those things that do work have to be high enough to pay for all the attempts that don't as well.

Countries that do not have enforceable intellectual property law do not produce innovations at anything like the rate per capita of countries that do.

Of course, most inventors are driven by obsessive curiosity, not by any realistic prospect of making a living, but not having enough for the odd bottle of half decent red can tend to sap perseverance over the long haul.

And of course the potential fortunes to be made are talked up to keep spouses, supporters, and investors on side. But the sad truth is that the total returns to all inventors for all their work is almost certainly less than what they spend, probably even less than their patenting costs.

The first problem is that patents are incredibly expensive to get and maintain. Don't be fooled by the initial application fee, which gets quoted at the outset----it's likely to be about 1 percent of the final total.

The second problem is that they are incredibly expensive to defend. The state grants the patent, but it takes no part in stopping infringers except by way of providing a court system, which you pay for the privilege of using.

The third problem is that originality is no guarantee of making money. Very many new ideas don't ever find a commercial niche, and it's rarely clear at the beginning, when all the money has to be invested, whether something is going to be commercially successful or not.

The fourth problem is that it is never possible to be sure whether some new idea is really original. It's usually

possible to discover if an invention has already been disclosed in some prior patent, but it's never possible to be sure that it hasn't been described and published somewhere obscure, but not patented, and this stops a new grant just as surely. Even five years after a patent is granted, an earlier disclosure can come to light that will cause the grant to be withdrawn. And you don't get your money back!

The fifth problem is that patents irk people. Most people, myself included, get really annoyed when they want to do something but find they are prevented because someone, somewhere has a patent on it.

Depressing, isn't it? Why am I going on about all this?

About the New Kite

The latest kite is a soft, 6.5-by-10-meter Stars and Stripes, the prototype for what may be the new world's largest kite. Our plan is to make one 25-by-40-meters (about 900 square meters, comfortably larger than the Mega-Byte or Mega-Ray which are each 635 square meters) and to fly it at various (mainly non-kite world) events around the globe.

We have now filed applications for two separate patents on the Flag style kite. By the usual system, these initial filings are in our home country (New Zealand) but will proceed to foreign filings as per the required timetable for international coverage. Actually, while they cover the key original ideas that I believe make kites of this form possible, these applications look to be much wider in scope and are likely to have beneficial consequences for many other soft single line kites.

In the meantime, to make the design principles available to amateur kitemakers in an orderly manner without opening a door that could eventually prevent our enjoyment of any commercial benefits, we propose to offer consecutively numbered license labels free to kite clubs and associations. These groups will then be able to offer these labels to their members, on a one-at-a-time basis, relieving us of the administrative nightmare that doing all this from New Zealand would entail, and hopefully becoming a minor but useful source of income for the clubs. We will not provide plans with the label, but will work with bona fide clubs by offering helpful suggestions in preparing such plans.



Both photos by Peter Lynn

Lynn's huge Mega-Ray (left) is topped easily by the new Stars and Stripes, prototype for the world's largest kite.

Kites Photographing Whales Up Close

In one of its more adventurous research projects, the Drachen Foundation is funding Mexican marine biologist Oscar Frey in his study of the impact of humans on humpback whales. In its test phase in the Bay of Bandaras, north of Acapulco, Frey joined French photographer Nico Chorier and Drachen Administrator Ali Fujino in making kite aerial videos and still photographs of the giant whales.

Going out to sea daily in a heaving 27-foot boat was real punishment, says Fujino, and seasickness was rife. But the team carried on without a hitch.

One plus was the sightings at sea of giant manta rays, numerous turtles, and schools of dolphins. One school of 200 spent a half hour cavorting about the vessel. Then there were the 45-foot whales.

“Whales are beautiful, powerful, smart and big,” says Fujino. “It was exciting watching them in action. Oscar Frey can ‘read’ them. He’s amazing. He can smell and feel them.”

Chorier, the photographer, used a Rokkaku kite as his platform and from it made streaming videos and single lens reflex still shots. A video hookup in the boat permitted Chorier to judge when to activate his equipment.



Tourist boats approach much closer than the law permits to view this pair of humpback whales off the coast of Mexico.

Because a kite can be flown well downwind of the boat, it can be stationed over the target without intrusion. Thus the boat can stay well outside of the minimum 100 meter approach distance mandated by law to save the whales from harassment. Close contact with humans seriously affects their well being.

During the course of its studies, the Drachen group repeatedly obtained visual proof that tourist boats were breaking the law by approaching far too close to the whales. With these photos, the Foundation is working with Mexican officials to impose sanctions against trespassing vessels.

The whale project is on-going and will resume as the giant animals swim off the U.S. coast enroute to calving grounds in the north.

Success Story in Cambodia

After its total suppression by the Khmer Rouge, kiting has made a resounding comeback in Cambodia. Last year a national kite museum was opened in the capital Phnom Penh with His Excellency Ouk Socheat, undersecretary of state for culture, presiding. Educational workshops for children at the museum were initiated and judged a great success. School tours of the facility began. And an annual kite festival bloomed with 80 enthusiastic participants. This kite activity parallels the revival of other unique Cambodian cultural manifestations such as Khmer royal dance and the country's classic cuisine. All were victims of the Khmer Rouge, whose infamous Maoist rule from 1975-79 caused 1.7 million deaths in the small country, including most members of the educated classes.

The major figure in the return of kiting as not only a sport but also an important symbol of Cambodian cultural identity is Sim Sarak, director general for administration of the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Arts. Sim was an enthusiastic flier as a boy and never forgot this early fascination. He has been greatly aided by his wife Tcheang Yarin.

Another landmark in the resurgence of kiting in the Southeast Asian nation was the recent publication-----in Khmer, French, and English-----of a scholarly book on Cambodian kites. This excellent, well illustrated work was written jointly by Sim and Tcheang, both of whom know English and French. The English-language version of the volume was supported by the Drachen Foundation. Drachen has also given funds to the museum for educational purposes, such as workshops and the purchase of a computer, copier, and other useful equipment.

Ali Fujino, administrator of Drachen, worked with the Cambodians and pronounces the joint, wide-ranging project successful beyond her hopes. "They're total stars," she says of the Cambodian group. "They had a goal and a focus and they carefully orchestrated the project from start to finish. Their collaboration with each other and with Drachen was exemplary. Able people in the field completed tasks assigned them. There was no deviation. This was a case of nationals doing it on their own, and doing it well. As the leaders, Sarak and Yarin had the passion, not uncommon in third world countries, but also the skills, often lacking, to complete a grand plan. They and their group have my deepest respect."



The new kite museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

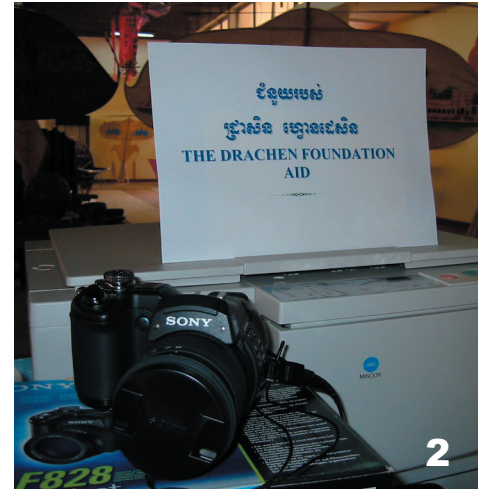
1. Glorious Angkor Wat in north Cambodia, with dancers posed in the foreground. Royal court dance was one of the Cambodian traditions almost wiped out by the Khmer Rouge, but now undergoing a rebirth. Another is traditional kiting. 2. A grant to the new kite museum in the capital Phnom Penh from the Drachen Foundation receives formal recognition. 3. Young Khmer fliers. 4. Workshops teach traditional kitemaking. 5. The Drachen gift was used to buy electronic and other educational equipment. Assembled in the museum, it was blessed at a ceremony by His Excellency Ouk Socheat. He is flanked by Sim Sarak and wife Tcheang Yarin, who are chiefly responsible for the successful governmental kite program.



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