



THE REAL
'Mlle. de Sombreuil' (Tea, 1850)

The '*Sombreuil*' Saga One Step Forward — Three Steps Back

*"The ARS Classification Committee has concluded that the rose sold in the United States and elsewhere as '**Sombreuil**' is not the same as the cultivar named '**Mlle. de Sombreuil**' originally introduced as a tea rose by M. Robert in 1850. The cultivar currently grown and purchased in the United States under the name '**Sombreuil**' is, in fact, a Large-Flowered Climber introduced into the United States, circa 1880, that does not have the typical Tea fragrance, shrub growth form, and the winter tenderness of the 1850 cultivar.*

*To correct this confusion, the Classification Committee has ruled that the name '**Mlle de Sombreuil**' (Synonym '**La Biche**') will be retained as the approved exhibition name (AEN) for the 1850 shrub-form Tea, and that the name '**Sombreuil**' be used as the AEN for the LCI, typically grown and sold in the United States.*

With this change, 'Sombreuil' (LCI) will no longer be eligible for the Dowager Queen award, and must be exhibited in the Climber class."

("AMERICAN ROSE" MAGAZINE, NOVEMBER, 2006)

When the news arrived in November, 2006, we were very pleased. At LAST, ARS was recognizing the true "creamy white" Tea Rose introduced by Robert (in France) in 1850 or 1851.

Named '*Mlle. de Sombreuil*,' perhaps the third rose named for the family Sombreuil, this Tea Rose honored a heroine of the French Revolution. It's parentage was un-recorded, but contemporary descriptions hinted at Bourbon parentage on at least one side of its pedigree. It was described as being "*The hardiest and most vigorous of the white Teas, and free from mildew.*" (per Brent Dickerson, *The Old Rose Advisor*)

— Continue



Within a few years, the rose's name was shortened in common usage to "*Sombreuil*."

In the mid-20th-Century, (probably some time around 1945-1947) the original *'Mlle. de Sombreuil'* was somehow replaced in commerce by a vigorous, fragrant climbing rose.

The climbing imposter bloomed in a color similar to the original rose, but its bloom form and fragrance were very different. The original rose was considered to be fairly hardy — for a Tea. The imposter, even hardier, was adopted enthusiastically, and — eventually — distributed globally. At that point, nursery descriptions of *'Sombreuil'* changed from "*vigorous*" to "*Climber*." (Those who grow Bush Form Tea Roses in mild climates understand just how "*vigorous*" they can be, without being Climbers!)

Most Old Rose people have known for a long time that the handsome climber, with its Wichuriana characteristics, was not the original *'Mlle. de Sombreuil'* introduced in 1850/1851. The American Rose Society has, at last, agreed with this. The change in the November "*American Rose*" Magazine.

The climber will now be classed as a Large-Flowered Climber (LCI), name: *'Sombreuil'*:

'Sombreuil'* / *'La Biche'

ARS further announced that a rose which has been for some years sold as *'La Biche'* (Noisette, 1832, Woollier, France) is the true *'Mlle. de Sombreuil'*.

How did that happen? The confusion of names resulted from the erroneous identification of a found rose. The true *'La Biche'* is not known to be in commerce in the United States at this time. It may (or may NOT) be extinct. If you bought *'La Biche'* I congratulate you. You have *'Mlle. de Sombreuil.'*

So, ARS has now, for the most part, "*fixed it.*" Hooray! The faux *'Sombreuil'* has been a rose-show standout for decades, so this was a tough decision, and not a popular one among many exhibitors. They have our thanks.



OOPS!

After lengthy — occasionally passionate — discussions, some threatened **NEW** errors have been avoided. Errors of classification, errors of origin, these errors would have cast doubt on the validity of the upcoming twelfth edition of **Modern Roses**.

A couple of these “loose ends” remain unresolved.

1. The Date Problem

First, there’s the date — **1880** — which ARS is listing for introduction of the Modern Climber, **‘Sombreuil.’** Most who have studied the rose believe that it, like other hardy, Wichuriana-cross climbers, originated in the 20th-Century. More research is needed here — and it’s entirely possible that we will never know where this fine climber originated.

We now THINK that ARS will opt for “*Date unknown*” or “*Date disputed.*” This would be correct, as far as the facts that are currently known. It should raise no waves.

2. The Synonym Problem

This one remained un-resolved in late January — but we’re still hoping for accuracy.

At this time, ARS is calling **‘La Biche’**¹ a “*synonym*” of **‘Mlle. de Sombreuil.’** Oh dear! Yes, **‘Mlle. de Sombreuil’** has been sold as **‘La Biche.’** (Some nurseries still sell it under that name.) But the two roses are separate and distinct.

‘La Biche’ a Noisette, was introduced in 1832. Unusually detailed contemporary descriptions include: “*fine pillar rose . . . very dainty . . . stem purple . . . Borne on a moderately-long stem accompanied by a purplish bract . . . very remontant . . .*”

If and when the real **‘La Biche’** is returned to commerce, its listing as a “*synonym*” of **‘Mlle. de Sombreuil,’** will re-awaken THAT confusion. It’s a shame to see a new error of identity created, when an old one is corrected. I hope the MR12 committee thinks better of the “*synonym*” idea.

3. The ‘Colonial White’ Problem

As far as we know, **‘Colonial White’** is the final “loose end” in this saga.

There’s widespread agreement that the climber, **‘Colonial White,’** registered by Wyant in 1959, is identical to the newly-re-classed Large-Flowered Climber, **‘Sombreuil.’**

Accordingly, the AEN² **‘Colonial White’** will be invalidated.

Roses purchased as **‘Colonial White’** will be exhibited in the Large-Flowered Climber class at ARS Rose Shows, under the AEN **‘Sombreuil.’** (This change should be announced in “**American Rose**” Magazine for Jan. or Feb.)

If you don’t exhibit, you don’t care about the AEN part. You just need to know that the rose you bought as **‘Colonial White’** (LCI) is **‘Sombreuil,’** (LCI). Only the name has been changed . . .



'Mlle. de Sombreuil'
Tea Rose, Int. 1850-1851

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Oh, Well . . .

We're happy to see the real '*Mlle. de Sombreuil*' restored to her rightful name.

We're glad that a lovely Climbing Rose at last has a name and class of its own, and that a false name will be eliminated.

We remain hopeful that the remaining "*loose ends*" will have been eliminated, by the time **Modern Roses XII** rolls off the presses, some time this year.

If not, maybe a future team will get it right in **Modern Roses 13**. That would be some time in 2014.

— *Text and Photos by Jeri Jennings, Dec. 12, 2006*

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1. '*La Biche*' (Noisette, 1832, Toullier, France) "White with a pink heart . . ." "Flesh-white, large and full . . ." ". . . Form cupped; growth vigorous. A fine Pillar Rose." "Globular." "Stem purple; bushy, very vigorous; alternate leaves, petiole sharp . . ." ". . . purplish bract." ". long thorns which are very thick and pointed, light red in youth and brown in age, sometimes recurved, looking like the beak of a parakeet." ". . . stipules long and narrow, glabrous, finely ciliate with glandular hairs; . . ." (Dickerson, **Old Rose Advisor**, Pg. 215)

The true '*La Biche*' is not in commerce in the U.S. at this time (and may not be in Europe).

If you purchased '*La Biche*' in the U.S. in the 20th or 21st Centuries, CONGRATULATIONS! You have '*Mlle. de Sombreuil*.'

*“ . . . And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all
with leaves of myrtle . . . ”*

— Christopher Marlow

