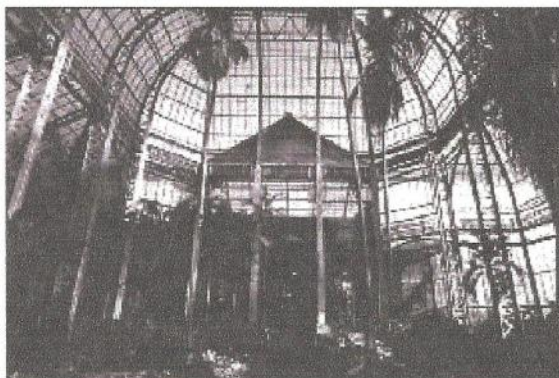


WHY ELSE GO... TO THE UNITED STATES BOTANIC GARDEN BY JENNIFER O'BOYLE



One of the wonderful benefits of living near the nation's capitol is the vast array of wonderful things to see and places to visit. One of the terrible downsides is that whenever out-of-towners visit, they want to see the same attractions over and over. Most tourist attractions are worth a visit or two, but more than that becomes a bore. Dropping the tourists off and heading out by yourself is certainly accepted, but that defeats the purpose of having friends and family visit. Chatting and interacting on the way to the next stop is often just as fun as the stop itself. So this series will give you a different perspective on some of the local attractions. While the family is admiring the traditional things, take a moment to look at something else...

Any tourist worth his weight will demand a trip to The Smithsonian. The Smithsonian Museums are some of the best in the world, and the collections are stunning. Any local knows that a trip to The Mall during tourist season will leave you exhausted. Added to that is the fact that, aside from new buildings or special exhibits, the museums just don't change that much. While seeing a moon rock or the Wright Brothers' plane certainly puts one's life in perspective, they both fall prey to 'been there, done that.'

So next time your friends demand a trip in to town, steer them two blocks past the Air and Space Museum, to the United States Botanic Garden's Conservatory. The little aluminum and glass building is

easy to overlook when admiring the grand Capitol Building and the impressive Smithsonian museums, but is worth the trip. Be warned though, it is considered part of the capitol, so you do have to go through a metal detector. No guns or knives allowed!

Once inside, let the little ones run free. There are signs warning that the plants and signs should not be disturbed, so don't let children climb on the planters. Several plants have pricklers or thorns and there are no warning labels, so you may want to keep very little children out of the desert room. The Garden Court's high ceilings and running water drown out all but the most determined screams. There are many benches to rest, and the controlled humidity can be wonderfully refreshing after a day running in and out of air conditioned buildings.

The Botanic Garden Conservatory was recently restored, and if you attended the last Art Deco Ball you had the chance to admire it. The restoration maintained the 1933 appearance, especially from the outside. The gleaming aluminum and glass are wonderfully art deco, and the little details are charming. The limestone facades are striking, and the fountains are wonderful. While cooling off in the Garden Court, be sure to look past the plants and note the tiles and carvings in the walls.

If the day isn't too hot, try going up to the catwalk – there is an elevator for anyone who can't manage the stairs. Avoid this side trip if you are troubled by heights and it is significantly hotter up there, but if possible go for the view. Not only do you get an unusual perspective on the climbing vines and trees, but you can look out towards the capitol and across the mall.

So the next time you are showing off your home town, or spending some time reacquainting yourself with downtown DC, be sure to take some time to cool off and admire some simple plants and quiet Art Deco architecture.

