The 19th World Orchid Conference and Show was held at the Sheraton Miami Mart Hotel and Exhibition Centre in Miami, Florida, USA between the 23rd and 27th January 2008. The theme of the event was ‘Orchids- Nature’s Masterpiece’. The host societies were the South Florida and Fort Lauderdale Orchid Societies, well known breeder and nurseryman Robert Fuchs was the President of the event. Compared with a wet and dreary United Kingdom, Miami was warm and welcoming; temperatures in the low seventies more than compensated for the occasional soaking.

At the entrance to the show was a display of orchids complete with resident flamingos and macaws, all live, flamboyant, colourful, and exotic; they set the general tone of the show. On walking into the exhibition hall, the visitor was greeted by an artificial gorge of limestone cliffs covered in white *Phalaenopsis* and blue purple *Vanda*. RF Orchids, Homestead, Florida was responsible for this spectacle. They won a gold medal and the Grand Champion exhibit trophy for their one thousand plus square foot extravaganza entitled ‘On the road to Mandalay.’ A traditional wooden carriage passed through the gorge on its way to an ornate golden shrine. In the shrine were choice treasures like *Ascocenda* Fat Tuesday with pretty speckled red flowers. Mature palms and ferns added to the overall effect.

The Reserve Champion and another Gold medal exhibit was created by Frank Smith and his team from the legendary Krull-Smith nursery, Apopka, Florida. Their astounding Japanese Garden complete with original ancient stone ornaments, brought back from Mr Smith’s family garden in Japan, stole the show. There was a bridge over a river of *Phrag. bessiae* unseasonally brought into flower for the show. At the corners of the display were life-like mature tree trunks sprouting orchid plants. The most striking of these was the evocation of a cherry tree made up of plants of the small pale pink *Phal.* Nobby’s Amy. Over eighteen trophies for class winners festooned the exhibit indicating the high quality of plants on this truly astounding display. Amongst them was the Grand Champion plant *Paph.* Michael Koopowitz with four spikes and five open flowers on each, the petals were 60cm long. There were many specimen *Paphiopedilum* plants including a large form of *Paph. lowii*. Other interesting hybrids included *Vanda* Roberts Delight ‘Black’ which was as the name suggested nearly black. The display also won, not surprisingly, the People’s Choice Award (voted for by visitors to the show) for best display.

A type of display rarely seen in the United Kingdom are Wardian Cases, not the small ones just a few feet in diameter of the old descriptions but more elaborate affairs; ten feet tall by seven and a half feet, complete with lighting and misting devices. One of the most
admired of these cases at the show was packed full of miniatures and not so small species. Andy’s Orchids, San Diego, California won a Gold medal and the Trophy for the best Wardian Case. It included intricate specimen plants of *Dendrobium cuthbertsonii* and *Lepanthes calodictyon* and the deep mauve *Den. woodsi*. With plants that small labelling can be a problem; this was solved by putting small numbers on each plant then listing the names and numbers on the display frame outside. Another case by Hoosier Orchid Company, Indianapolis, Indiana, showed the wide variety of Jewel orchids, including examples of *Macodes*, *Dossinia* and *Anoectochilus* all with attractively marbled dark green or red foliage. Some had flower spikes but most were there to show off their foliage.

On a grander and very different scale was the display from E. F. G. Orchids Inc., Deland, Florida, which had a central Volcano complete with flowing molten larva as its centre piece. Some interesting *Calanthe - Phaius* hybrids in dark mysterious maroon colours were arranged around the lava flow.

The show also featured many wonderful exhibits from overseas; a masterpiece from Singapore was awarded a well-deserved Gold medal and also the trophy for the best International Display. The general theme was of a courtyard garden but taking elements from the different cultures in Singapore; gold Malaysian wedding parasols, brilliant wedding sari material embroidered with flowers and a low wooden table and stools laid for tea all set the tranquil scene. To complete the multi-cultural theme vacuum flasks were scattered around the foreground; all this provided a back-drop to the vibrant colours of the beautiful hybrid *Dendrobium* and Mokara blooms. This inspired showmanship bodes well for the next World Orchid Conference in 2011, in Singapore.

An excellent display from the Taiwan Orchid Growers showed some interesting *Phalaenopsis* hybrids including the rich yellow *Phal. Sogo Cake*. The South African Orchid Council took advantage of their flowering season for Disas and brought a very attractive collection to the show. The large deep red *Disa Madiba’s Pride* was shown ‘hatching out’ of ostrich eggs and the deep buttercup yellow Unimeyer also caught the eye. The exhibit from Ecuador used twelve-foot banners with photographs of rainforest printed on them as an appropriate back drop to the plants, the addition of recorded bird song completed the overall effect.

Large specimen plants in the Commercial exhibits contributed to the overall high standard of the displays and show; the Reserve Champion plant was *Eria javanica*, owned by Amazonia Orchids Inc., Homestead, Florida, a plant four foot across with more than forty flowering spikes of white starry flowers. This species is widespread in Southeast Asia from India across to New Guinea. It is very variable in colour and can be white or yellow with purple veining. It was first described in 1800. Carmela Orchids, Hakalau, Hawaii, used their specimen *Cattleya Hail Storm ‘Coconut Orchids’* as a centre piece to their Gold medal winning display, it gained the trophy for the best specimen orchid. The plant was five foot across with more than sixty spikes of deep mauve flowers
and it was voted the People’s Choice Award; the display was well designed and used wooden benches and large pots to good effect.

Over three hundred Judges from all corners of the world took part in the judging which ran for the best part of a day. They awarded a total of twenty-two Gold medals to displays and individual plants, one hundred and sixty-two medals were distributed in total.
Away from the show the 1200 delegates could enjoy four days of lectures from an international list of speakers. Many also joined some of the trips to visit the Florida Everglades and to visit local Orchid Nurseries. The closing banquet was a Tropical Night Gala held at ‘Jungle Island’, complete with skunks, parrots, very lively music and … mango wine…

Several countries submitted excellent bids to hold the 21st World Orchid Conference in 2014. At the Closing Ceremony it was announced that the WOC Site Selection Committee voted Pretoria, South Africa, as their favourite choice.
The next World Orchid Conference, the 20th will be held in Singapore during the latter half of 2011. It promises to be a truly outstanding event; with a wonderful show, great lecture programme, refined hospitality and a unique venue …. we look forward to seeing you there.