

The Mysterious Baker of Ghent: Mysteries of Monsieur Mortier and the First Ghent Hybrids, Part 2

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Introduction

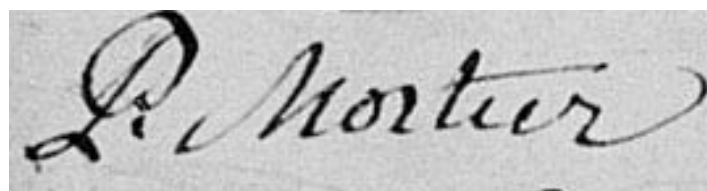
In Part 1 of this article in the Spring 2023 edition of *The Azalean*, we learned the little that was previously known about our mysterious P. Mortier, whose colorful deciduous azalea hybrids took the horticultural world by storm in the early 1800s. Now, as Paul Harvey so often said, here is “the rest of the story.”

The Veil Lifted

Part 1 identified the extent of what the world knew of P. Mortier until the year 2000, when a book written in Dutch appeared on Ghent Azaleas. Albert de Raedt, a member of the Belgium Dendrology Society, was bitten by the azalea bug, specifically a variant we call the deciduous azalea bug. On a trip with his dendrology society to England in 1987, de Raedt saw azaleas in full bloom and realized that they were Hardy Ghents and Rusticas, plants that originated in his Belgium homeland. He returned home determined to discover everything he could about these plants and began searching for existing cultivars. De Raedt teamed with Jozef Delvaux to find, document, and collect samples of these plants to save the gene pool of this old and large hybrid group from extinction. During his research, de Raedt located a man who turned out to be Mortier’s great-great-grandson. This man, Pierre Mortier, provided information to de Raedt, which revealed precisely who was our mysterious P. Mortier, and put him in touch with Sabine de Groote, an art historian. De Groote had written a series of articles on Ghent families, including some of the hybridizers involved with these early hybrids. De Raedt and de Groote documented the history of these plants and their hybridizers in 2000 in the book *De Harde Gentse Azalea: Een Historisch Overzicht (The Hardy Ghent Azalea: An Historical Overview)*. Much of the personal information on the hybridizers was contributed by de Groote. De Groote’s information was merged with de Raedt’s in the chapter “Origin and Development of the Hardy Ghents.”¹⁶



Azalea Mortieriana, Hort.
*Annales de la Société Royale
d'Agriculture de Gand* v2, 1846.



Mortier's signature.

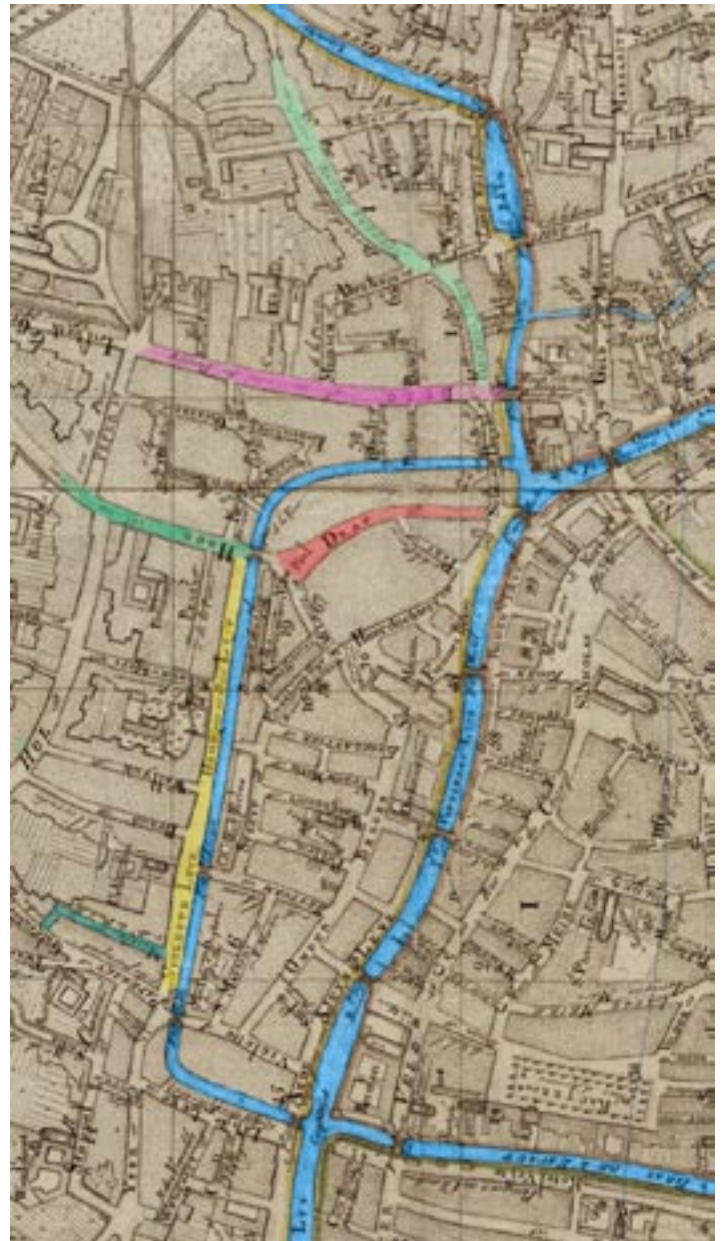
After 200 years of Mortier being a shadowy figure, we now know that our mysterious “P. Mortier” was Petrus Martinus Mortier (1768-1847). *Petrus* is a Latinized name derived from Greek, meaning “rock.” This Latin form was sometimes used for Dutch and on occasion for German names. In Belgium, the French *Pierre* or Dutch *Pieter* is often substituted. In English, he would be *Peter*. The Latin *Martinus* is the official Dutch form of *Martin* seen on old birth certificates, but those so named often go by *Maarten* or *Marten*.¹⁷

Petrus Martinus Mortier’s parents were Joannes Baptiste Mortier and Joanna De Clercq. Pierre was born in St. Michael’s North Parish in Ghent on 3 Oct 1768. He first married Isabelle Antoinette Smesmans or Smesman (27 Dec 1765–10 Aug 1815) in St. Michael North Parish on 23 Feb 1794. She was a daughter of George Smesmans and Anne Marie Dupré. Pierre and Isabelle had four sons: Joannes Martinus Mortier, Jean Daniel Mortier (died as infant), Lodewijk Petrus Mortier, and Joseph Pierre Mortier.

The death certificate of Isabelle in 1815 states that she was 50 at the time of her death and that her husband was a baker. Mortier died 11 Jan 1847, and his death certificate states that he was 78 years old. It also states that he was the widower of both Isabelle Smesmans and Maria Elisabeth Vervaet.¹⁸

Mortier is a name derived from a word meaning a bowl in which a pestle is used to crush pills and other substances; a mixture of lime, sand, and cement; and a short cannon. A mortarium is a Roman pottery bowl. Mortier is not a common name, but neither is it rare. One amateur genealogist has charted his ancestry to the 1600s, back to his great-great-great grandparents: Petrus Martinus Mortier (1768-1847) < (p) Joannes Baptiste Mortier (1728-1799) & Joanna De Clercq (1743-1779) < (gp) Martinus Mortier (1692-) & Jeanne Naessens (1704-) < (ggp) Adrianus Mortier (1641-1714) & Elisabeth Stepman (1657-1716) < (2ggp) Balduinus Mortier (1608-1676) & Elisabeth Wille (1608-) < (3ggp) Joannes Mortier (-) & Livina Verstraeten (-).¹⁹

Establishing contact with several of Mortier’s descendants led to additional details. His grandfather Martinus was a *jardinier* (gardener). Pierre and Isabelle appear to have financial means, for his son Lodewijk Petrus (Louis Pierre) Mortier, attended the Ghent Academy, now University of Ghent, and



Old part of town from 1799 map of Ghent by Louis De Vreese, with pertinent streets highlighted.

became a lawyer. Louis Pierre’s 200-page thesis in 1828 was a response to the question “What part did the Belgians have in the Holy Wars, and what fruits did they receive from them?” Louis Pierre married a daughter of a tobacco manufacturer, and for several generations the family was successful in the tobacco industry before moving into sprinklers for horticulture and agriculture. Auguste Joseph Mortier, a great grandson of our baker, served in *Heilig-Kerstparochie* (Holy Christmas Parish) as a well-respected parish pastor for 25 years.²⁰

Albert de Raedt and Sabine de Groote found information about the Hardy Ghents and their hybridizers in newspapers of the day. Some issues are now digitized and online. By checking in Ghent news-

papers from the early 19th century, we found various people named Mortier. Contemporary newspapers in Ghent provide bits of information on our P. Mortier, the baker-florist. Advertisements for the sale of Mortier's plants can be found at least from 1815 to 1838. Mortier may have held his last public sale in 1833. As mentioned, Van Hulle tells us that Mortier sold the last of his azalea hybrids to Louis Verschaffelt in 1834. In 1838, a botanist named Hoste included some of Mortier's azaleas in a public sale.²¹

The earliest records suggest he lived on *Burgstraat* near the *Hoogbrugge*. That was the location of his bakery and residence when he participated at the Frascati. At the time of his death in 1847, he was living on *Drapstraat*. Mortier's address and garden is given at times as *Magdestraetjen* No. 2 and as *Purcelle* No. 2. These two are the same address, the former in Dutch and the latter in French. Both translate in English as "Little Virgin Street." *Magdestraetjen* was described in one advertisement as *by de houtleye*. Dug in the mid-12th century as a semi-elliptical canal off the River Leie for city's western defense, this canal was called the Houtlei (Main Canal). Foul odor and constant silting led to it being filled in at the end of the nineteenth century. A canal or quay in Ghent was referred to as a *lei* or *leye*, after the River Leie. *Oude Houtlei* is now a north-south

street in Ghent in the west central portion of the old city between the Coupure Canal and the River Leie. Today, a small street named *Maagdestraat* enters into the west side of *Oude Houtlei* near the street's south end. In 1833, about the time Mortier sold the last of his hybrids, his address was *Princenhof* No. 10, at the south end. *Princenhof* was once called *Keysers Dreve*. In September 1833, Mortier's son, the lawyer, of *Prinsenhof* [sic], married Adelaïde Dullaert, of Ste. Margrietestraet. The wedding certificate states that "Petrus Mortier," father of "Ludovicus Petrus Mortier" (Louis Pierre) was retired.²² We can imagine that Pierre Mortier, the baker and hybridizer, was then living together with his son, Louis Pierre Mortier. Today, *Prinsenhof* is a NW-to-SE street about five blocks above the north end of *Oude Houtlei*. *Burgstraat* is a W-to-E street below *Prinsenhof*. *Hoogbrugge* or *Hoofbrugge* was the bridge where *Burgstraat* crossed the Leive, a tributary of the Leie. Mortier's bakery on *Burgstraat* may have been near the bridge area.

The Ghent Hybrids

From the 1820s through the 1830s, the number of Ghent Hybrids exploded. Collectively, the early hybrids were called *Rhododendron Mortieri*, *Azalea Mortieriana*, and *Hardy Ghent Azaleas*. H. J. Van Hulle called them Ghent *Rustica Azaleas* (*Les Azalées Rustiques de Gand*) to distinguish

Loddiges Catalogue of Plants 1830

hybridae-belgicae

<i>amœnissima</i>	<i>exquisita</i>	<i>miniata</i>	<i>præstantissima</i>	<i>speciosissima</i>
<i>ardens</i>	<i>flamboyante</i>	<i>mixta triumphans</i>	<i>pulchella</i>	<i>splendens</i>
<i>atrorubens</i>	<i>fulgida</i>	<i>munica</i>	<i>punicea</i>	<i>splendida</i>
<i>calendulacea-insignis</i>	<i>gloria-mundi</i>	<i>morterii</i>	<i>recentissima</i>	<i>variegata</i>
<i>cardon</i>	<i>gloriosa</i>	<i>ne plus ultra</i>	<i>regina belgica</i>	<i>venusta</i>
<i>concinna</i>	<i>guilielmus primus</i>	<i>nobilis</i>	<i>rigida incarnata</i>	<i>venustissima</i>
<i>cruenta</i>	<i>hilarissima</i>	<i>novitata</i>	<i>robusta</i>	<i>versicolor</i>
<i>cupræa-eximia</i>	<i>hybrida micans</i>	<i>ornata</i>	<i>rubricata</i>	
<i>electa</i>	<i>lepida</i>	<i>pontica globosa</i>	<i>sanguinea</i>	
<i>elegantissima</i>	<i>maritima incarnata</i>	<i>pontica konick</i>	<i>speciosa</i>	
		<i>pontica</i>		
	<i>alba</i>	<i>glauca</i>	<i>lactea</i>	
	<i>aurantia</i>	<i>flammea</i>	<i>ochroleuca</i>	
	<i>crocata</i>	<i>fulgens</i>	<i>pallida</i>	
	<i>cupræa</i>	<i>ignescens</i>	<i>tricolor</i>	

J. C. Loudon listed 95 Belgian Hybrid varieties in 1838. By 1850, reportedly, there were over 500 named varieties available from various sources.²⁵

VENDITIE VAN EXTRA SCHOONE PLANTEN.

Donderdag 6 april 1820, ten dry uren naer middag, zal d'heer Mortier, liefhebber, publiquelyk laeten verkoopen, in zynen hof gelegen in het maegdestraetjen, by de houtleye, door het ministerie van den deurwaerder *Lefevre*, het grootste gedeelte van zyne schoone collectie van Planten, als alle de exquisite soorten van Magnolias, waer onder van 6 à 7 voeten hoog, vele schoone soorten en varieteyten van Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Pioen-boomen met bloembotten, eene groote plante van *Rosa banksiana*, op eygen wortel, verscheyde soorten van Oragne-boomen, vele schoone Camellias en menigvuldige andere van de beste planten voor den vollen grond en 't groenhuis.

Translation of the above newspaper advertisement from the *Gazette van Gend*, 03 April 1820, p3 c2:

SALE OF EXTRA BEAUTIFUL PLANTS.

Thursday 6 April 1820, at three hours after noon, Mr. Mortier, enthusiast, will sell publicly in his garden located in the maegdestraetjen, by the Houtleye, by the ministeric of the bailiff Lefevre, the largest part of his beautiful collection of plants, like all the exquisite varieties of Magnolias, 6 to 7 feet high, many beautiful kinds and varieties of Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Peony trees with flower buds, a large plant of *Rosa banksiana*, on its own roots, several kinds of Orange trees, many beautiful Camellias, and many other of the best plants for the open ground and greenhouse.

VERKOOPING VAN PLANTEN,
Waer onder eene schoone collectie
Geraniums en Azalea, Orangerie-
Planten enz.,

Ten buyze van M.^r P. MORTIER, Princen-
hof n.º 10, Zaterdag 18 Mey 1833, ten vier
uren naermiddag, door de Greffiers **DE**
POBBE en **VERHULST**, in Gend.

Translation of the newspaper advertisement at left from the *Gazette van Gend*, 12 May 1833, 05 12 p3 c2:

Sale of Plants,

This is a beautiful collection of Geraniums and Azalea, Orangerie Plants, etc., at the home of Mr. P. Mortier, Princenhof nbr. 10, Saturday May 18, 1833, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, by the Registrars de Porre & Verhulst, in Ghent.

V E N D I T I E

Van eene uytmuntende collectie van Pot-bloemen, voor-dezen noyt in deze stad Gend gezien, op maendag 10 july 1815, ten vier uren naer middag, in den hof van P. Mortier, in het Maegdestraetjen n.º 2, uytkomende op de Houtleye in Gend.

Translation of the above newspaper advertisement from the *Gazette van Gend*, 06 July 1815, p3 c1:

SALE

Of a unique collection of potted flowers, never before seen in this city of Ghent, on Monday, July 10, 1815, at four o'clock in the afternoon, in the garden of P. Mortier, in Maegdestraetjen No. 2 coming off the Houtleye in Ghent.

Vente de belles Plantes.

Le Sieur P. MORTIER fera vendre dans son jardin, rue de la Pucelle, N.º 2, près le quai au Bois, à Gand, le Mercredi 21 Mars 1821, à trois heures de relevée, par l'Huissier LEFEBVRE, une superbe collection de Plantes, consistant en azaleas, rhododendrons, calmias, camelias, Magnolias, pivoines, etc.

Translation of the above newspaper advertisement from the *Journal d'Affiches de Gand, Bruges, Courtrai, et de Deux Flanders* 18 March 1821, p1:

Sale of beautiful plants

Le Sieur P. Mortier will sell in his garden, rue de la Pucelle, No. 2, near the wooden wharf in Ghent, on Wednesday, March 21, 1821, at three relief hours, by the bailiff LEFEBVER, a superb collection of Plants, consisting of azaleas, rhododendrons, kalmias, Magnolias, peonies, etc.

the hardy deciduous hybrid azaleas of Ghent from hot-house evergreen azaleas. Later, the name *Rustica Azaleas* came to be applied only to the double Ghent forms. Karl Koch Latinized all the Ghent Azaleas as *Azaleae gandavensae*. Alfred Rehder used *Rhododendron gandavense* specifically for the hybrids of American heritage that were crossed with *R. luteum*. In the Netherlands and in Germany, Ghent Hybrids were most often known as Pontica Azaleas. The name “Ghent Azaleas” eventually was applied to all these hybrids whether from the Continent or England between 1825 and 1880. Since 2010, “Ghent Azalea” has received a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) that applies to azalea plants coming from licenced growers in East Flanders. These PGI Ghent Azaleas are, however, evergreen varieties.²³

Azalea pontica, variety *tricolor*, was listed for sale as early as 1823. This may have been the same variety seen in J. B. de Wulf’s garden in 1817. Francies Van Damme bought the stock plant *Azalea pontica* var. *tricolor* Wulf for 560 francs. From that investment, he sold more than 20,000 francs worth by 1829. Hybrid varieties *A. Morterii* var. *carnea* and *A. Morterii* var. *praestans* were listed in 1830, and a color illustration of *R. Morterii* var. *carnea* was published in 1831. Robert Sweet described these hybrids as intermediate between *R. calendulaceum* and a red variety of *R. nudiflorum*. These plants, named for Mortier, were part of a shipment received in 1829 from the Continent by the nursery firm of Whitley, Brames, and Milne of Fulham, London. *A. Morterii* var. *praestans* was received under the name *A. praestansissima*. While Sweet listed no Belgium hybrid azaleas in 1830, Conrad Loddiges listed in that year 47 varieties of Belgium hybrids as well as 12 separate *pontica* varieties.²⁴ (See **Loddiges Catalogue of Plants 1830** on page 30.)

Thomas Rivers, of the well-known nursery of Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, England, reported on a horticulture tour of the Netherlands, Belgium, and France in 1830 and saw the Mortier azaleas in Belgium. In Bruges, he visited the garden of a brewer who had a special collection of azalea hybrids, including ‘Morterii Genio’, ‘Tricolor Jacobs’, ‘Mortieriana’, ‘Regina Belgica’, and others. In May of 1835, he wrote glowingly of Mortier azaleas, and, although primarily a grower of fruit trees and roses, Rivers obtained azaleas from Ghent. In 1842, Rivers advertised his “fine Belgic varieties,” listing 33 selections, including ‘Pontica



Morterii var. carnea
The British Flower Garden
2nd series, t10, 1831.

tricolor’ Wulf, ‘*Coccinea speciosa*’, and ‘Morterii genio’.²⁶

Robert Osborn of the Fulham nursery of Whitby & Osborn evaluated the old varieties. As some of the best, he identified ‘Mortieri’, pink and orange; ‘Mortieriana’, similar but darker; and ‘Gloria Mundi’, an intense orange. Osborn considered ‘*Coccinea Major*’ the best of the old varieties and ‘*Ne Plus Ultra*’ the best Belgian hybrid, bright red and yellow.²⁷

Which of the early Ghent Hybrids are hybrids developed by Mortier himself is not possible to say with certainty. No catalog or list of individual cultivars from Mortier exist. Plants raised by him may have been named by others. We are left with Charles Van Geert’s statement, written 11 years after Mortier sold his last azalea hybrids, that nearly all the superb varieties now disbursed

throughout Europe were raised by him. Very few early catalogs still exist, but some of the earliest names of Ghent Hybrids came from catalogs of Loddiges and Sons (1826, 1830), Alexander Verschaffelt (1829, 1836), L'Institute Horticole de Fromont (1829), William Masters (1831), Pieter Verleeuwen (1835), Joost Verleeuwen (1835), and Jan Van Geert (1835, 1838, 1839). The Académie d'Horticulture in Ghent in 1860 ranked the best varieties at that time, indicating the breeders to whom they were attributed. Of the best 30, 25 were attributed to Mortier:

Adorée	Couronne Impériale
Glorie d'un parterre	Mutabilis
Astreans	Duc de Provence
Grandeur Triomphante	Nec Plus Ultra
Beauté de Royghem	Empereur Napoléon III
Grand Monarque	Optima
Bijou des Amateurs	Flameola Incarnata
Jules César	Reine de Pas Bas
Cardinal	Géant de Batailles
La Superbe	Rêve de Bonheur
Comble de Gloire	Gloria Mundi?
Minerve	Roy de Belges
Unique	

Archie Skinner identified 'Ignea Nova' and 'Coccinea Speciosa' as two of Mortier's hybrids. Fred Galle, however, listed the source of 'Coccinea Speciosa' as L. Seneclausse, before 1846. De Raedt listed 'Coccinea Speciosa' as Lisha Sénéclausse, before 1832. *The International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* (IRRC) listed 'Coccineum Speciosum' as introduced by L. Seneclausse, before 1836. In 1832, Jacob Ernst von Reider listed variety *Azalea coccinea speciosa nudiflora*. It should not be surprising that Reider placed it under *Azalea nudiflora*. He also placed several *R. calendulaceum* varieties under *A. nudiflora* as well as 'Gloria Mundi' and 'Nec Plus Ultra'. The IRRC listed 'Dulcedo', 'Invincible', 'Mortierii Carneus', and 'Nec Plus Ultra' as probably raised or introduced by Mortier. De Raedt suggested 'Duc de Provence', 'Flameola Incarnata', 'Mortierio Genio', 'Mortieriana', 'Mortierii', 'Nec Plus Ultra', and 'Optima', as in or possibly in Mortier's original collection. Yet, one cannot safely assume the varieties such as 'Mortierii', 'Mortierii Carnea', 'Mortierii Praestantissima', 'Mortierii Praestans', 'Mortieriana', 'Mortierii Genio', and similar names resulted from Mortier's hands.²⁸

The colorful Ghent Hybrids differ greatly. Some are dark and rich, others light and pastel. Many



Top: *pontica versicolor* (perhaps Loddiges' 'Versicolor'); Left: *cuprea eximia nova* ('Cuprium Eximium Novium'); Right: 'Nec Plus Ultra' ('Nec Plus Ultra'); Bottom: *pontica macrantha* (one of the deciduous 'Macranthum') *The Garden: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Horticulture* 15: pl. 176, 19 Apr 1879.

are multicolored. There are whites and creams, yellows, pinks, oranges, orange-scarlets, and reds. Some corollas are often flushed or tinted with additional colors. A prominent blotch, characteristic of the flame azalea, is common. A *New York Times* article stated that 'Coccinea Speciosa' was a typical example of a Ghent Hybrid.²⁹ 'Coccinea Speciosa' appears to be more of a typical *R. flammeum* or small-flowered *R. calendulaceum*. It is difficult to say what is a typical Ghent Hybrid. It may be that some named varieties are not inter-species hybrids but no more than intra-species variation.

Gerald H. Pinckney, managing director in the 1950s of John Waterer, Sons & Crisp, in Bagshot, England, did not know the ploidy of the species or how ploidy affects crosses. He believed that *R. nudiflorum* (now *R. periclymenoides*) and *R. canescens* contributed to the Ghent pinks and whites. Not mentioned were *R. roseum* (now *R. prinophyllum*), *R. atlanticum*, and *R. viscosum*. He thought *R. luteum* provided the yellow and cream, while *R. calendulaceum* and *R. cumberlandense* were

T RIVERS, JUN., begs to offer the following choice varieties of HARDY RHODODENDRONS AND BELGIC AZALEAS. Healthy plants from 1 foot to 18 inches high, mostly from pots.

RHODODENDRONS.	
1. Arboreum album . . . 10s. 6	9. Hybridum, very strong plants . . . 2s. 6
2. Arboreum ponticum album . . . 7 6	10. Macranthum roseum . . . 7 6
3. Altaclerense . . . 3 6	11. Mundula, dwarf . . . 10 6
4. " coccineum . . . 7 6	12. Nobilcanum, dwarf and early . . . 5 0
5. " splendens . . . 7 6	13. Nobilis, dwarf . . . 10 6
6. Angustum, robust and fine habit . . . 31 0	14. Princeps . . . 7 6
7. Eximium . . . 5 0	15. Russelianum . . . 5 0
8. Formosum . . . 7 6	16. Speciosum . . . 10 6
	17. Strictum . . . 10 6

With exception of numbers 1 and 17, which are species, the above are hybrids. *R. arboreum*, numbers 1 and 2, have flowers of pure white without spot; numbers 3 to 15 have crimson and scarlet flowers of different shades, with black spots.

1. Ponticum album . . . 1s. 6	13. Lowii . . . 5 0
2. Atro-rubens . . . 1 6	14. Magnoliifolium . . . 1 6
3. Album multi-maculatum . . . 7 6	15. Nivaticum . . . 5 0
4. Contortum, very dwarf . . . 1 6	16. Pumilum . . . 1 6
5. Caucasicum album, or new white . . . 3 6	17. Roseum . . . 1 6
6. Coccineum . . . 3 6	18. Roseum flore-pleno . . . 10 6
7. Carneum maculatum . . . 2 6	19. Smithii album . . . 5 0
8. Flos pictum . . . 5 0	20. Spirale . . . 3 6
9. Fulgidum, crimson . . . 10 6	21. Splendidum . . . 5 0
10. Grandiflorum . . . 3 6	22. Spectabile . . . 5 0
11. Guttatum . . . 5 0	23. Tigrinum, blush-spot . . . 10 6
12. Hysanthiflorum, dbl. purple . . . 5 0	24. Wilsonii . . . 5 0
	25. Vittatum . . . 10 6
	26. Atrio-purpureum, very dark purple . . . 3 0

The above are varieties of *R. ponticum*. Numbers 3, 8, 11, 13, 15, and 19, have cream-coloured and white flowers, beautifully and curiously spotted with brown, red, and greenish spots; No. 5 is a very early and dwarf variety, with flowers of the palest blush, changing to pure white; 10 and 15 have double flowers; 19 has curious small flowers nearly blue; No. 6 has not scarlet flowers, as its name implies—they are of a light carmine.

1. Adansonii . . . 10s. 6	4. Fragrans . . . 2s. 6
2. Azaloides . . . 1 6	5. Gowerianum . . . 3 6
3. Azaloides album . . . 7 6	

The above are hybrids of Azaleas, with Rhododendron; No. 4 is dwarf and very fragrant.

1. Cinnamomum . . . 15s. 0	6. Catawbiense hybridum . . . 1s. 6
2. Caucasicum . . . 5 0	7. Catawbiense flore-pleno . . . 5 0
3. Campanulatum . . . 7 6	8. Dauricum atrovirens . . . 1 6
4. Camp. hybridum . . . 10 6	9. Luteum . . . 42 0
5. Catawbiense . . . 1 6	

With exception of No. 1, the above are quite hardy; No. 4 is a robust growing and very interesting hybrid; No. 9 is said to be a hybrid of Azalea pontica, with *R. caucasicum*.

AZALEAS, FINE BELGIC VARIETIES.	
1. Pontica alba . . . 1s. 6	17. Double White . . . 1 6
2. " alba flore-pleno . . . 3 6	18. Decus hortorum . . . 3 6
3. " alba globosa . . . 2 6	19. Early Pink . . . 1 6
4. " eximia . . . 3 6	20. Electa . . . 2 6
5. " lutea rubicunda . . . 3 6	21. Insignis . . . 2 6
6. " mirabilis . . . 3 6	22. Large Orange . . . 2 6
7. " magnifica . . . 3 6	23. Morterii genio . . . 3 6
8. " rosea . . . 2 6	24. Maritima . . . 2 6
9. " spectabilis . . . 3 6	25. Nobilissima . . . 2 6
10. " tricolor (Wulf) . . . 2 6	26. Pulchella . . . 2 6
11. " tricolor alba . . . 2 6	27. Præstantissima . . . 2 6
	28. Princess Augustæ . . . 2 6
	29. Splendens . . . 2 6
12. Cnprea splendens . . . 2 6	30. Speciosa . . . 2 6
13. Coccinea speciosa . . . 3 6	31. Venustissima . . . 2 6
14. Calendulacea . . . 2 6	32. Violæ odora . . . 2 6
15. " crocea . . . 2 6	33. Vittata . . . 1 6
16. " grandiflora . . . 2 6	

Of the above Numbers, 1 to 11 are the earliest of Azaleas; Numbers 19, 25, 29, 30, and 31 follow in succession; Numbers 18, 23, 27, 28, 32, and 33 are late flowering varieties, with beautiful striped flowers.—All packages sent carriage free to London.

Sawbridgeworth, Herts., Nov. 30, 1842.

used to get the deeper reds. Pinckney ignored *R. speciosum* (now *R. flammeum*).³⁰ We truly do not know the species used in the creation of the Ghent Azaleas. Additional DNA and flow cytometry analyses may yield some insight into the composition of the early Ghent Hybrids.

The blossoms on Ghent Hybrids vary in size but are generally small, from 1 to 2¼ inches (2-5.7 cm.) wide. That Van Houtte found the flowers of the North American species small in comparison to their Ghent Hybrid descendants tells us that European specimens of our species were quite limited and not of the best forms. Our swamp azalea would contribute fragrance but reduce flower size. The coastal azalea would also contribute fragrance, but it's blossoms should be somewhat larger and bloom earlier. Later hybrids with *R. molle*, both the Chinese and Japanese forms, and *R. occidentale* increased flower size. Many, but not all Ghents, are fragrant. Bloom times are typically in mid-spring, depending on the cultivar and location. Flowering occurs before or with leaf emergence. The later-flowering varieties may come from purely American parentage. They are generally tall and upright, growing 6-10 feet (1.8-3 m.) and almost as wide as they age and spread. The leaves of some turn vivid autumn colors in the fall before they drop. Ghents prefer partial to full sun, depending on the climate. Most seem to be hardy plants, withstanding temperatures to -15° F (-26° C) and even colder. The first plants were not this hardy, however. The production process involved grafting the cultivar onto the roots of the Pontic azalea. The grafted plants acquired the reputation of being short-lived and not so hardy. Those grown on their own root stock proved much hardier. With smaller flowers than later hybrids, a natural setting is a better placement.³¹

While Mortier and his fellow Belgian horticulturists were experimenting with deciduous azaleas, concurrent hybridization efforts were taking place in England, some with species and some using imported Belgian hybrids. In England in the late 1820s, James Robert Gowen, the gardener for Highclere, seat of the Earl of Carnovon, was crossing the flame azalea with the Pontic azalea and the Pontic azalea with the swamp azalea. Some of those hybrids have tested tetraploid, suggesting the cross may have been *R. luteum* with *R. atlanticum* and not with *R. viscosum*. This group was called the Ornatum Hybrids. Gowen

later crossed *R. molle* with *R. viscosum*, beginning the Viscosepalum Hybrids taken up by other breeders. Louis Verschaffelt, to whom Mortier sold the last of his stock, crossed some of Mortier's with the Ornatum Hybrids, the Pontic azalea, and other eastern North American azaleas. Louis Van Houtte found a double-flowered seedling of a Mortier hybrid in 1858 and started a new group of double Ghent Hybrids called Rustica Flore Pleno Azaleas. Van Houtte also made many crosses using the Japanese variety *R. molle* var. *japonicum*, essentially beginning the Mollis Hybrids. Around 1870, Anthony Waterer in England took the challenge of improving Ghent Azaleas by adding *R. molle* and other species, resulting in his Knap Hill Azaleas. Those from Knap Hill led to sub-groups including Exbury Hybrids by Lionel de Rothschild of Exbury, Southhampton, England; Slocock Hybrids from Slocock, Bagshot, and Sunningdale Nurseries of Sunningdale, England; Windsor Hybrids developed by Sir Eric Savill at Windsor Great Park; and Ilam Hybrids by Edgar Stead, Christ Church, New Zealand.³²

Conclusion

Mortier's hybrids were a horticultural sensation. Imagine someone in the 1830s willing to pay 10,000 francs for only 10 stock plants! His new combinations of dazzling colors with fragrant flowers, apparently larger flowers, and generally later blooms that could avoid late frosts were a giant step up from the earlier varieties of the pinxterbloom, swamp azalea, and flame azalea available to the initial gardeners and plant lovers. As subsequent hybridizers rushed to the market with their Hardy Ghent Hybrids, they were now met with fresh competition from Asian evergreen azaleas and their many horticultural varieties. Deciduous varieties were best suited for informal gardens, and, as the nineteenth century progressed, formal gardens with hot-houses became the preferred style. With deciduous azaleas, excellent plantsmen such as the Waterers and Lionel de Rothschild took the attractive Ghents and worked to create varieties with larger blooms and



Azalea rustique de Gand
'Madame Alexander Hardy' (L. V H.),
acquired from the widow of Louis Hellebuyck.
Van Houtte. 1873. *Flore des Serres* 19: 152.

even later flowering. *R. molle* and subsequently *R. occidentale* were added. The older Ghents, however colorful, were being left behind.

Almost 200 years have passed since an amateur horticulturist, a baker by trade, made a significant mark in horticultural history. Why in those two centuries did someone not report more about this important man and about his remarkable work? In all that time, wherever the history of hybridization of deciduous azaleas is mentioned, one can find only a brief note such as P. Mortier, a baker from Ghent, took *R. calendulaceum* and several other American species and crossed them with the Pontic *R. luteum*, beginning the Ghent Hybrids. Yet, thanks to the research and leads from Alfred de

Raedt and Sabine de Groote, we now know that Petrus (Pieter or Pierre) Martinus Mortier (3 Oct 1768-11 Jan 1847), husband of Isabelle Smesmans and of Maria Elisabeth Vervaeet, father of at least four sons, was that mysterious baker-florist, and, by 1833, he was in his mid-60s, no longer baking bread and pastries every morning, and was about to sell the last of his remarkable azalea seedling stock.

Unfortunately for English speakers, *De Harde Gentse* is available only in Dutch, and, further, the book is out of print. It covers (1) the species de Raedt thought were involved in the creation of the Hardy Ghents, (2) the history of the Hardy Ghents and of the Rusticas, (3) named cultivars with a brief history, (4) gardens where Hardy Ghent and Rustica cultivars can be found, (5) list of old nursery catalogs, and (6) an 8-page summary in English. This marvelous book is not simply the definitive narrative history of the Ghent Azaleas. It provides 64 pages of descriptions of many varieties, lavishly illustrated with new images and old illustrations photographed by botanist and photographer Roel Jacobs. I have (imperfectly) translated much of the text into English. It would be wonderful to have such a book available to a wider English audience of azalea lovers.

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17. During this period of time in Belgium, Dutch, French, and Latinized names were used interchangeably. We found P. Mortier's first name as Petrus and Pierre. The name of his son, the lawyer, appears in various records as Lodewijk, Louis, and Ludovicus.

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21. *Gazette Van Gend*. 1816-1838. Various years of the newspaper are available online from Ghent University Library as a Google book download by year. Not all years are available. <<https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/ser01:000366992?i=3&q=Gazette+van+Gend>>. Accessed 11 Aug 2022. Names of Mortiers include: marketeers P. J. Mortier & D. Cars, a deceased Pieter, widow Francies, Sophie, Hector, Marcus, Josepha, Jan, N., Bernadine, Joannes, Arnout, Augustin, Martinus, Anne Marie, Jacobus, Guilielmus, C., A., Louis, baron Mortier, Maria, Jacob, Carolina, Joanna, Ch., Marie, Napoleon, Karel, Jan-Baptiste, Anna, Gerrard, J. F., Victoria, Jan-Francies, and Catherine; *Journal d'Affiches de Gand, Bruges, Courtrai, et dei deux Flandres*. [Journal of Posts from Ghent, Bruges, Courtrai, and the two Flanders] 1821 Mar 18, p1, as a Google book download. <[https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/ser01:000375516?i=0&q=Journal+d%](https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/ser01:000375516?i=0&q=Journal+d%27affiches+de+Gand%2C+Bruges%2C+Courtrai)

[27affiches+de+Gand%2C+Bruges%2C+Courtrai](https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/ser01:000375516?i=0&q=Journal+d%27affiches+de+Gand%2C+Bruges%2C+Courtrai)> Accessed 11 Aug 2022; *Gazette Van Gend*. 1818 May 18 p3 c1, 1820 Apr 3 p3 c2, 1821 Mar 19 p4 c1, 1821 Dec 10 p3 c1, 1826 Nov 6 p4 c2; 1826 Nov 20 p3 c3, 1826 Dec 4 p3 c3, 1833 May 12 p3 c2, 1833 May 15 p4 c1, 1838 Nov 21 p3 c2. In addition, de Raedt & de Groote identified ads from 1827 Nov 15 and 1830 May 12 issues, years for which digital copies are not online. The records available are not enough to be confident these were his only public sales.

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