

A Fan Recounts His Meeting with Rex Stout

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By request: mystery author Rex Stout of Nero Wolfe fame

On New Year's Day OEsheepdog posted "Ten authors I want to meet someday. Who's on your list?" I was pleasantly surprised to see that he said this about me: Designanator – "He once met Rex Stout, one of my favorite writers. I want to know more about that meeting."

I was around ten years old when I met two well known people: Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who was a dental patient of my maternal grandfather's and Rex Stout, who was a friend of my grandfather's. Rex Stout used to live in the same town that we did and both he and my grandfather were interested in horticulture. Many decades back my grandfather was president of the Men's Garden Club of America along with being on the boards of other national horticultural organizations. I recall that it was through the local chapter of the Men's Garden Club that he first met Rex Stout.

According to my grandfather, he gave Rex the first orchid that he ever owned. Readers of the Nero Wolfe will be familiar with the orchids theme. One flowering variety of plants that Rex Stout had an abundance of were irises. Below I have included two photos that I found yesterday showing Rex Stout with my brother standing in Rex Stout's iris garden. The photo was taken around 1965 by my grandfather. In the background you can see the garage attached to his house. His house and garage were constructed of cement blocks and were modern in style. Rex Stout designed the house and made many pieces of furniture for it, as well. The exterior walls were all painted in a light green color. In a newspaper interview Stout mentioned that Frank Lloyd Wright had once visited his home and liked it. The old transparencies that I found yesterday have faded over time as they were Ektachrome and not Kodachrome medium format film.

I met Rex Stout just once when my grandfather brought me along when he was either dropping off or picking up some plants from Rex. His house was set back from the road and not visible so there was no way to photograph it today as a part of this post. We also have a wood lathe that Rex gave to my grandfather as both enjoyed woodworking. I turned some spindles on the lathe when I was in high school but haven't used it in a long time.

Some of you may have read Rex Stout's books as OEsheepdog has and others of you might have seen the Nero Wolfe TV series on the A&E channel a few years back. For those of you who want to know more about Rex I have included the entire Wikipedia entry here and it shows the huge number of works that Rex authored over the years. As the Wikipedia write-up mentions Rex was active in a number of liberal causes over the years and ignored a subpoena from the House Un-American Activities Committee during the height of Senator McCarthy's heyday.

As a result of the friendship we have a number of Rex Stout's novels from the '50s and '60s. His sister, Ruth Stout, was also a friend of my grandparents and we have a one gardening book that she authored.

It has been great to see continuing interest in his work and to see some of the plots turned into television and film productions as noted in the Wikipedia entry below. For those in scholarly pursuit of his work Boston Colleger is the repository of his archives.

Many thanks to OEsheepdog for inspiring me to put together this post on Rex Stout!

http://open.salon.com/blog/designanator/2010/01/10/by_request_mystery_author_rex_stout_of_nero_wolfe_fame



Above and below: Rex Stout and my brother checking out the iris garden at Stout's home "High Meadows" around 1965. The photo was taken by my grandfather.

