Beat: News

Edinburgh’s Palm Houses: A New Chapter Beneath the Glass

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Edinburgh, 01.11.2026, 13:31 Time

USPA NEWS - Architecture, conservation and the return of one of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh’s most distinctive spaces.

There are buildings in Edinburgh that reward a closer look, however familiar they become. The Palm Houses at the Royal Botanic Garden are among them. Their sandstone façades and sweeping glass roofs bring together two subjects that continually interest me as a photographer: the built environment and the natural world.

Following a five-year restoration, the Palm Houses reopened to the public on 2 October 2026. Their return marks an important stage in the Garden’s Edinburgh Biomes project, bringing visitors back into buildings that have sheltered generations of plants.

Architecture shaped by growth

The history of the Palm Houses is closely connected to the needs of their occupants. The first, an irregular octagonal structure, was built in 1834. As the collection grew, some plants began to outgrow their surroundings, prompting the construction of a larger house.

Designed by Robert Matheson and completed in 1858, the later building combines Bishopbriggs sandstone with a curved iron-and-glass roof. Its substantial stone frontage gives way to a structure that appears remarkably light above it.

For me, that relationship is central to its photographic appeal. The repeating arches provide rhythm, while the roof draws the eye upwards. From outside, the glass reflects the changing sky, allowing the weather to become part of the building’s appearance.

It is architecture with a clear practical purpose but considerable visual presence.

The work behind the reopening

Restoring these buildings required attention to both their historic fabric and the living collection they protect.

Weathering had damaged the ironwork, glass and sandstone. Specialist teams repaired the structures, replaced thousands of panes and incorporated modern environmental systems to provide more stable growing conditions. Plants were carefully relocated and cared for elsewhere within the Garden during the work.

The finished appearance tells only part of that story. Much of the achievement lies in work visitors may scarcely notice: repaired connections, conserved materials and the systems needed to sustain plants through Edinburgh’s changing seasons.

That is one of the quieter strengths of conservation. Its success can be measured in how naturally a building continues to serve its purpose.

Seeing the buildings together

One of the most significant changes is the removal of the partition between the two Palm Houses. Visitors can now experience them as a continuous space, opening views through the buildings and revealing their relationship more clearly.

From a photographic perspective, those longer views offer an interesting subject. The ordered lines of the structure meet the less predictable shapes of leaves, stems and fronds. Looking upwards, or concentrating on a smaller section of planting, produces a different reading of the same space.

The broader view establishes scale. The details explain its character.

A collection with continuity

The plants carry histories of their own. Among the most memorable is the story of the Garden's old sabal palm, which arrived from the previous Leith Walk site in the early nineteenth century.

Too large to relocate, it was felled before restoration began in 2021. A young palm grown from its seed now continues that connection within the restored houses.

Other displays introduce visitors to rare and threatened plants, including the Norfolk Island tree fern. Around 1,000 ladybirds have also been introduced to help control insects affecting the collection. These smaller details bring the daily work of horticulture into view.

A welcome return

For me, the interest of the Palm Houses lies in the relationship between architecture, time and living things. The structure is carefully maintained, while the collection within it continues to grow and change.

Their reopening gives Edinburgh an opportunity to look again at a familiar landmark and appreciate the work required to secure its future.

The wider restoration continues, with the Front Range glasshouses remaining closed. Visitors should book a timed ticket for the Palm Houses through the Garden's website; members also need to reserve a slot.

Click on link below to see more photographs of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-27359/edinburghs-palm-houses-a-new-chapter-beneath-the-glass.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Daren Frankish

Exemption from liability:
The publisher shall assume no liability for the accuracy or completeness of the published report and is merely providing space for the submission of and access to third-party content. Liability for the content of a report lies solely with the author of such report. Daren Frankish

Editorial program service of General News Agency:
UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619