

Cover Story

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Seattle: Sophistication in All Sizes

Jennifer Polanz

Come along with me on a photogenic tour of the best displays Seattle has to offer. I was pleasantly surprised to see a wonderful diversity of garden centers and styles during this year's GCA Summer Tour (along with lovely cool weather), which I attended with about 112 industry colleagues in retail and allied trades. The merchandising was particularly on point, with extensive use of natural fixturing and an eye-pleasing mix of materials. It has to be, though, as Seattle is attracting a high-powered workforce (Amazon) that's spending a pretty penny to live there (the median house price is \$819,500). Let's divide it up by garden center type.

Urban Vibe



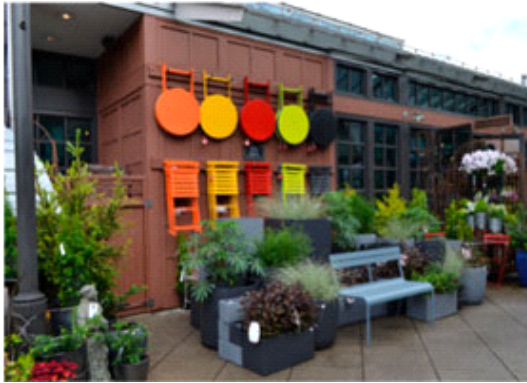
Got Bugs?

Or disease? West Seattle Nursery & Garden Center, an urban retailer tucked in a waterfront neighborhood of West Seattle, offers the Bonide plant diagnostic center right next to the cash wrap as a way to help customers diagnose their problems. Once diagnosed, the wall of solutions is right next to them.

Cool Colors

West Seattle recently constructed a greenhouse to house the tropicals, houseplants and gifts/accents, moving everything over in November 2016. Since then houseplant sales have increased close to 80%, says Ingrid Nokes, who works in the new greenhouse. Specifically, she sees the ficus, monster and succulents, as well as cactus and airplants, taking off. "Seattle's exploding right now and there's no place to go but up," she says, explaining in part the local obsession with houseplants. "If you can't have a patch of land for a garden, then you do it in a house."

This is just one of the walls in the greenhouse, which highlights the mix of natural materials in the wood and the lovely blue wall housing a treasure trove of gifts and potted plants.



Merchandising Up

Ravenna Gardens in the University Village shopping center (near the University of Washington campus) is space-constrained at 2,500 sq. ft., which means using outdoor space and every wall available to maximize sales. This eye-catching way to merchandise bistro tables and chairs made several tour attendees stop for pictures. How does all this product not get stolen? There's extra shopping center security patrolling the area throughout the night.

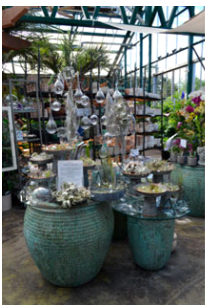
Impulse Alley

When you have a small location, you have to merchandise every bit of it, and Ravenna does a nice job of that with a wooden pergola over the cash wrap, as well as impulse options in each corner.

Color Use: Level Expert

One last note about Ravenna—the use of color in merchandising is pretty much expert level. This display is red, white and blue (we were there the last week of June) with just the right accents of silver and natural wood material. They merchandised outside pots and plants together according to complementary colors, too, in sections all around the store.

Suburban Oasis



I've known about Swansons for almost as long as I've been in the industry, but I'd never been to the store, situated on 5 acres in the Crown Hill neighborhood. I wasn't disappointed and there's too much to show here, but some items of note are the beautiful tropical conservatory that includes the Barn & Field Kitchen and Bakery, as well as gift and tropical/houseplants; lovely signage throughout and—best of all for them—

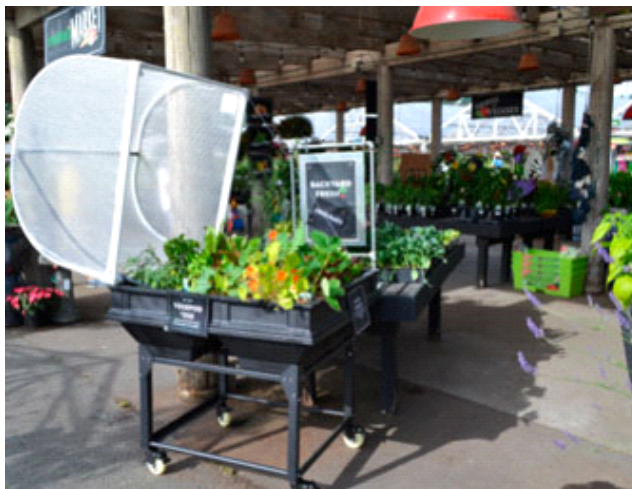
customer counts up 7% and annual sales up 12%.

This photo, taken inside that conservatory, highlights the use of large pottery and glass tops for display tables, providing a different look (and inspo for customers) on how to make airplants even more enticing.

Outside Sales

In this picture, you can see a couple of things happening at Swansons: two-tiered wood display tables, multiple types of signage (main themes and then plant-level signs), and in the background, covered walkways since, well,

Seattle and rain.



Veggies & Herbs: How to Kill It

No trip to Seattle is complete without a visit to Molbak's Garden + Home, a mainstay of more than 60 years in suburban Woodinville, northeast of Seattle. If you're looking for an inspiration in how to kill it in veggies (kill it is a good thing, BTW), then look no further. This is one of the best veggie and herb setups I've seen at a garden retailer, including cross merchandising, great signage, all the products needed (such as this Vegepod for those growing on patios or small spaces).

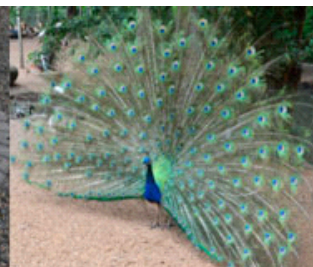
Like a Boss

Molbak's infuses fun into its signage while making everything seem just a little bit easier and more manageable for newbie customers. In this, they detail the basics of great containers while showing a few as inspo, as well.

Displaying Premium Products

I'm adding Watson's Greenhouse & Nursery, Puyallup, in with the suburbs, even though it's a bit more city (kinda like it's a little bit country, a little bit rock 'n roll). Aside from the absolutely gorgeous plant material they have on sale, the folks at Watson's really know how to merchandise their premium products, like these lovely finds (love the tags, too!).

Divine Destinations



A Winding Path

Our last couple of images are from garden centers that are definitely destinations, thanks to their locations way outside city limits. These retailers expect customers to stay a bit longer and to meander through the offerings. McAuliffe's Valley Nursery in Snohomish has this down to a science at its farm-to-retail nursery, where they grow their own stock. That great red barn in the picture? It's the original dairy barn from the property, dating back to the late 1800s, and you can still see the hoof marks on the floor. Now that's authenticity.

Upcycling For Displays

I'm adding this one in here in case this isn't a "thing" in displays around you (it seems regional)—Wells Medina Nursery in Medina was just one of several retailers on the tour that used wood spools for display tables. They can be pretty versatile, and easily painted or used in its natural distressed state. In the Seattle area, Second Use is an organization that salvages materials like these and others that can be used in displays, but there are places like this all over the country.

Hardscapes, Too

When you have room to breathe in a larger, destination garden center, you can have things like chickens, peacocks and hardscapes, along with 15 acres of retail display area (3 acres covered), like Flower World Inc. of Snohomish does. Yes, you read that right, peacocks. I also wrote hardscapes and I liked this display of stone, which shows how many are needed to recreate this circle. There were a couple highlighted and they were next to the neatly piled stone. **GP**