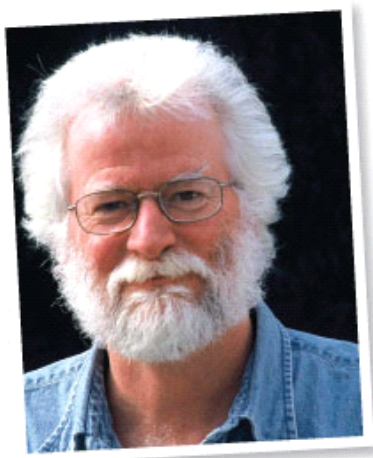


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What They Said

John Friel



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I'm perhaps a bit too fond of quotes, unable to resist a well-turned phrase. Here are a few gems from a variety of sources, some not intuitively linked with horticulture.

"I loathe gardening, but I love gardens."

—Sir Elton John

At a seminar, I heard a speaker ask her audience, "Who wants a garden?" Every hand shot up. But then: "Who wants TO garden?" Most hands went down.

Admittedly, gardening can be hard work and a source of frustration. But we need the ones whose hands stayed up. Luckily, the sequined one could afford to have a garden created for him. It's large and quirky, but no, there's no yellow brick road.

"Be not the first by which the new is tried; nor the last to lay the old aside."

—Alexander Pope

For an 18th Century satirical poet and critic who never sullied his hands with commerce (aside from dabbling in the stock market), Mr. Pope compressed some timeless marketing wisdom into that little rhyme.

Obviously, someone has to be the first. We're all indebted to the pioneers out on the leading edge—AKA the bleeding edge. But every successful product treads a well-worn path from oddity to commodity. And the most profitable place to be is usually near, but not on, the front lines.

For another take on this phenomenon, let's hear from a guy who once wrote a column for Ball Publishing: Kerry Herndon, erstwhile breeder of bromeliads and orchids. He found out the hard way (there probably isn't an easy way) that, "When you're ahead of the market ... there's no market."

"A cherub's face, a reptile all the rest."

—Alexander Pope

The sharp-tongued Pope was lampooning an enemy, of which he had many, but this barb reminded me of my beloved night-blooming Cereus. It's a gangly, sprawling, misshapen thing—until it flowers. Then the cherub's face appears and the reptilian remainder, gracelessness personified, is forgiven.

"The garden suggests there might be a place where we can meet nature halfway." —Michael Pollan

That's a rough definition of a garden: A manmade space filled with natural things, filled with life—but not actually Nature. More like a place where nature does as it's told. But turn your back on it for a season and you learn who's really in charge.

"Where flowers bloom, so does hope."

—Lady Bird Johnson

Amid the horrors of the Vietnam War, in a nation still reeling from the assassination of President Kennedy, the First Lady launched a prescient crusade for indigenous species. She said, "We are concerned for all of North America's native plants, from the smallest sprout to the tallest tree."

Mrs. Johnson is justly famed for her beautification efforts, which benefitted our industry tremendously. The institution that bears her name has grown from a small non-profit to a valued research arm of the University of Texas.

"Flowers always make people better, happier and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul."

—Luther Burbank

Mr. Burbank didn't just breed potatoes and fruit trees. Among the 800 new plants he introduced were ornamentals like Shasta daisy, hybrid roses, lilies, Gladiolus and more. It's a staggering output, but it's been topped.

Dan Heims, President of Terra Nova Nurseries, is responsible for over 1,000 new plants. He's been honored by the RHS, the Perennial Plant Association (Award of Merit) and can also claim—what else?—the Luther Burbank Award for extraordinary achievement in plant breeding.

Dan calls Burbank his hero, his "rock star." That's apt in more than a spiritual sense: Burbank was instrumental in persuading Congress to allow plant patents, the economic engine that makes new introductions feasible.

"How did these organs of plant sex manage to get themselves cross-wired with human ideas of value and status and Eros?"—Michael Pollan

How, indeed? To the plant kingdom, humans are all voyeurs.

So many quotes. So little room. **GP**

John Friel is marketing manager for Emerald Coast Growers and a freelance writer.