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Features

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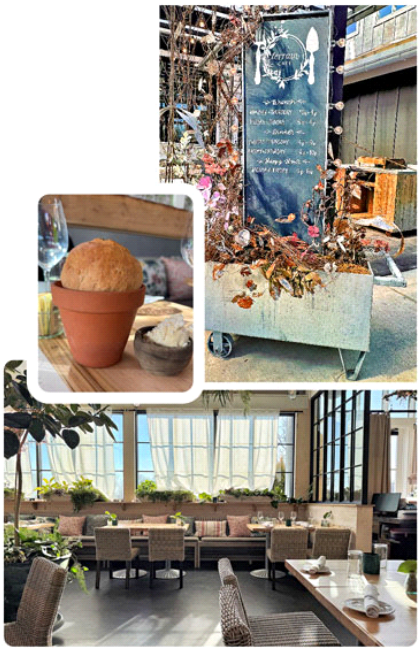
URBN’s Terrain Expands

David Williams



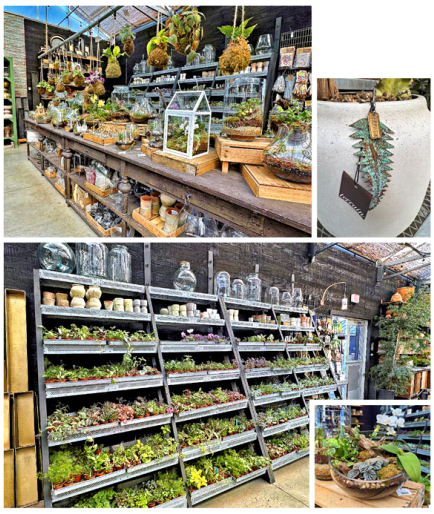
Having visited Terrain at Styer’s in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, regularly since its opening, I was intrigued to explore the new Terrain at Delaware Valley University. Known for transforming traditional garden center shopping into a compelling destination experience, Terrain, owned by URBN (Urban Outfitters, Inc.), consistently impresses with thoughtful merchandising and exceptional product selection. My recent visit to their DelVal location reinforced this perception—and offered several pleasant surprises and actionable ideas along the way.

Adjacent to the retail area is Terrain’s Café, an easily accessible restaurant via a dedicated entrance yet still thoughtfully connected to the retail space. Unlike the original café at Styer’s, housed in a converted greenhouse, the café at DelVal is situated in a modern, newly constructed building. The interior design is simultaneously contemporary and inviting, heavily featuring lush, living greenery that reinforces the garden-focused identity of the brand.

Left: Garden centers considering integrating dining options might take inspiration from Terrain’s well-executed approach but should proceed with caution. Terrain’s menu features fresh, farm-to-table dishes made from locally sourced ingredients—including produce grown by students at Delaware Valley University. While this enhances the café’s appeal and fosters deeper community connections, running a café or restaurant within a garden center poses unique challenges and complexities. It may be beneficial to look into separate management or consider leasing this portion of the business to experienced professionals. Just as operating a garden center has its distinctive quirks, managing food services requires specialized knowledge of culinary operations, food safety regulations, staffing dynamics and customer service expectations. Partnering or collaborating with dedicated restaurant operators can mitigate risks while still providing the attractive synergy between dining and retail that Terrain demonstrates so effectively.

My personal experience at the café was exceptional. Warm bread served in charming terracotta pots provided a memorable and distinctly garden-themed dining touch. This simple yet effective presentation reinforces the core garden identity of the Terrain brand—a tactic easily adopted by garden centers integrating café or refreshment offerings.

The first thing you notice upon arrival at Terrain DelVal is the seamless integration of spaces. Unlike the original Styer's location, which features several separate buildings, Terrain at Delaware Valley combines its spacious main retail building directly with an expansive greenhouse. This strategic architectural choice creates an intuitive and highly efficient customer flow, providing a dramatic sense of openness emphasized by soaring ceilings, abundant natural light and thoughtful placement of smaller structural accents—such as gazebos and a charming open-frame structure crafted from birch logs—that provide scale and interest.



This intentional design offers an excellent example for garden center owners considering renovations or new construction. By removing barriers and streamlining spaces to avoid dead ends, customers are naturally guided through a circular traffic pattern from one appealing area to the next. Garden centers can significantly increase exploration and sales per visit by adopting a similar circular flow, as customers dislike dead ends that force them to backtrack.

Right: Their impeccably designed terrariums and upscale container gardens serve as focal points that naturally draw customer attention. The larger containers have a special copper branded Terrain tag and leaf. Though Terrain offers small plants individually for customers who prefer DIY arrangements, the design team's pre-made options are nothing short of inspirational. Beautifully arranged with attention to every detail—from vessel choice to plant combinations—these displays stand out as unique gift items or elegant home décor accents.

For garden centers aiming to replicate this success, investing time in staff training focused on aesthetic design and merchandising can be a valuable strategy. Workshops for your employees on container and terrarium design could significantly boost the visual appeal and sales potential of your offerings.

Thoughtful Presentation

During my mid-March visit, the store was gracefully transitioning from winter to spring. Even in this transitional period, Terrain's merchandising elevated familiar products remarkably. Take, for instance, the simple 4-in. pansies. At my own store, these would typically retail for around $5.99; however, Terrain's price was $9.99. Similarly, quart-sized perennials—sourced from the same reliable growers I use—were retailing for $14.99, nearly double my standard price. Despite these significant price differences, the presentation and perceived customer price justification helps command the premium.

Merchandising and presentation matter enormously. Terrain removed plants from the plastic grower trays and placed them in short, rustic wooden crates. This simple yet impactful technique instantly elevated their perceived value, allowing customers to envision these plants as special additions to their homes rather than mere commodities. Such subtle merchandising touches can easily be replicated by garden centers looking to enhance their perceived product value and customer experience.

The Events Side

One standout feature that truly distinguishes Terrain DelVal from its Styer's counterpart is its significant emphasis on hosting events, especially weddings. Terrain has carefully developed a versatile and elegant event space, both indoor and outdoor, that seamlessly blends with its garden-centric aesthetic. The outdoor wedding area, though simple, allows ample room for personalized floral enhancements—a service the Terrain team conveniently provides. Terrain's move into events illustrates an excellent strategy for garden centers looking to diversify revenue streams

and extend their season beyond typical gardening months.

Below: Terrain's collaboration with Delaware Valley University offers another insightful example for garden centers seeking stronger community connections. Featuring student-grown produce within the garden center space creates a strong narrative around sustainability, local agriculture and community engagement. This model not only enriches a store's story but can also attract customers who are passionate about locally sourced products.

Incorporating thoughtfully designed operational features, such as Terrain's large barn windows that swing open during warmer weather, can enhance customer convenience significantly. Allowing indoor cashiers to easily service outdoor sales during peak seasons streamlines checkout processes, reduces staffing by eliminating the need for a dedicated outdoor cashier, and improves overall customer satisfaction.



For garden center owners interested in exploring events as part of their business model, Terrain DelVal is a great example. By creating multipurpose spaces that can effortlessly transition between retail and events, garden centers can boost profitability. Additionally, incorporating floral design services positions your garden center as a comprehensive event solution provider, further increasing your competitive edge. Again, it is important to run this as a separate part of the business. The events aspect will help spread out cash flow during non-peak garden center months.

Ultimately, Terrain at Delaware Valley University embodies a forward-thinking vision for garden retail, skillfully combining elevated merchandising, premium pricing strategies, engaging dining experiences, and profitable event hosting. Garden centers looking for inspiration and practical strategies to implement should undoubtedly put Terrain DelVal on their must-visit list. Observing their continued evolution through seasonal changes promises ongoing ideas and valuable insights worth adopting in your own garden center operations. **GP**

David Williams, a fourth-generation garden center owner and former president of the Garden Centers of America (GCA), has recently embarked on a new venture as a partner at Garden Center Consultants, leveraging his extensive industry expertise to shape the future of garden retail. Contact him at dave@gardencenterconsultants.com.