What this retailer needs from growers, plus TPIE and color talk



News and Inspiration from the world of foliage and tropical plants

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TROPICAL TOPICS

COMING UP THIS WEEK:
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Looking Ahead to TPIE

The Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE) begins next week, January 16-18 to be specific, and I for one am excited for the trip to the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, area. Bossman Chris Beytes and I have a few visits planned the Monday and Tuesday before the show, and it's always a treat to get out in the field—literally—to experience the plants and products you work so hard to grow and sell.

But it's the show itself that is the highpoint of my visit. And I'll list the reasons why:

Wednesday Morning Keynote: TPIE's keynotes are the best in the business. Trend analyst Christine Boland's talk on "The Principles of Progress" will reveal consumer insights from a global perspective while highlighting four design trends. I've previously mentioned two of those design trends—the remaining two I will briefly mention as "Fantasea" (think fluid fantasy and surrealism) and "Poptimistic Play" where one can find a release from reality and the source of eternal youth.

TPIE Create Theatre Presentations: Five different designers will present their takes on Christine's four design trends for both indoor and outdoor landscapes. What a great opportunity to gain some real-world tips and techniques for presenting these global trends. Click HERE to see who is presenting and when.

The Show Floor: It's one of the best shows around for the breadth of new varieties and inspiration for your own customers. Whether you are a grower, retailer, designer or installer, you'll find the supplies you need for your business.



The People: Everyone is in a good mood at TPIE (must be the weather), which means good business connections happen. Even the Uber drivers are pleasant and entertaining.

If you'd like to connect at the show—whether it's to discuss a possible story or product feature, or just to say hello—drop me a line at ewells@ballpublishing.com. Can't make it? I'll be following up with highlights of the show and our visits north of Ft. Lauderdale in the next several editions of *Tropical Topics*.



Color Talk

One thing you're guaranteed to see at TPIE is a whole lot of colors. And seeing that it's Florida, you might even spy a whole bunch of Pantone's Color of the Year, Living Coral. But, as my Ball Horticultural colleague Marvin Miller pointed out in a recent email to me, let's not forget that there are many Colors of the Year, depending on the company promoting them.

An e-newsletter about the many different colors of the year from color expert Kate Smith of SensationalColor.com prompted Marvin's missive. In it, he pointed out the following:

- A whole range of different companies offer their version of a Color of the Year—from paint brands to fabric and fashion brands. In fact, because paint and fabric manufacturers are more closely connected to their product-buying consumers, maybe they have a better idea of how colors affect people than a color consulting organization such as Pantone.
- Notice what words these companies use to explain why they picked their chosen Color of the Year. For example, PPG's Night Watch, a shade of green, is described by the company as "bringing the healing power from the outdoors into your home through color." Benjamin Moore says of its color, "Comforting, composed and effortlessly sophisticated, Metropolitan AF-690 exudes beauty and balance." Kate alludes to the fact that the explanation of why a company chose a color is nearly as important as the color itself, as it gives insight into consumers that can be applied to other products.



PPG's Color of the Year 2019 is a lovely darker shade of green called Night Watch.

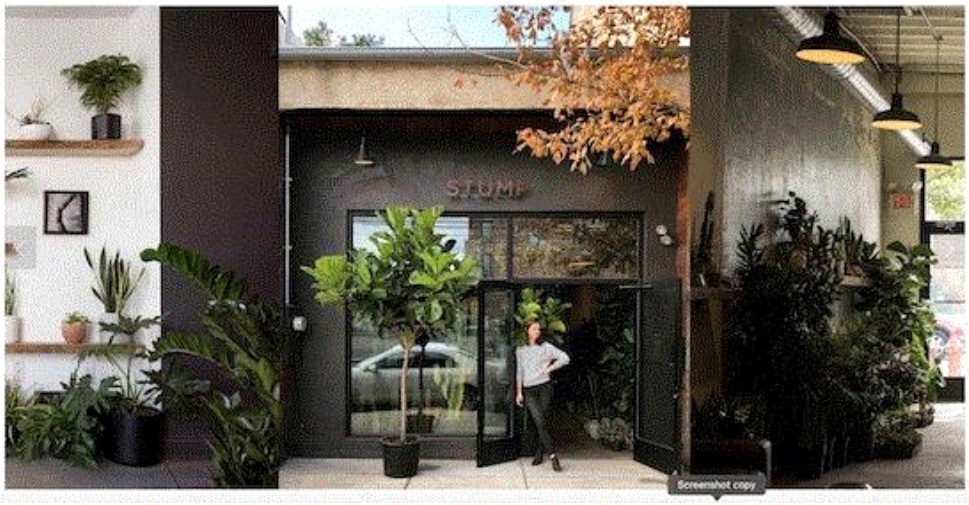
- The recent batch of Colors of the Year range from light grey through a honey to a darker shade of green. But each company always uses a floral or botanical accent, either within the photo or even within the color's description. Horticulture is all about color, after all.

The point of this whole story? You know your customers. Make your case for your own Color of the Year using words that you know will resonate with them.



What Retailers Need From Growers

In the last *Tropical Topics,* I mentioned the newish plant retailer Stump located in the Columbus/Cleveland/Philadelphia market, which was also featured in *Green Profit's* December Style issue (scroll to page 46). Since they sell tropicals and houseplants—your bread and butter—I decided to reach out and get the opinions of owners Brian and Emily Kellett about how they do what they do—and what you can do to work more closely with shops like theirs. Here's what they had to say:



Tropical Topics: If you had a tropical/houseplant industry genie, what three things would you request from it?

Brian and Emily: Our top goal is to make our shops as eco-friendly as possible. While we do our best to recycle as much as possible, we would love for the plastic planters that growers use to be made from biodegradable products. We understand the complications that arise from this request but we believe the answer is out there—it will just require us all to work together to make the transition. Additional requests would all be related to working towards the goal of producing less waste that ends up in landfills.

TT: What do you love most about the stores you've created?

B&E: Our customers' enthusiasm for our inventory and the spaces that we have created will always be what we love most about our shops.

TT: I'm wondering how your growers/suppliers could be of more help to your business.

B&E: We would love to hear from growers who are eager for suggestions. Since we are working directly with a wide variety of consumers, we know exactly what people are looking for months/years before it seems that the growers know what is in high demand.

There you have it, answers and suggestions from an up-and-coming and fairly new type of industry retailer. How might you change the way you grow and sell to meet the needs of the new retail environment?



A GMO, Air-Cleaning Houseplant

Speaking of sustainability, did you know Ball Publishing offers a sustainability-related e-newsletter called GreenTalks *written by Jen White? In Jen's last edition of her newsletter, tropicals met sustainability in a new GMO pothos variety, so I grabbed this item from it to share with you.*

The horticulture industry has always reminded consumers that they are not buying genetically engineered plants on the greenhouse benches. But that could change.

Researchers at the University of Washington say they've genetically engineered a pothos ivy so

that it can remove the air pollutants benzene and chloroform. Both of these compounds are common in households and have been linked to cancer, but they're too small to be filtered out by HEPA filters.

In their research, they found that unmodified pothos did not affect the concentration of either pollutant. But the modified plants placed in a tube with the pollutants dramatically reduced the concentrations. Chloroform decreased 82% after three days and was almost gone after day six. Benzene levels dropped a little slower, but by day eight, the concentration had decreased 75%. Next up, they're looking at how they can break down formaldehyde, another common air pollutant in homes.

However, the researchers say that if such a plant were to be placed in a traditional home, you'd need some kind of airflow system in order for the plant to affect the entire room.

Developments such as this are an interesting addition to the genetic engineering debate. To date, much of the push against genetic modifications has also been conflated with how the technology is being used. While GE corn and soybeans enable a farmer to spray herbicides over a crop, here's a technology where a gene is being used to reduce an existing pollutant.

Thanks for letting me share this, Jen! If you're interested in sustainability issues as they relate to horticulture, sign up for GreenTalks *HERE.*

Comments, questions or news to share? Just drop me a line at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

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