

Our Excelsa Gardens stop, plus LiveTrends news and who has dolphins?



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Our Second Pre-Show Stop Speaking of "It" Plants LiveTrends Goes Int'l Nominate a Young'un Dolphin Succulents?

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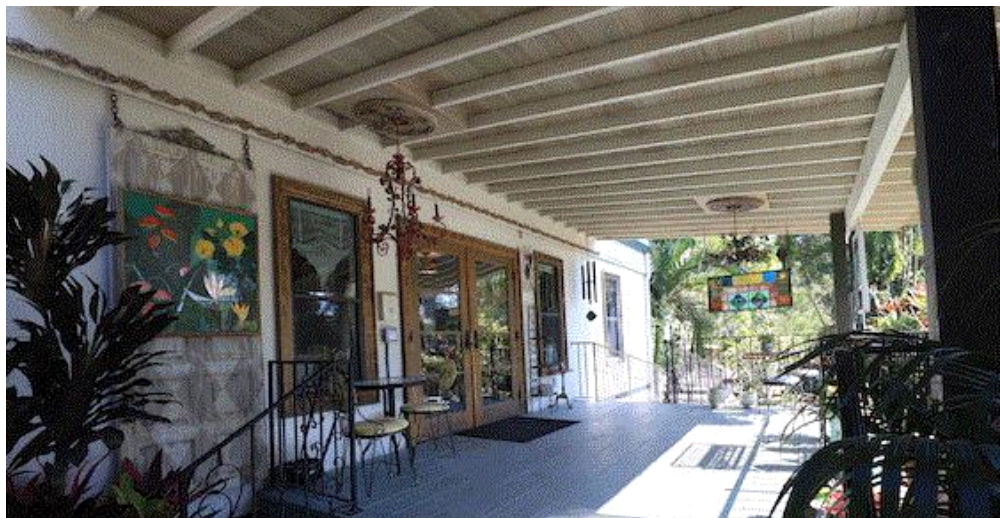
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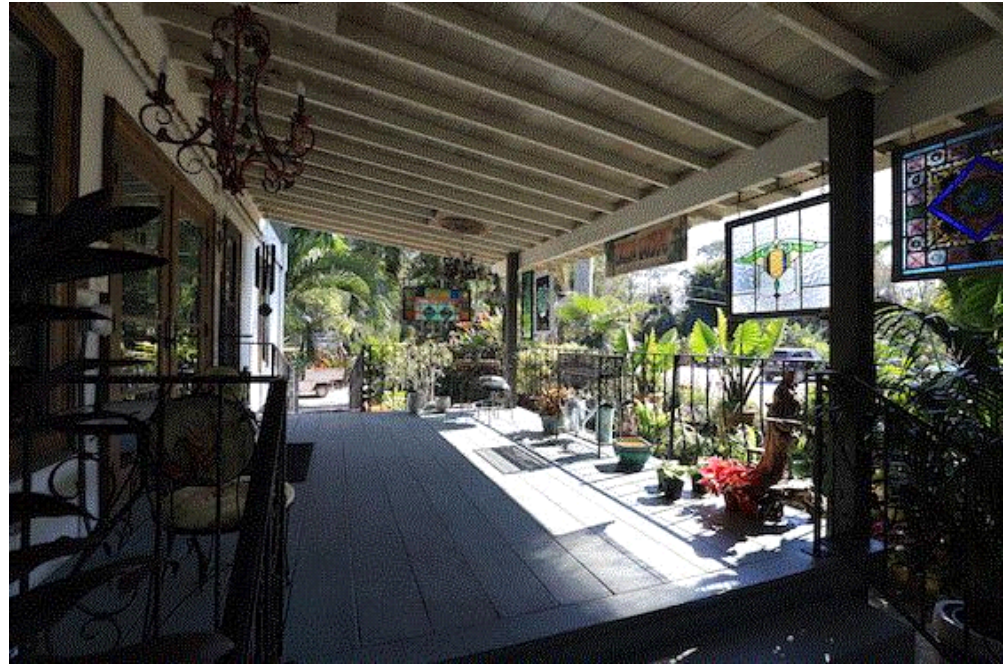
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Our Second Pre-Show Nursery Stop

In the last *Tropical Topics*, I wrote about Garden Industries in Loxahatchee, Florida, the first nursery Chris Beytes and I visited prior to the opening of TPIE (you can read about it [HERE](#)). This week, I'll tell you all about our second stop, Excelsa Gardens, which took us all of two minutes to get to—it's literally next door.

For those of you who have been to TPIE, you may know Excelsa Gardens from its numerous booth awards—and just completely inspiring booth design. Walk into Excelsa's office and you'll see that their TPIE booth is just an extension of the environment created at the nursery. That's all due to Susan Friedrich, one of the nursery's owners. She's filled the office and area surrounding it with pieces—interesting grates and grills, distressed tables and cabinets, wall art and whatnot—that she finds here and there, and they all look so great together.





Susan's great style blends with the great tropicals her husband Mark and son Colin grow in the nursery and which are showcased in a new display greenhouse adjacent to the office. They built this space specifically to give visiting buyers a chance to see some of their best plants. Mark mentioned that there are just so many great plants that are underutilized in the trade that might not have worked for the production methods of the bigger growers. Because Excelsa Gardens is small (30 acres total over three different locations and just 30 employees), they can grow those more unusual or finicky or longer-term plants, and they give them a spotlight in this space.

Like what kind of unusual plants? Well, there's this:



It's a *Cerropia peltata*, or trumpet tree, and to feel it was to touch something that felt soft, limp finger-like and somewhat creepy. But it's totally cool because its edible fruit is said to taste like kiwi gummy bears! Sorry I don't have a better picture of the entire plant.

The display house was filled with heliconias (which you could call their specialty), bromeliads (which they say a lot of customers tack on to most of their orders) and samples of the other latest "it" plants. Remember last week when I mentioned that wholesale nurseries in Florida were set up much like retail garden centers? I bet this looks like one to you. "It's as good as a good IGC," Chris said to me. But like all good visual displays, you really need to go there to experience it for yourself.





2027 CALADIUM OF THE YEAR



Speaking of “It” Plants

As we moved into an adjacent shadehouse, we asked what plants have been their best sellers recently. They keep adding philodendrons to their mix, Colin said, and variegated monstera are the hottest of the hot houseplants around. They had ric-rac cactus (*Cryptocereus anthonyanus*) aplenty, too. And this plant, *Calathea lancifolia*, caught my eye. I'd buy it in a heartbeat if I had a cat-free place to put it. Colin says it's an awesome plant, and I believe him.



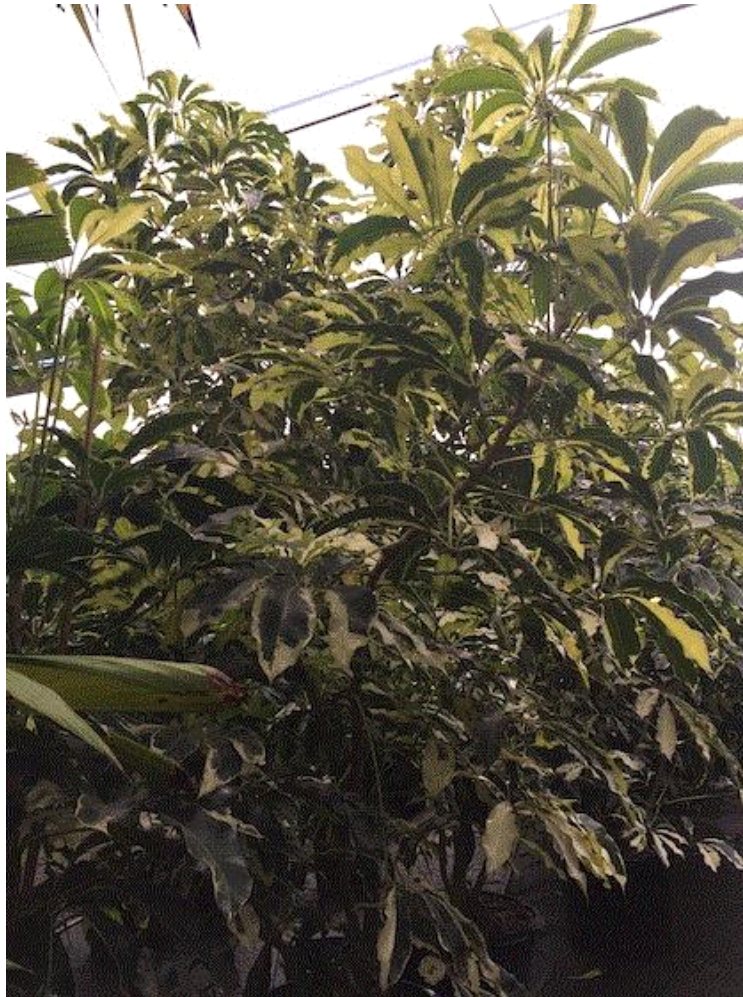
Interestingly, ferns have become a big deal, they told us, especially for landscaping use. Speaking of ferns, check out this greenhouse filled almost completely with tree ferns!





Looks like Land of the Lost, doesn't it? Close, actually. I am pretty sure Mark and Colin (above) said these very ferns were used in the filming of Avatar. Movie people, botanical gardens and zoos, those are some of the kinds of folks who pick stuff up from Excelsa, along with landscapers and architects.

Mark and Colin showed us a sneak peek of something they'll have at TPIE next year. It's called *Tupidanthus calyptratus*, or variegated snowflake, and it's a new low light/interior plant. It's hitting all the marks for an "it" plant: plenty of variegation, interesting leaf shape and it has some height to it, too. Kinda looks like a variegated Schefflera to me, which is a good thing.



Sometime during our visit—it may have been while we were chowing down on the excellent food from the Asian-themed **TMI Food Truck** the Friedrichs had on site that day—Chris asked what keeps them up at night. “Labor,” said Mark without hesitation. He said they could be doing so much more with dependable labor. That seems to be the prevailing insomnia reason for lots of ag-related fields.

Next time around I’ll tell you about our third grower visit of the day. It’s a good one with some staggering numbers of a very “it” crop. Stay tuned.



LiveTrends Goes International

One of TPIE’s most innovative exhibitors—LiveTrends Design Group—saved the big news they’ve been working on for *after* the show. And that big announcement is that they have gone international—and I don’t mean Canada. They’ve entered the India retail market, which, by testing the local waters for about six months, promises to be a lucrative one.

LiveTrends created a new business entity—LiveTrends India LLP—with business partners local to India. Those associates are Tarun Bhartia, CEO—India, and Hitesh Bhartia, COO—India, pictured below with LiveTrends founder Bisser Georgiev sandwiched between them. Bisser told me these

gentlemen own a telecom company in India, and are completely new to the horticulture and design fields. “However, they are learning extremely quickly,” Bisser commented.



And they are acting quickly, too. LiveTrends India has already built three production and assembly greenhouses, one each in Mumbai (which is also home base for the India operation), Puna and Delhi. They even have 50 employees already on the payroll and expect to have as many as 800 by the end of the year. They also plan to expand the LiveTrends products into the “premium” shopping malls in India’s seven biggest cities. LiveTrends India will be building production and assembly greenhouses in or near all of those seven cities.

I asked Bisser if they had to omit or tweak any of the current LiveTrends products—which number more than 400 items—in any way to fit the market in India, where they’ll be promoted as premium, luxury goods. “We are offering the entire LiveTrends collection as it is,” he replied. “We are finding out that, with the help of social media, trends are becoming more global than local. Whatever is appealing here, it has the same appeal in India. Also, the entire concept is to use our dynamic design work and apply it without any additional work on their end. The tests proved that this is possible.”

Why launch the LiveTrends products internationally in the first place? As said in the initial press release on the topic, offering products internationally enables LiveTrends to “utilize the value of its intellectual property and apply its design, marketing assembly and global sourcing know-how to many foreign countries.” And why India? Well, it’s a 1.2 billion-person market, for one. And, according to Bisser, Indian consumers are hungry for living décor. “By moving quickly and covering all big cities with distribution, we expect to become one of the best-known brands in the Indian home décor industry.”



Something tells me that India isn't the last international market for LiveTrends. Can't wait to see where they launch next.



Know a Young Retailer or Grower?

The deadline for submitting nominations for Ball Publishing's annual Young Grower and Young Retailer Awards is fast approaching! March 1 will be the last day for you to send us the name of your favorite 35-and-under grower and/or garden retailer. You've got to have one, right? In fact, your favorite young grower or young retailer may even be yourself. Nominating yourself is a sign of confidence—another character trait we appreciate in our finalists.

Once we gather all the submissions, our staff studies and sorts and finally determines which three nominees will be our finalists for each of the two categories. The finalists don't have it easy after that point, either. They'll write a 600-word essay for the June issues of *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*, be interviewed by our three judges (during the height of the spring rush, no less!) and then will travel to Cultivate in July, where they'll dine with the likes of Anna Ball and other horticultural luminaries TBD. The announcement of the winners will take place during Cultivate's Unplugged event on Monday evening. It's a fun experience that all finalists treasure, whether or not they take home the top award.

Fill out the quick-and-easy nomination forms here:

Green Profit/RBI Young Retailer Award.

GrowerTalks/Nexus Young Grower Award.

Who Has Dolphin Succulents?

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