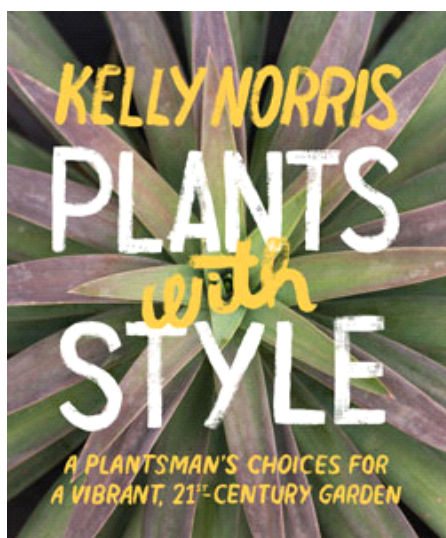


Features

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Bringing Style into the Garden

Maria Zampini



This December, Timber Press is unveiling a horticultural gift just in time for the holiday season: the newest book by Kelly Norris, “Plants with Style: A Plantsman’s Choices for A Vibrant, 21st Century Garden.”

The Director of Horticulture for the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, Kelly is a fresh-faced young man with an unparalleled depth of plant knowledge who exudes a contagious love of the green industry. I’ve personally known Kelly since 2007 when we both attended our first Garden Writer’s Association (GWA) National Symposium in Oklahoma City. During our time together at this year’s GWA Symposium, I was able to catch up with him on his new book and style interpretations.

Q. What inspired you to write this new book and how did you get the idea for it?

I’m passionate to a fault about plants and so often I feel like the way we talk about plants as horticulturists is bland and technical. We need a book that frames gardening and the plants that inspire it in stylistic terms, that evokes a passion for the plants themselves because they are the details of a garden that matter the most. Our style consciousness pervades our awareness and influences everything from how we dress to what we eat and what our homes look like. Why not acknowledge and consider that first when making gardens? Of course, there’s a lot more to the book than that. I hope in the course of its pages to expose readers to new plants, how to love them and how to garden with them.

Q. Do you have any new favorite stylish plants that aren’t in the book?

I’m always encountering and exploring new plants. I’ve got a little list of running omissions or exclusions—at some point a book has to end, right? It’s always nerve-racking to whittle down a list of plants for a writing project because you worry about what the omissions might say to a reader. Inevitably, though, you just run out of space.

That said, I would have liked to pay more homage to tropical and temperennial plants in the book. These are

plants that people revel in as the stars of container gardens in northern temperate climates. The section in Chapter 5 is pitifully short. *Pseuderanthemum*, *acalypha*, *justicia*, *abutilon*, etc. all deserve more than they got (if at all).

Q. How are you bringing style to the Des Moines Botanical Gardens?

I have a little three-part mantra that I try to instill in my staff. The first idea is to embrace opportunity with challenge—gardens can be made in either. The second is to plant passionately—there's no room for blandness. Third is to hold true to the belief that gardens are living forms of art. The results—emotional, romantic planting schemes that engage people—justify the means of this process, in part because I work with very creative people who care about doing something different, not just delivering an expectation.

Q. What landscape style trends do you feel are up and coming and how can retailers capitalize on them this spring?

I think there's an expanding opportunity to capitalize on ideas like foodscaping and how to marry the utility of plants with their aesthetics. I think retail could take the "Plants With Style" concept one step further and actually curate collections of plants that speak to new demographics and personalities. The power of visual branding is well established in other trades, especially fashion (we all wish we could look like those models we see in the stores, right?). Yet, we've never really taken it that far in gardening. We'll show pictures of attractive, middle-aged women in gardening gloves on a well-appointed patio, but the plants and her surroundings always seem to be a little secondary or homogenized. What if we created marketing images with late 20-something women in beanies and leggings planting tulips with their friends? It looks a lot closer to the market demographic we're spending a lot of energy cultivating and working towards. In short, we have to update our look and the depth of its presentation. **GP**

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