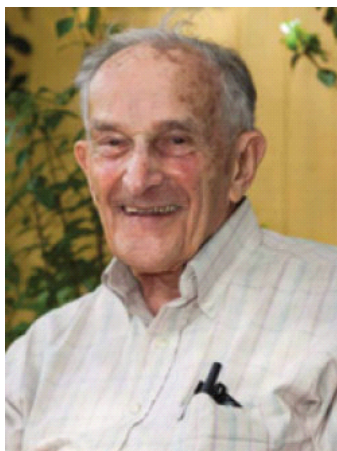


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A Long and Full Life

Ellen C. Wells



I knew the time would come when I would have to write of the passing of garden center architect and industry icon Ernest Wertheim. And yet, unlike *The New York Times* or CNN, I don't have a file to pull with a pre-written "In memoriam" piece ready for publication. What I do have for you, however, are a few recollections of a man the likes of whom this industry, quite honestly, will never see again.

The facts of a life lived over the span of a century are obviously too numerous to share, especially if the life is well lived. And Ernest's was well lived, although it got off to a treacherous start. Born in 1920 in Germany, Ernest escaped the Nazi regime amid gunfire, and came to the U.S. in 1938, losing his family in the process. The move not only allowed him to live, but it also allowed him to flourish as a landscape architect, and in the 1950s, working specifically for the nascent garden center industry. He designed some of our industry's stalwart garden centers, too—such as Alden Lane Nursery, Orchard Nursery and Al's Garden Center here in the U.S., and Bents and several others in the UK. He was a regular on all the garden center tours, ringing the "board the bus or else" sleigh bells and sharing valuable insights between stops even well into his 90s.

Ernest was 100 years, seven months and four days old when he passed away on August 4. He lived long and well because he loved long and hard—his sweetheart Margrit, his family, his career, his involvement with horticulture's numerous industry associations worldwide. And while receiving an email or side-session talk during a garden center tour from him would sometimes feel like getting pulled into the principal's office, I knew "the talk" came from a place of love, concern and deep respect for what we all do here in horticulture. He wanted to be sure we all shared our passion for plants as best we could. From the entry to the checkout, it all revolved around the customer's experience with the products we grow and how they bring joy to life.

Just this Monday I was thinking about the man, passing a garden store with two entries and saying to myself, "I wonder what Ernest would have to say about that." Everyone who met him has a little bit of Ernest in them, inspecting, analyzing and questioning each aspect of a store. Ernest, you taught us well. We were listening the whole time.

P.S. We wrote a piece for *Green Profit* in August 2010 on Ernest and his business partner Jack Klemeyer after following the pair on a tour of garden centers they designed in the San Francisco area. Read it for yourself at greenprofit.com under Magazine Archives.

P.P.S. Have an Ernest story or memory you'd like to share? Send me a note about it at ewells@ballpublishing.com.

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