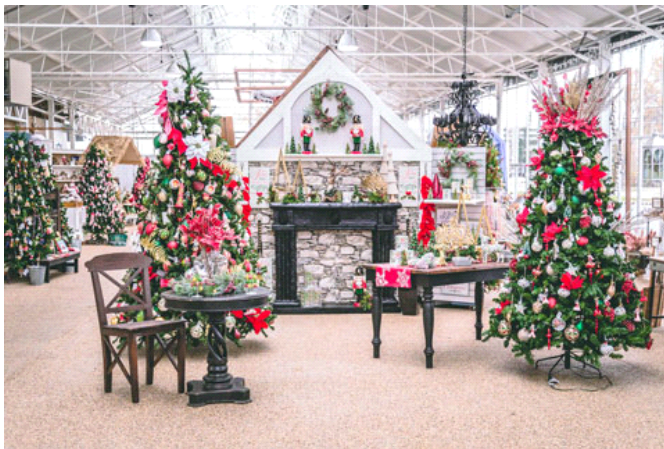


Features

1/1/2021

Retail Tour, 2020 Style

Jennifer Polanz



Of course, a retail garden center tour in 2020 is going to have to look a lot different than in the past. In keeping with the flexibility of the year, AmericanHort created a virtual look at three garden centers in the U.S. and one in South Africa. The tour mixed video with some live chat and allowed tour attendees to get a little semblance of normal in an otherwise very abnormal year. Here are the stops and a few noteworthy bits about each.

Petitti's Garden Center

If you don't live here like me, you probably don't hear their trademark jingle singing the name of the garden center. But if you saw the tour, you did get the gist that Petitti's is definitely one of the biggest names in Northeast Ohio (with nine retail stores), and had a pretty bang-up year this year despite the difficulties in staying open. President & CEO A.J. Petitti told attendees how they changed some setup, including a plan to display more holiday items along peg walls and mannequins, and not on Christmas trees, to make it faster and easier to shop, while allowing for social distancing (note all the space in the photo).

They also changed their checkout line structure, too, to form one main line that branches customers off to the next available register once they reach the front, versus forming individual lines for each register.

His prediction for 2021? "I think it's going to be close to what we saw this year," he says, adding they were up 43% in 2020 and he thinks they will keep about 25% of that increase in 2021. "We picked up about 150,000 new customers this year, so I'm hoping we can retain that."



He also talked about self-watering tables they purchased from Orlandelli Group about three years ago. Since they put them in, indoor plant sales increased substantially, A.J. says. They added in displays from New Wood in Oregon and those two additions “really, really kicked sales into high gear in those categories.”

Eckards Garden Pavilion

A large independent garden center in Bedfordview, Germiston, South Africa, this retailer prides itself on providing top-notch customer service, as well as creating a culture that people want to work in. Eckards wasn't able to do a live Q&A because of the time

difference, but tour attendees could still see how they set themselves apart through the pre-recorded video takes. For example, the retailer shows customers what mature specimens look like via some of their trees and shrubs that have been onsite for more than 40 to 50 years, according to owner Wayne Stewart.

The bird bar is one of the most popular departments and an example of how they block departments so they're a store-within-a-store.

Rockledge Gardens

This Space Coast, Florida-area garden center started as a roadside stand in 1960 and today features not only a full-service garden center and landscaping operation, but also a farmers market and destination venue that's rented for weddings and other events. They host workshops and tours for children and adults in non-COVID times, as well.

They converted 8,000 sq. ft. for the venue, called the Harry & Mary Witte Learning Center, that has hosted 125 weddings since 2017, as well as numerous other events. It's a natural site that includes a 2,000-sq. ft. covered pavilion for receptions, ceremony lawn and gardens, a fire pit, a wedding suite and a memorial garden.

The farmers market began in 2012 to partner with local vendors to provide fresh produce to customers. There's a building on site dedicated exclusively to the market.

A final note: the T-shirts worn by staff members are fabulous, like “Drop the Beet” and “I'm rooting for you.”





Roger's Gardens

This is a garden center in the unique position of being located in a very high-end area in Corona Del Mar, California. Features include Farmhouse at Roger's Gardens, a highly rated farm-to-table restaurant, as well as a landscape design operation and unique departments like a gallery and extensive gift offering.

The store transforms itself at Halloween and winter holidays to create an extraordinary setting for customers. For example, fall 2020's Halloween Boutique took the shape of a pirate's ship. Then

Halloween makes way for the Christmas Boutique the first week of October.

The whole operation spans about 5 acres, with the retail portion taking about 2.5 acres.

Check It Out

We barely scratched the surface here and it's definitely worth watching the full tour for yourself. Carve out two hours and rejoice that you won't have to stand in line for the bathroom on this one! The retail tour can be found here: AmericanHort.org/Retail-Tour. Thanks to tour sponsor Proven Winners for helping to make this event happen. **GP**