

# GROWERTALKS

## GT in Brief

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## Ball Buys Conard-Pyle

*Chris Beytes*

A pair of venerable family businesses made news in August as 110-year-old Ball Horticultural Company has agreed to purchase 118-year-old Conard-Pyle. The Pennsylvania breeder/propagator is best known for Knock Out and Drift roses. The deal, announced August 14, was finalized October 1.

Why was Conard-Pyle for sale? We went to the source and asked third-generation co-owner, president and CEO Steve Hutton.

“It’s a succession issue,” Steve replied. “I’m the last one with my last name who wants to do this.” (Steve has one son, who doesn’t want to follow in his footsteps.) “It became a question of how do I do it and when do I do it. Rather than wait until I was kind of old and pottering, I thought I’d do it while I was still healthy and relatively sane,” he joked. Steve is just 64.

Conard-Pyle’s shareholders (which include Steve and his wife, and French company Meilland Roses) decided on a competitive bid process. The main criteria was that “the fit be right,” Steve explained, meaning a buyer with a long-term perspective, an owner-operator doing some version of what Conard-Pyle does, and that was a cultural fit—“people who conduct themselves the way we conduct ourselves, with values and ethics and their approach to business. And Ball touched all the bases.”

And why did Ball want to buy Conard-Pyle? We asked Anna Ball that question. She answered that one of Ball’s strategic goals is to strengthen its position in perennials and woody ornamentals, and Conard-Pyle is a “fabulous” company in those areas.

“And it’s a successful company,” she added. “Usually companies that are for sale, there’s something wrong with them. Conard-Pyle is well-managed and successful.”

The deal includes distribution, production and administration facilities in Pennsylvania and California, plus their breeding division, NovaFlora, and all the company’s intellectual properties, such as the Knock Out and Drift rose brands.

Ball will operate Conard-Pyle as a separate division, retaining its staff, name and facilities. Ball Ornamentals (BOS), which focuses on woody plants, will be integrated into Conard-Pyle. BOS already has some roses in

its line, from German breeder Kordes, which should compliment Conard-Pyle's Meilland genetics.

As for Steve? He plans to stay on for two years to help with the transition and with finding his replacement. **GT**