

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Retail, the Swiss Way

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Attendees of the annual International Garden Center Association discuss the greenhouse of Ernst Meier, one of 12 garden centers and one big box retailer featured on the IGCA's tour of Switzerland, August 22-26.

GrowerTalks/Green Profit joined 220 or so garden center owners, managers and related folks on the five-day Zurich-based trip—IGCA's 56th—which also featured a train ride through the Alps, a lunch cruise on Lake Zurich, tour of a specialty chocolatier (free samples until we were sick of the stuff), dinner in a castle and more. The typical IGCA fare.

Switzerland was this scribe's sixth IGCA (joining France, Japan, Germany, Ireland and Denmark), and I'm a confirmed believer in the event, for two reasons: It's given me a deep dive into the retailing habits of different countries and cultures, and it has connected me with the best garden center people on the planet.



I chose to feature Meier in this spot because they're one of Switzerland's oldest garden centers (founded 1894 as a seed company), but with one of the newest garden center facilities, featuring 1 acre of covered greenhouse shopping, 2 acres of outdoor plants and a small, but upscale, café. You can tell from the inset photo of their entrance that they're hardly typical. From the road, Meier could be any high-end retailer of Swiss watches or Danish furniture.

Once inside the plant sales area, however, Meier represents what you'll find at most other quality Swiss garden centers: a tidy paver floor, sleek metal benches and an open-roof greenhouse for all-weather shopping—essential in a country where we were told it rains 15 out of every 30 days during the spring. To the right, you can see two open overhead garage-style doors. Many centers we visited featured these, allowing either lots of air (and traffic) flow or a weather-tight seal, depending on the climate. Also note the extremely heavy greenhouse structure. We were told the Swiss like to over-engineer everything.

You'll read more about the IGCA tour and Swiss garden centers in the November issue of *Green Profit*. **GT**