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A joint e-newsletter by Chris Beytes (GrowerTalks) and Bill Calkins (Green Profit)

Thursday, January 25

Welcome!

Chris: We've just finished up the first day of IPM Essen 2007, and it's been a great show thus far, not only by our standards, but by those of the folks we've encountered. Trends and ideas abound, so we'll have plenty to write about besides our lame adventures in cabs and trains, and reports of the food we've eaten.

Bill: The food has been excellent, no doubt, but the show has been even more appealing. I was just discussing it with our international editorial colleague, Anabel Evans (from [FloraCulture International](#)) and I feel there are a ton of ideas from Europe that will translate to the North American market. Of course, there are plenty of European trends that won't and we'll try not to get into them.

To me, the exhibition halls we saw today were all about decor. In many cases, the plants seemed secondary. That's not to say they weren't of the highest quality, but when you see a 4-inch pot adorned with 18 inches of decorations, you have to wonder.

Chris: One thing I meant to mention yesterday was that our garden center visits on Wednesday proved one thing: the trends that I saw last year at Essen were ubiquitous in German garden centers. Bill, find me one of those photos from yesterday of all the yellow, orange and green decor and the fuzzy daisies:



Yeah, that's a good one. Last year at Essen, this stuff was everywhere, and I mean

everywhere, and after seeing it in every garden center we visited, I was truly afraid that I'd see a repeat at Essen this year.

Whew! Thankfully, that wasn't the case at all. You can still find citrus colors and daisies, but they're not as common and might be considered a little bit "five minutes ago," at least here in Germany. The colors are still here, but overall the yellow, oranges and greens are more muted and earthy. The big trend colors seem to be black & white, earth tones and natural materials. Here are a couple of examples:



But enough of that. Bill, why don't you weigh in with your first impressions of Essen.

Bill: All I can really say is WOW. I don't really know what to say other than I hope some of these trends hit the states, and soon. Jennie and I are in the market for a house and I really want to incorporate flowers into the decor. We did see a lot of great display racks and benches incorporating wood and metal that seemed to reflect the merchandising our customers are accustomed to in clothing stores, supermarkets and other trendy retailers. A large part of Essen is about retail strategies, but there are also a lot of plants and breeding work being shown off. So, Chris, what did you see that the growers and grower/retailers should take note of?

Chris: Ask anybody at the show and they say Essen is all about ideas - especially in packaging. If you're into potted plants or cut flowers, there are loads of ideas to steal. And much of it has to do with either inducing consumers to buy more, or making it more convenient to buy.

I like what the Europeans do with landscape plants, such as boxwood. Such as pack five small ones together in one long pack and promote that they'll make 1 meter of hedge. JobaPlant had beautiful 6-inch rhododendrons, in bud, with a carry handle. Arie Ramp said they weren't necessarily intended for traditional nurseries, which won't pay more for a small pot with a handle. Instead, they sell to DIYs and grocery stores that understand the value of convenience

to the customer. I remember that you commented on how an independent should care just as much about customer convenience, if not more.



Bill: We also saw four small yews in a pack meant for a 1-meter space packaged together as a grab and go. all I could think of was the amount of time a nursery would save in explaining how many a customer would need for a small area.

Chris: Then there was the tillandsia grower - remember, I asked if he ever considered trying to get his small, easy-to-care-for, impulse-oriented product into a retailer such as IKEA, and he replied that he had, in fact, swung a deal with that retailer, only to have them take the idea and do it themselves in order to save money - they sourced the product out of Poland or someplace, he said. The lesson being, if you ever get lucky enough to break into that retailer (something many in the industry talk about), you'd better be sure to be super competitive on your pricing, or provide something they can't duplicate.

Bill: For all the BuZZ readers, consider what you can do to differentiate so you don't have to compete with the big guys. For instance, high-end pottery that encourages your customers to decorate indoors and outdoors. Speaking of which, we stopped into the [Scheurich](#) booth and met with the North American rep Keith over coffee discussing color trends and the North American market, in general. Here's the international marketing director Axel with some new containers reflecting the muted tones Chris mentioned. Both commented that the U.S. market is about two years behind Germany in terms of hot colors and guessed that Germany is three years behind Holland. If our international coverage seems way out there, consider it a preview of what's to come.



(Yawn). Well, it's midnight and in the words of Anabel the Brit, it's time to catch some zeds. Chris?

Chris: Yeah, if anyone wonders why our heads bobble, it could be the late hours we keep to get this stuff out. We hope you enjoy it - feel free to weigh in with comments and criticisms. (Click on our names, below, for a direct e-mail link.) But just for fun, here are a couple of shots of us in action. Just to prove we really are at the show and not making this stuff up!





Until tomorrow,

Chris & Bill

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