

Pre-TPIE: Touring Retailers & Growers in Southern Florida



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- First Stop: Pinder's
- The Idea Garden
- How They Hire
- Stop and Look
- Going Formal
- Foliage Color
- The Vanda Rock Star
- Changed My Mind



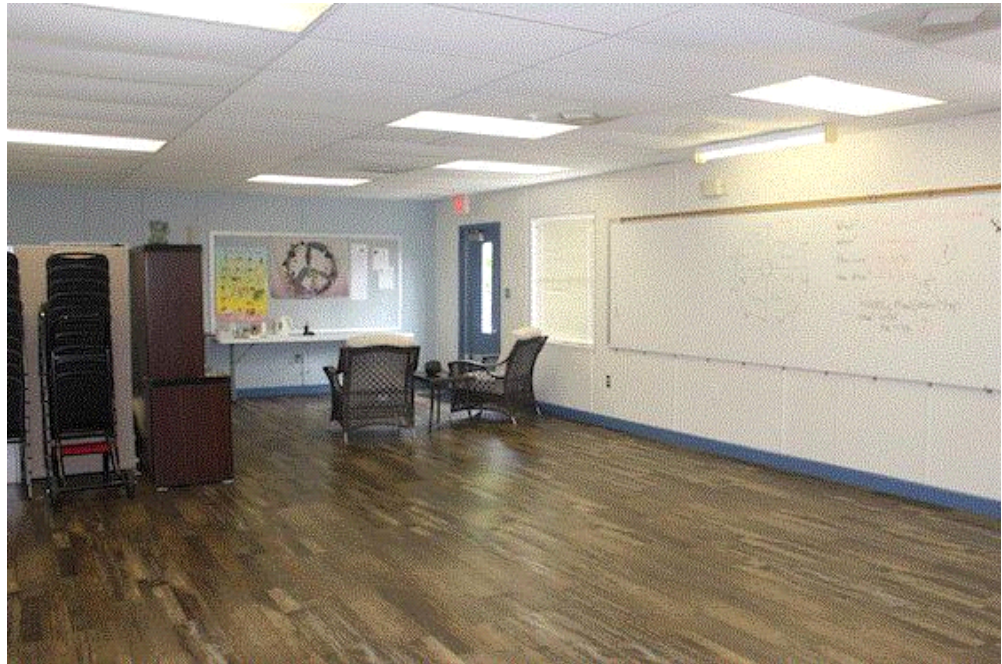
First Stop: Pinder's

If you weren't aware, Bossman Beytes and I (and his wife Laurie) are in southern Florida this week to attend TPIE. First, to answer your question, which is likely the same as my mother's question to me: Yes, it's been as cold here as the weather people say it is. Floridians are shivering. Northerners are considering putting long pants on.

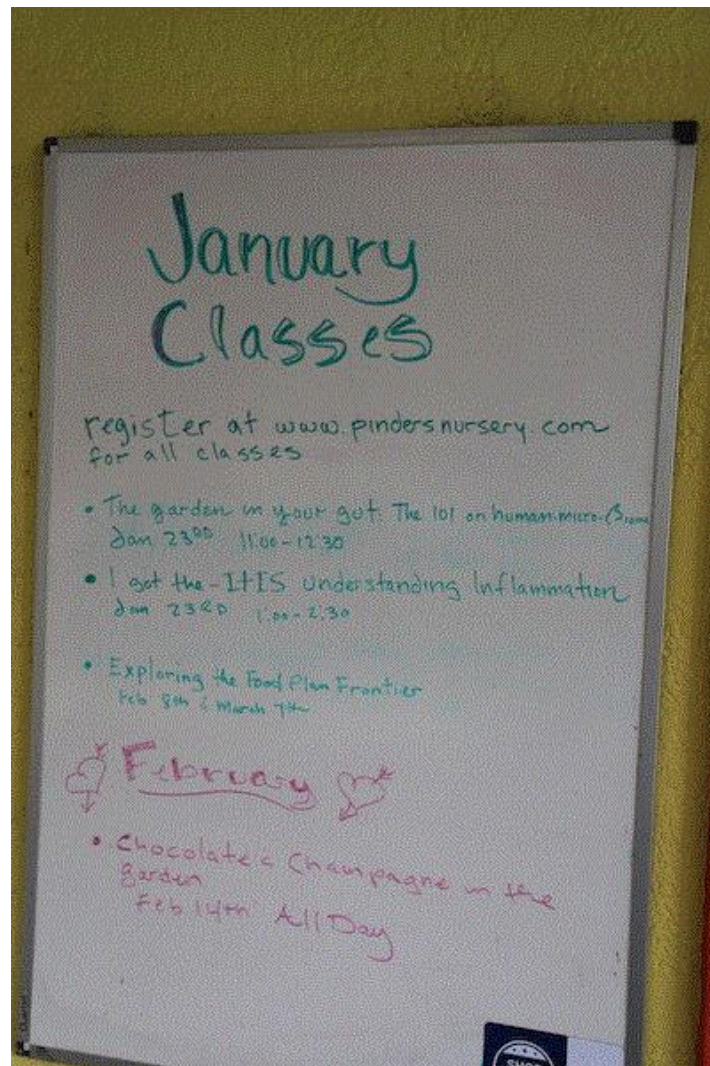
We arrived here early to give us a couple days to make grower and retailer visits. And that's what this edition of *Buzz* will be about—a few of the whos-and-whats we saw before the show even opened its door.

Our first stop was Pinder's in Palm City. Its full name is The Community Garden Center at Pinder's Nursery. And talking with Terri and Kenleigh (mother and daughter) Pinder, they really do emphasize the community aspect of their establishment. We talked about that topic in the [December issue of *Green Profit*](#), in case you didn't catch that.

What the visit afforded me was a chance to see the store's classroom building.



It's where many of the community-building activities take place—garden classes, cooking classes, healthy living classes, yoga, indoor exercise, reiki—you name it.



The classroom is a portable building that was previously leased by a school district “and it’s perfect,” Terri said in our interview last December. She estimates that they spent \$10,000 for building and another \$4k to plumb, run the electric, paint and add some new flooring. A 24 ft. x 36 ft. air conditioned space for that! It doesn’t require anything new and fancy. If you offer it, customers will come—could be on your sales floor or in a separate building, they’re just looking to form a community.



The Idea Garden

Customers are also looking for new ideas of what to do in their gardens. How about giving them some? Again, you can be as simple or as complex as you’d like—your customers will appreciate any level of effort.





The Pinders installed a few gardens—sun, shade, pollinator, etc.—around their pavilion as inspiration. You could dig the plants in for a season or two, or make it more temporary by arranging the pots and piling some mulch around the base. What I like about their Idea Garden is that it's around back, so the signage for it draws you further into the garden center and through all their product.



How They Hire

Daughter Kenleigh had spent some time outside the family business working in the culinary world (did we mention she's a trained chef?). She's brought some of her experiences from that world into the garden retail environment. Namely in the way she hires.

Rather than focusing on creating displays, events or products, Kenleigh makes a point of hiring key support roles—like head cashier, for example. The team comes first and you take it from there. But any new hire has gotta have an excellent customer service attitude. They'll teach the horticulture part, it's harder to teach attitude. But she will ask a question such as "What's your favorite plant?" If somebody answers, "I don't like plants," well, they're out.



The Pinder family, left to right: Kenleigh, Ian, Martin and Terri

Pinder's Nursery is definitely an operation we'll keep an eye on over the coming years as they transition to the next generation of leadership. And with Millennials filling Terri and Martin's shoes, I suspect the sense of community they've come to create will become even stronger.

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Stop and Look

Our next stop was an informal stop-and-poke-around-for-10-minutes detour into Giverny Gardens in Jupiter (Chris Beytes' hometown!). Cute and tidy store, indeed! I spotted two display ideas you could replicate at your own store in less than a day.



I liked this arrangement of round tables within the structure of the long pergola. It naturally highlighted the plants within each section. I wasn't the only one who liked it—Laurie, a garden center aficionado, thought it was a nice idea, too.

Going Formal

I also liked the way the store had created a somewhat formal garden with the arrangement of pots.



It's a smart way to showcase the plants and inspire your customers to buy more than just one or two. Look at what you can do with so many! Plus, it's a smart way to stock plants in a store with

such a small footprint.

Foliage Color

Tuesday found me leaving Chris and Laurie to visit Homestead on their own while I visited a few stops in nearby Davie. Among my stops was a place called Grant's Farm, which is almost exclusively bromeliads and almost exclusively for the landscape and architect trade. I'll tell you about the "almost" another time.

Owner Steven Grant toured me around his 10 acres to take a look at all the color (he has another 12 acres elsewhere). That's what he specializes in—color from foliage rather than from flowering. And growing them in mighty big containers, too—up to 25 gal. pots! He grows some of the best quality in the business—and I'm not saying that because I know quality bromeliads (I don't!). Grant's quality was independently confirmed by a couple of folks I ran into on the TPIE show floor the next day.

Mr. Grant had all of the usual suspects in production, but he pointed out a couple of varieties that were special because he had found and named them himself.

First, there's Red Candles. Have you ever seen such tall, erect and thin bromeliad leaves before? Just like a candelabra. Landscapers love them because they're different and add some structure.



And then there's a variety called Pink Panties. Steven said it has nearly a pink dayglow effect in full sun.



Why the name, I asked? Because you don't forget a name like that, Steven said. I agree with him.

The Vanda Rock Star

R&R Orchids is also best in the biz when that biz is growing vanda orchids. Someone tipped me off about Tony Romani's excellence in vanda growing, so we stopped in on Monday on our way home from Palm City and Jupiter (there I go, messing up my chronology). This is the guy who supplies many of the well-known botanical gardens—Brooklyn, Chicago, etc.—with their vandas for their orchid shows. And he brings home awards from orchid competitions for his excellent work.



Vandas can be tricky to grow but he's gotten the technique down pat. He started with vandas when he bought one for his girlfriend (now wife) 20-plus years ago. And he just really enjoyed caring for it. One lead to several hundred and he decided to take a go at making a living from it. He started with a dream, a passion and a determination to grow the darn things. And it helped that he didn't know he shouldn't have been able to do it.



Now look at him—he's a "rock star" at the local green markets, has tons of well-to-do clients knocking down his door and just hit the million dollar mark in sales. Not a bad take from 30,000 sq. ft.

Changed My Mind

Now, I said I wasn't going to mention anything from the show. But I changed my mind after the opening keynote session from Trendwatching's Max Luthy. Max's insights into overarching trends on a societal level are what gets folks excited to get to work on their next best things. He's that good!

But the reason I'm mentioning his talk now is because one of his trends—Village Squared—is exactly what's happening at Pinder's Nursery. Connection, as Max explains, is a fundamental human need. We needed to connect as a group to survive the lions and bears and storms—all the dangerous stuff we had to overcome if we were to make it as a species. We're wired to need community. With all the divisiveness in the world, people have a "hunger for a healthier community," Max says.

He used examples such as a rethinking of a Milanese piazza Apple created for 24/7 use and Walmart's reimagining of its footprint to be more of a town center. But Max could have just used Pinder's portable classroom and their schedule of health-focused classes.

Think ideas from a place like Trendwatching are beyond our industry's efforts? Think again.

More on Max's other four trends next time.

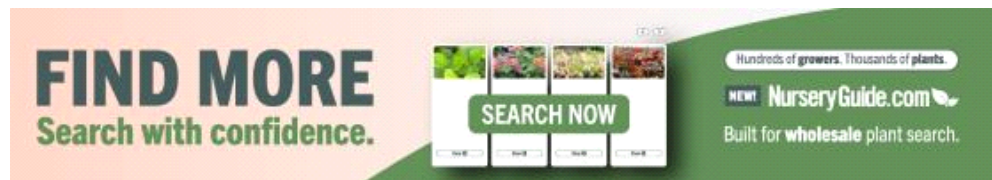
More TPIE and tropical things in my *Tropical Topics* e-newsletter and the next *Buzz*, both coming out next week. Meanwhile, comments, questions, suggestions? Send 'em to ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

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