

GROWERTALKS

Young Voices

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Industry Flower Festival: CAST '19

Lauren Kirchner



The story of 2019 California Spring Trials: A concert performed collectively by our industry singing the songs of new. A platform for belting out the freshest value propositions for plants and guiding the future of garden spaces. As performances go, there were plenty of great crescendos, a few lullabies and some straight-up lip synching that altogether kept us charmingly invigorated.

I had the pleasure of traveling with the industry's finest and there we were: hands up to the sky anticipating the next introductory chord, ready to join in. Here are a few perspectives on the set list from CAST '19:

Romantically Charged

If the consumer was the one that got away, this group of flowers is going to get her back. I loved seeing the presence of the ultra-romantic flowers this year: Dahlia Sincerity at Syngenta, lots of flirty dahlias at Beekenkamp and Selecta's massive display of large pot dahlias.

Pictured: The author takes 5 at Benary's Spring Trials stop.

Gorgeous double petunias at Kientzler, ruffled Roller Coaster New Guinea Impatiens at Dümmer and the wondrous displays of extra-large tuberous begonias also fall into this category of extra romance. A woman at a garden club once told me she felt pretty when seeing flowers that were pretty. I think the same concept crosses into the romance of these bursting layers of flower form. Perhaps the end consumer feels loved by seeing these, too.

Intentional or not, the underlying theme of big, double flowers was an acoustic serenade of "I can't take my eyes off you." At least I was feelin' the love.

Breathe it In

While captivated by the romance of doubles, the added bonus of scent for me was an immediate hook. All the beautifully scented nemesias from Westhoff and PlantHaven, unique smelling herbs at Hishtil and the gorgeous display of Stock Mime at Sakata were all intoxicating, unexpected notes. This group begs the question: "Have you smelled a flower today?" Shouldn't everyone face plant into a plant at least once a day?

The interactivity of scent is a tremendous sensory experience that I think has been lacking in breeding. The more a

plant can do, the more connected and committed the consumer will be to see to its success. Encore here, please!

The Gray Hairs

Textured, gray filler plants had a bit of a touch-and-feel moment this year. I had to touch all of them along the way: soft, wiry and all shades of silver gray. Again, added sensory has a draw. In the same friendly sharing fashion of “Taste this, try this—FEEL this!” All cuddling enthusiasts can easily transform into plant parents and cozy up to a senecio or salvia. The best part is they’re super easy to care for and never argue about the next Netflix binge.

The market of this category might not be wildly valuable, but we’re all superfans of a good, textured contrast in a combo. You gotta have a few filler songs on the playlist.

The Warriors

Beacon and Imara Impatiens and Cora XDR Vinca were impactful, headliner introductions. All set to be warriors for many programs to regain market share lost to the pressures of disease. But I’m still considering what possibilities could occur should those millions of dollars in research and development been allocated to another avenue of exploration for the industry. Would \$10 million get us a bright blue double gerbera daisy that smells like cotton candy? Maybe garden plants bred to bloom in lower light levels and make a bigger impact on the houseplant craze?

Is it possible to white-flag out of this battle of disease mutation and step aside to create the greatest performer of our generation in another plant? New possibilities could transpire simply by letting go of something that may ultimately have to die anyway. For how long will the resistance last and until when will we be forced into the creation of a totally different replacement?

Sure, impatiens and vinca have a place now and will for at least five to 10 more years, but assuredly, none of my generation can identify either as a typical bedding plant and wouldn’t know their loss of genus in 10 years. Maybe the time is now for a completely new artist to take the center stage? A hit isn’t necessarily what’s on the chart; it’s what people sing along to.

Until next year’s release ... Happy Spring!

A very special thanks to Express Seed Co. for their generosity and hospitality. **GT**

Lauren Kirchner is the Director of Sales and Marketing for her family’s greenhouse operation in Waller, Texas.