

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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A Blossoming Adventure: The Pro Mastercourse in Floriculture

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In the middle of winter, as January sunk into snowy stillness, I found myself doing quite the opposite. I was warming up, clutching my passport and antsy to join a group of horticultural kin on an expedition tailored to expand our perspectives. The Pro Manager Mastercourse in Floriculture, organized by Jungle Talks awaited—a direct line to the heart of European horticulture and industry titans spanning the Netherlands and Germany. This wasn't your run-of-the-mill tour; it was an intensive dive into the depths, designed for us to leave behind the familiarity of our daily grinds in pursuit of broader horizons.

Pictured: This year's participants of the Jungle Talks

Pro Mastercourse in Floriculture.

The purpose of the Mastercourse is to amalgamate a disparate group of industry leaders—growers, directors and innovators, among others—into a cohesive cohort ready to tackle pressing issues, such as sustainability and the trajectory of our field. Additionally, we take some time to reflect on the past that delivered us to where we are today. Our group was a tapestry of nationalities, from Turkey to Taiwan, Poland to Portugal, and more. Each participant brought their own unique perspectives to the mix. This diversity proved to be one of the course's greatest strengths, facilitating rich discussions and the exchange of ideas across cultural and professional boundaries. This year, there were four Canadians in attendance ... we humorously noted our “peaceful invasion,” as it's not common for multiple participants to join from one country.

Our itinerary read like a who's who of the horticultural industry. The journey was punctuated by stops at the Aalsmeer Flower Auction and the Westland Museum, grounding us in the foundational aspects of horticulture and its evolution over time. Visits to Koppert Cress, Ter Laak Orchids, Koppert Biologicals and Porta Nova Roses offered up-close encounters with the pinnacle of sustainability and beauty. Meanwhile, explorations of Emsflower's sprawling greenhouses, Maan Group's innovations and Viscon Technologies' cutting-edge automation solutions painted a vivid picture of the sector's future. There were many visits—too many to share altogether here. But I'm sincerely grateful for all of the dedicated time spent by these companies' C-Suite and caliber team members in

welcoming us and mentoring us in key topics.

Along this jam-packed list of stops, we hit IPM Essen to explore the show itself and participate in the AIPH International Grower of the Year Awards. Not only did we get to put on a wonderful show (there may have been spray suits and streamer cannons involved), but members of our group interviewed for the International Young Grower of the Year Award. A huge congratulations to Colin Fernandes of Marginpar for winning!

The demanding schedule and the ongoing travel from one venue to the next tested our endurance, however, some of the real magic occurred in those interstitial spaces. During the bus rides between visits, genuine conversations brought us closer. These were the times when barriers fell further away, and exchanges about our aspirations, challenges and visions for the future of horticulture blossomed. It was here in these cramped quarters that the unadvertised power of the Mastercourse unfolded, transforming a group of strangers into a close-knit community of professionals and friends.

After two weeks, we recapped our experience together and said our goodbyes. I may, possibly, have ugly cried in the last moments. As we returned to our respective corners of the globe, we carried home new memories and knowledge gained, but also a renewed vigor for our careers. The challenges facing our industry are many and the path forward is not always clear. Yet, the Mastercourse has equipped us to return to our roles not just as leaders, but as ambassadors of a sustainable and vibrant future for horticulture.

If you're reading this thinking "Okay, where do I sign up?", I have good news for you. Renee Snijders and Ed Smit, the fearless leaders behind Jungle Talks, have recently shared they're coordinating another round for October 2024. Check it out at jungletalks.com for the new itinerary and information on how to sign up.

In essence, the Jungle Talks Pro Mastercourse in Floriculture was a profound journey through the heart of horticulture, blending the personal with the professional, the theoretical with the practical and the local with the global. It was a reminder that, in the end, our endeavors in this field aren't just about plants, but about the people and the planet they sustain. **GT**

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