

LAWN & GARDEN

Retailer's



Merchandiser Of the Year FINALIST

See what beauty and creativity did for this New Hampshire garden center and how you can incorporate some of its award-finalist ideas into your store.

COMPILED BY CATHERINE EVANS

If you have ever been to New England in, well, any time of the year, you will realize how surreal it all seems. There is nothing that isn't beautiful or breathtaking to look at, and Churchill's fits right into that mold, hence the reason Churchill's was chosen as the second finalist introduction.

I had the opportunity to visit Churchill's last summer during the ANLA Retail Roadshow in New England. When I walked up to the store, I was in awe. The entire staff was standing outside to welcome the tour attendees, which was a great feeling after getting off the bus. Then the best part emerged when we were able to see the store's full view. There were interesting displays, fabulous merchandise (yes, I shopped) and just a neat and creative atmosphere.

Take a look at what Churchill's has to offer, because it is very much in the home décor business as well as the plant business.

— Catherine Evans

Churchill's is synonymous with inspiration. Owners David and Diana Kirkpatrick are committed to creating for customers a singular shopping experience that encourages individual expression through vignettes incorporating premium plants, outdoor living accents and garden-inspired home décor.

In our park-like atmosphere, customers are treated to the New Hampshire seacoast's largest selection of annuals; hundreds of species of perennials; lush, established roses; hardy, ornamental trees and shrubs; and a healthy selection of traditional and heirloom herbs and vegetables. Our extensive gardens and renowned displays are complimented with statuary and fountains from around the world; dramatic, custom-designed containers; and a splendid selection of pottery for every gardener's purpose. Outdoor furniture — including a comprehensive Smith and Hawken collection — enhances the landscape, creating both quiet places of refuge to sit and ideas for the homeowner.

We merchandise our displays with the customers' personal needs and experiences in mind, and we are confident our approach will translate into increased sales and profit. We strike the delicate balance between "form over function" when creating vignettes throughout the showroom and garden center. We are careful to blend products in inspiring and realistic ways while realizing the importance of the bottom line. It is our goal not only to make a sale but also to inspire customers to bring home the confidence to create their own private oases with our products.

Each of the vignettes shown here were designed and displayed in the summer of 2006. All displays are signed, albeit subtly so as not to litter the presentation. We create our own signage — including several that encourage customers to shop from the displays — further branding ourselves and our unique merchandising philosophy.

Churchill's sales soared in 2006 despite a sluggish economy and freakish New England weather (including two record-setting floods and an unexpected hail storm in May and June of '06). Our target customer base has expanded geographically, and we have become a true destination. To us, that is the ultimate measure of customer satisfaction and the success of our approach to merchandising the highest quality, unique and often difficult-to-find plants and products.



Private garden. This display is situated in the perennial department and was designed to give customers a sense of entering a private garden, yet all the products in the photograph are for sale. Customers enter the garden through a “Fleur-de-Lys” arch. The arbor is flanked by zinc containers faux-planted with golden arborvitae. A path of brick and stone pavers designed by a staff member leads them past buxus interspersed with penstemon and heuchera to a majestic 7-ft., 3-tiered fountain softly spilling water. The display not only inspired customers to recreate the scenario at their homes but also created a calm shopping experience.

Outdoor living. A handmade wooden pergola woven with grapevine and tiny white lights sets the stage for this indoor display. The vignette incorporates elements of the indoors and outdoors without contradiction. Elegant pieces of silver and glass are displayed in a curio befitting a dining room, while outdoor red-cushioned, black wicker chairs invite customers to contemplate their surroundings. A majestic glass chandelier centers the display, and authentic, everlasting botanicals in ceramic pottery create a feeling of home. This was an especially effective and creative way to incorporate indoor and outdoor living products into one display.

Statuesque. Set at the entrance to the showroom, the statue/fountain is the focal piece and is featured against a backdrop of verdant *Cyrtomeria japonica*, *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* ‘Pendula’ and *Picea abies*. Surrounding the statue are custom-designed containers featuring traditional fall fare accompanied by unique accent material. Single variety mums and a large princess pumpkin complete the vignette. The colors in the arrangement are purposely complementary.

Asian flare. This design incorporates Asian and Asian-inspired plants and is primarily monochromatic. It features gold and chartreuse foliage plants, including *Hakonechloa macra* ‘Aureola’ and a sampling of *chamaecyparis*. Red and burgundy plants — such as a 20-year-old Japanese maple and heuchera ‘Plum Pudding’ — accent the landscape. The garden is planted on a berm with large stones unearthed from Churchill’s property. The stone at the top of the image supports a waterfall leading to a koi pond. Asian granite elements are incorporated into the garden and are often lit at night. A majestic brass heron stands sentry at the waterfall, warding off the real predator. This Zen garden and pond are centrally located in the perennial area. In the background is an arbor leading to a children’s garden and a gazebo with seating and piped-in classical music.

Relaxing on the porch. This porch itself is designed to replicate a home; it is cozy and inviting. Again, the intention in this vignette is to encourage customers to feel at home and inspire them to recreate the scenario or one similar to it themselves. There are at least 15 products for sale in this display. Hanging baskets line the porch ceiling while sconces light the entrance. A cast-iron ram’s head adorns the building, and a classic, comfortable bench welcomes visitors to sit. Custom-designed containers, wrought iron plant stands, stone pottery and nursery stock circle the bench. Statues representing the four seasons (two here) grace the display, and a contemporary, live moss garden accent sits on the bench.

— Churchill’s

For more information about the Lawn & Garden Retailer Merchandiser of the Year Award, contact Catherine Evans at cevens@sgcmail.com or (847) 391-1050.

Now that you’ve seen two finalists, we are two-thirds of the way finished showing you all three Lawn & Garden Retailer Merchandiser of The Year Award finalists. Check out the August issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer for the last finalist. Don’t miss the recap of all of the finalists in the November issue where we will be asking you to vote for your favorite merchandiser.