

LAWN &
GARDEN
Retailer

Merchandiser Of The Year

FINALIST

Take a European approach and combine it with a winter wonderland, and you have a greatly displayed garden center.

COMPILED BY
CATHERINE EVANS



When I walked into Village Green Home & Garden, Rockford, Ill., for the first time last November, I was amazed. The store was beautifully decorated with many inventive displays, wonderful design ideas and great color combinations. But the one thing that got me was the European village.

There were little stores within the garden center that made it look like you were walking down a cobblestone street in France. It was amazing. Each "store" had the merchandise that was on the "store" sign, making the merchandise even more unique. Overall, the concept was great and as you walked through the store the displays got even greater.

If you haven't been to Village Green you should make a special trip during the holidays.

—Catherine Evans

In today's already over-retailed world, the competitive holiday season finds consumers overwhelmed by marketing messages primarily extolling price as the reason to shop at a particular store. Unable to compete profitably in this approach, we chose a different message. We wanted to promote the experience, rather than the price, as the reward for a visit.

This message that a store is somehow "special" is often overused, especially in our industry, where we sometimes believe that our colorful products set us above other retailers, and that during Christmas season a few decorated trees and a greenhouse of poinsettias can be a special shopping experience. Therefore, we felt if we were going to talk the talk of being special we needed to walk the walk as well.

From the moment the customer enters the store, and continuing throughout a 30,000-sq.ft. journey, we try to create sensory experiences, incorporating colorful holiday trim, gifts, floral, music, food, home furnishings and accessories into themed, entire room settings. The marketing concept was that all the separate categories could play off each other, take advantage of the colorful seasonal themes and increase overall sales. This was often the case. A consumer who might be charmed by the Christmas décor would suddenly decide he or she needed to have the furniture or accessories or find gift opportunities within the vignette.

This form of cross merchandising flowed naturally in interior areas of our store, where carpeting, walls and fixtures simplified creating holiday theme rooms. When it came to creating excitement in greenhouses, the challenge was greater. Beyond benches of poinsettias, what can

be done with a greenhouse at Christmas? Our answer was to create a European "Village" within the greenhouses, complete with painted storefronts and specialty shops, each designed to provide themed presentations of gift and decorating inspirations.

Again, the cross merchandising results were extremely successful. In one instance, a shop that displayed gifts for men in an "Out of Africa" motif used upholstered chairs with a zebra look to enhance the masculine hunting theme. The chairs, originally there only for effect, became a favorite conversation piece and many were sold at several hundred dollars each.

Our holiday presentation is all created in-house by our staff, using an inventory of props and current merchandise. All design, carpentry and artistic painting needed to build the "village" are the work of our talented team, who understand what we all know, but seldom practice: that retail is theatre.

Holiday marketing begins the first week in November with a festive evening unveiling for customers, featuring food, drink, entertainment and evening-only special discounts on purchases. The staff dresses in semi-formal attire to emphasize the significance of the night and upcoming season. Our media advertising tries to maintain this same classy approach, with TV spots and full-color newspaper inserts filled with colorful images and settings that try to portray us as a holiday shopping experience like nowhere else.

Customer response has been very gratifying, truly making our Christmas a second profitable season.

— Village Green Home & Garden





Trendy Christmas. Christmas can be more than just red and green, and Village Green took it to a new level. They used splashes of color that made the room stand out. To also help off-season matters, the garden center staff used birdbaths, mulch and fencing to give the display more of an impact on how people can use other things during the holidays than just Christmas décor.

European Flair. Beyond benches of poinsettias, what can be done with a greenhouse at Christmas? Our answer was to create a European "Village" within the greenhouses, complete with painted storefronts and specialty shops, each designed to provide themed presentations of gift and decorating inspirations.



Homey Feel. It is not easy making displays that look like they can just be set inside the living room, but Village Green seems to be able to do it. This display looks like someone's home and with the lack of time the American public has today, scenes like this one are the perfect way to sell a display.



Staff Creativity. Our holiday presentation is all created in-house by our staff, using an inventory of props and current merchandise. All design, carpentry and artistic painting needed to build the "village" is the work of our talented team, who understand what we all know, but seldom practice: that retail is theatre.

For more information about the Lawn & Garden Retailer Merchandiser of the Year Award, contact Tim Hodson at thodson@sgcmail.com or (847) 391-1019.

Now that you have seen all three finalists, it is time to start thinking about who the winner will be. We will recap all three finalists in the November issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer, but in the meantime check out the April, June and August issues of Lawn & Garden Retailer to see the finalists again to make your final decision. We will let you know when the voting process begins in November.