

POINSETTIAS

BY BILL CALKINS

ART PLANTS

You've no doubt seen a lot of painted poinsettias this year. I know I have. Some looked like works of art with great care taken in the application of specific colors and effects, while others appeared to have been hastily dunked in a random mixture of paint and glitter. There's no consistency with this trend so it's tough to say whether it's something you need to get into or not. One thing's for sure: if you plan on retailing painted poinsettias, make sure they look good.

Here are two retailers who did a great job with painted poinsettias this holiday season—Matterhorn Nursery in Spring Valley, New York, and K&W Greenery in Janesville, Wisconsin.

At K&W, each painted poinsettia is hand-decorated by employee and artist Scott Hamburg (who actually has an art degree from the University of Louisiana), and is well worth the \$25.99 K&W charges for a six-in. plant with wrap and bow. For a high-impact display, K&W sets up a tiered bench of painted poinsettias at the bottom of the ramp leading from their store into the retail greenhouse. Using wooden picture frames, the staff at K&W is able to create an art gallery look and feel.



Here are three of Matterhorn's best sellers (left to right): Blue Lagoon, Blue Stripe and Tri Color.

At Matterhorn as many as 30 percent of the poinsettias sold in 2005 were painted, according to head grower Noah Schwartz. He observed customers buying painted poinsettias as gift plants, as well as for their own homes. The most popular colors this year were tricolors, ice blue, glittered red, snow, and gold sheen, he says. Matterhorn's designer, Sara Beuerman, has only one year of poinsettia painting experience but as you can see, her work is very unique. In fact, her designs and Matterhorn's approach to the process prompted a visit from Andrew Lee, vice president of the Fred C. Gloeckner Co., distributor of the Fantasy Colors paint system, who was interviewed by Channel 12 News for a television story on painted poinsettias.

For New Year's, Matterhorn had a display of extremely festive poinsettias in colors like blue and silver along with party favors and empty champagne bottles. They weren't expecting huge sales, but just having a poinsettia promotion after December 25 is a step in the right direction.

It's tough to predict how long this trend will last and what kind of demand there really is at retail. A few of the retailers I talked to are concerned that the huge number of poorly painted poinsettias out there might turn people off to the entire concept. Nonetheless, after seeing what Scott at K&W and Sara at Matterhorn can achieve, it seems there is definitely a market for the little works of art—if they are promoted as such. ♣



K&W's artist, Scott Hamburg



At K&W Greenery it's all about presentation.



Matterhorn's artist, Sara Beuerman