

BEST PRACTICES

The "Bella Italia" theme was designed into the show's classical garden centerpiece.



IN BLOOM

ED takes a look at the Philadelphia Flower Show
Interview with Gary Radin, Production Designer



The Philadelphia Flower Show is the largest indoor show of its kind in the world, and has been running since 1829. Needless to say, the design team behind the show's signature central architectural features has a lot of history to measure up against.

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society produces the event, and the overall show theme is different each year. The central feature area sets the tone for the show, with all of the exhibits flowing off the center area and playing off that theme.

Gary Radin, says the design phase for the project begins 18 months earlier, with the event themes decided years in advance. Past themes include a nod to New Orleans with "Jazz it Up" or more regional themes such as

“Ireland.” The theme this year was “Bella Italia.”

“The central feature was celebrating the gardens of Rome. It was created as an entrance collonade, in classical architectural style, entering into formal gardens, lots of water features, pools, and fountains,” Radin says.

The design was centered around a quadrant of gardens, each with classical layouts. The backdrop, as visitors walked through, was the terrazzo stage, where musicians and singers performed.

The hundreds of live plants that literally brought the environment to life presented big challenges on the show floor, from weight load considerations to making sure the plants could be watered over the course of the show.

“Logistically it’s pretty complicated, because you have all of this living material to work with—the fact that everything has to come in over one week and has to stay alive over the 10 days of the show,” Radin says.

Maintenance areas, watering equipment, and hundreds of yards of mulch are built into the planting areas, and everything is actually hand-planted onsite. All of the scenery components have to support the weight of it all, in addition to being watered on without being damaged.

To achieve this, many scenery elements were constructed onsite, including the hand-installed stonework of the large fountain elements in the environment.

“Scale and volume of water were key. The main central fountain was 60 feet long with three spraying fountains within, so it had to hold a large volume of water and thousands of pounds of water pressure. It was three feet high, built onsite with reinforcing steel at the bottom, solid construction block that was completely mortared together, then pond lining inside,” Radin says.

Showcase gardens featured the design and floral arrangement skills of the six exhibitors surrounding the central feature, and acted as an extension of the theme playing off other areas of Italy.

“It’s a dynamic design, and this show can see a quarter of a million people over the course of the week. Appropriate aisle spaces, as well as people’s sightlines when there are large crowds are things that must be taken into consideration,” Radin says. ■

