



BY MARY WESTBROOK

**SO YOU
THINK YOU
CAN DANCE?**

Large, upright heads. Perfect, pink coloring and blooms. Subtle fragrance. Green Valley Floral's 'Tabledance's' outshone a tough field of competitors in SAF's 2016 Outstanding Varieties Competition.



BEST IN SHOW

'TABLEDANCE'

Green Valley Floral

Americans will (finally) cast ballots this month in one of the most contentious presidential elections in history, choosing between two of the least popular candidates to ever run for the office. Fortunately, in another highly competitive face-off this September, the opposite was true: too many good options.

The Society of American Florists' Annual Outstanding Varieties Competition during SAF Maui 2016, the association's 132nd annual convention, showcased 84 varieties from 20 growers in Florida, California, Oregon, Hawaii, Idaho and Tennessee as well as Colombia and Ecuador. The varieties represented the very best in industry breeding and growing standards. A panel of six judges from across industry segments reviewed the varieties to come up with 19 blue ribbon winners and one super-star best in show: 'Tabledance,' an Oriental trumpet lily from Green Valley Floral in Salinas, California.

"'Tabledance' is amazingly beautiful, fragrant and interesting," said judge Lani Callister, the fresh flower manager at Ensign Wholesale Floral in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The variety has large pink blooms that darken as the flower opens (as a starting point, think Pantone's Rose Quartz 2017 color of the year). As an added bonus, the blooms have design appeal aplenty both when closed and open, said Janet Louie of Green Valley.

"It's really a unique variety in this class of lilies," she added. "For consumers, they are getting a lily that has a bit of a sweet smell, but not overpowering."

Toomie Farris, AAF, AIFD, of McNamara Florist in Indianapolis was one of the 400-plus convention attendees to check out the competition during SAF Maui 2016. He called 'Tabledance' "simply amazing," an assessment attendee Tim Farrell AAF, AIFD, of Farrell's Florist in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, echoed. The Best in Show title, he said, was "so well-deserved."

"It has magnificent blooms," he said. And that medium pink fading to white in the center? In a word? Dreamy.

And, as it turns out, practical. Joost Bongaerts of Florabundance in Carpinteria, California, has judged the competition for a number of years and likes to focus on the commercial appeal of flowers (and the profitability they

add to florists' businesses). Examining 'Tabledance,' he saw a strong, consistent color even after the blooms had opened and "a nice buildup of buds."

"It's easy to pack for growers and shippers, which is a great thing for wholesalers and florists," he said. "Plus [the bloom] is upward facing — it looks right at you. That's unusual."

Attendees who noted fierce competition particularly among the lilies this year may have been onto something. 2016 blue ribbon and best in class winners include six lilies and only four roses (standard, spray and garden). That's a significant change from last year, when judges awarded blue ribbons to 11 roses and only three lilies.

"The entire lily category was so beautiful," admitted David Mitchell, AAF, of Mitchell's Flowers in Orland Park, Illinois, a longtime convention attendee and former SAF volunteer leader. "It was hard to choose a favorite."

But choose favorites we must. Read on for coverage of best in class and blue ribbon winners from this year's event. Be sure to visit safnow.org/moreonline for a full list of winners, including red ribbon honors and participating companies.

WHAT MAKES A WINNER?

The Society of American Florists' 2016 Outstanding Varieties Competition showcased 84 varieties from 20 growers in Florida, California, Oregon, Hawaii, Idaho and Tennessee as well as Colombia and Ecuador. Judges scored each entry based on color and commercial appeal; stem and foliage; bloom form and size; and overall presentation. Judges evaluated specific categories of flowers; the highest scored entry of each won "Best in Class." To provide a range of perspectives, the judging panel included three growers, three wholesalers and three retailers.



Chrysanthemum
'Magnum'

Deliflor

Judges commenting on 'Magnum' all employed some kind of superlative to talk up its size: Big. Enormous. Huge. No wonder. According to Juan David Lecuona of Deliflor, the supersized chrysanthemum actually gets "even bigger in the vase as the weeks go by. It also becomes more spherical." The flower has a 20-day vase life, along with a bright green center and lots (and lots) of pure white petals. Indeed, 'Magnum' has so many ray petals that the flower never opens completely to reveal any disc petals in its center, even after weeks in the vase," Lecuona said.



Gerbera
'Glamour'

Green Valley Floral

'Glamour's' bubblegum pink hue is sweet, but behind the cuteness is one sturdy flower. Sporting a contrasting black center and double flower, 'Glamour' beat out many other high-caliber gerbs in this year's field to snag Best in Class honors. A big part of the appeal? That user-friendly, on-trend pink color. "It really had a great color among a strong category," Farris said. Adding to the overall look are multiple layers of thick petals, which create depth in its appearance. 'Glamour' will stand up to your design room needs, too: Its head is supported by a thick, strong stem with plenty of length.



Alstroemeria
'Jewel'

Flores Funza

'Jewel' combines a Palm Beach-ready palette (lavender bloom, green foliage) with major design appeal. The flower boasts a high bloom count, large head size and thick stems. Paola Aranguren of Flores Funza noted its "large buds will show the soft color of the flowers at the early stages of flowering," and designers can count on a vase life of about two weeks. Adding to its charm (and perhaps making it a bit harder to source in some areas), 'Jewel' is very new to the market, according to Aranguren. Flores Funza tested the variety for two years before starting commercial production just six months ago.

"'Ingrid' combines two things we love: Good looks and serious vase life. You'll be loving on this African violet for at least three months."

"Who are you calling delicate? 'Alcazar' is in store now — and this little powerhouse will bloom and bloom for up to 15 days."

"Want a wedding that feels warm and romantic? Have we got a garden rose for you. Say hello to 'Juliet!'"

"Silver bells? How about blue and green leaves with silvery-white tones for your Christmas wreath this year? Come in and check out one of our new favorites: Eucalyptus 'Tetragona!'"

"Calling all Lilly Pulitzer fans. Check out 'Jewel': lavender bloom, bright green stems. It's your official winter blues pick-me-up flower."

"Love the crimson color of this sophisticated 'Black Pearl'? You'll love it even more as the flower blooms over the course of almost two weeks!"

"Bubblegum pink + serious performance chops? Meet 'Glamour,' the Taylor Swift of gerberas, ready and waiting for your homecoming order."



Potted Flowering Plant
'Ingrid' African Violet
 Optimara Group

Chinery adored the “perfect pink, semi-double flowers” abundant on ‘Ingrid,’ particularly in contrast to its “full, lush leaves.” Noting that consumers can expect a three- to six-month vase life, Optimara, the world’s largest grower of African violets, has called ‘Ingrid’ the “start of a new generation of African violets,” one that will be centered on combining consumer appeal with shelf-life performance. For judge Leo Roozen, AAF, of Washington Bulb Company in Mount Vernon, Washington, seeing ‘Ingrid’ shine was especially sweet. “I have always loved African Violets. I don’t get to see these on a regular basis,” he said, adding that, along with some of the chrysanthemum and gerbera selections, ‘Ingrid’ was a highlight of the competition for him.



Decorative Foliage
Eucalyptus Tetragona
 Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers

Looking to shake up Christmas? Look to ‘Tetragona.’ The variety’s stems have broad, aromatic, gray-blue green leaves with a very prominent central vein. Judges loved the silvery-white tones along the length of the stems and leaves and said the foliage would be ideal in formal bridal bouquets, especially those with a silver color theme. Flowers are grouped in threes and have masses of white stamens grouped together in the four corners of each flower head. “‘Tetragona’ nuts are a naturally chic addition to floral arrangements, and look stylish in Christmas flower wreaths,” said Diana Roy of Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers. They’ll also last the holiday season, with an expected vase life of four weeks.



Other Cut Flower
'Blushing' Serruria
 Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers

Attendees and judges alike had one thing — weddings — on the brain when discussing the prize-winning protea. “I love this one for its texture, white and pale pink color and vase life,” which can extend up to four weeks, said James McArdle of McArdle’s Florist and Garden Center in Greenwich, Connecticut. “I see it being a great filler in a low and lush arrangement.” Mitchell said ‘Blushing’ would be the ideal flower to show a bride who wants to blend an “edgy and cool” aesthetic with soft, feminine colors. The unique beauty also delivers in cost per stem, said Chinery, noting “the stems were laden with flowers.” Serruria, one of the most delicate flowers in the Proteaceae family, was technically extinct in the wild for almost a century until an accidental fire germinated seeds in South Africa’s Franschhoek Mountains, according to Roy. “Conservation efforts in the 1960s and ‘70s saved it,” she said.

HONOR ROLL

The following companies earned either blue or red ribbons in the Society of American Florists’ 2016 Outstanding Varieties Competition. See the full list of winning varieties at safnow.org/moreonline.

Alexandra Farms
AlexandraFarms.com

Ball
BallHort.com

Connectaflor
ConnectaFlor.com

Deliflor LatinAmerica
Deliflor.nl

Dummen Orange
DummenOrange.com

Equiflor/Rio Roses
RioRoses.com

Flores El Capiro S.A.
capiro.co

Flores Funza
Floresfunza.com

Green Point Nurseries, Inc.
GreenpointNursery.com

Green Valley Floral
GreenValleyFloral.com

Jet Fresh Flower Distributors, Inc
JetFreshFlowers.com

Liberty Blooms
LibertyBlooms.com

Melano & Company
Melano.com

Optimara Group
Optimara.com

Oregon Flowers, Inc.
OregonFlowers.com

Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers
Resendizbrothers.com

RosaPrima International, LLC
RosaPrima.com

Royal Flowers, Inc.
RoyalFlowersEcuador.com