

A Gardener's Source

WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER PETER CARPENTER



Everybody knows that plants have roots. But the Pomander Road garden centre of **Aberfeldy Nurseries** has its own roots in the 1950s plant introduction and propagation activities of architect **Will Onions** and horticulturist **David Gill**. Their common interest was originally geared to their formation of a private collection of choice plants from all over the world.

Following the death of Mr. Onions in 1959, Mr. Gill considered the prospect of turning his expanding collection into a commercial business. He subsequently sought the partnership of **Col. J.C. Astwood** and his son, **Christopher “Kit” Astwood**. Together, they formed the company of Aberfeldy Nurseries Ltd, taking the name ‘Aberfeldy’ from the Astwood family’s Somerset home.

The company grew quickly in a variety of directions, most notably through the mass production of suitable plant species for island-wide landscaping, the service of indoor plant supply and maintenance for hotels, businesses and private residences, and contracts for large scale planting projects at new and developing hotels.

Under the continued direction of Mr. Gill,

the business’s landmark garden centre in Paget opened in 1976, on land later purchased from the Triminghamams. During the spring of 1977, the company called in bike mechanic **Bobby Baron** to drive for the firm’s increasing trucking demands. Thirteen years later, on David Gill’s retirement, Mr. Baron became Aberfeldy Nurseries’ President and Managing Director.

“I’m a bike mechanic turned plant mechanic,” Bobby joked to me in his office, “and I want our cashiers to be as well informed about plants and gardening as the field staff.”

It was inevitable that I should become a regular Aberfeldy customer, since the nursery isn’t far from my house. With a property amounting to a blank slate, and



BOBBY BARON
President and
Managing Director

“...I somehow overlooked Aberfeldy’s outstanding range of ceramic pots...”



little experience under my belt, my initial dabbling with plants was based largely on the guidance of **Henry Gill** and **Gerald Tatum**. Since their moving away, I now turn to **Axel Bubenzer**, **Che Smith**, **Julie Greaves** and **Trent Smith**, among several others. Indeed, any employee sporting the familiar blue shirt embossed with the company’s red anthurium logo is quick to answer questions, offer advice, and even to discuss particular design concerns.

Two years ago, for example, I decided to augment my garden with the addition of a parterre feature – in this case, a large circle defined by a low, dense, meticulously clipped hedge – to highlight a particular group of roses. Traditionally, and in cooler climates, such decorative hedges utilise the small-leaved evergreen shrub ‘Buxus.’ However, Axel spent considerable time suggesting that I consider using the tougher ‘Murraya,’ or Chinese Box, given my garden’s close proximity to salt water, as well as pointing out the plant’s proven longevity in Bermuda’s climate. As a result of his recommendation, I purchased the 48 specimens I required for the project, and have since enjoyed the steady progress of my ‘Tea Circle.’

browse a wide variety of ready-to-plant vegetable, herb, and flower seedlings. A huge inventory of shrubs, vines and trees offers varieties suitable for even difficult exposures or soil types. Less ambitious gardeners who may be seeking impressive displays of instant colour will certainly find solutions in the dazzling array of ready-planted pots and hanging baskets. In contrast to landscaping material, the nursery’s extensive collection of houseplants, located in the slat house, offers striking foliage plants suited to the filtered light of interior environments. On a recent visit, my eye was drawn especially to the tabletop cactus gardens, planted in complementary terracotta containers of various sizes.

Since I typically make a beeline for plants, I somehow overlooked Aberfeldy’s

Throughout the year, customers can





“...Aberfeldy Nurseries Employee handbook states the motto “Do one thing and do it well...”

outstanding range of ceramic pots – that is, until last Christmas. For a change of pace, I decided to use a gift certificate to buy a matching pair of tall, narrow, glazed pots, which I’ve placed on either side of the door to my house. Objects of great beauty in their own right, quality pots create satisfying focal points, both indoors and out. (For that matter, the use of pots is hardly restricted to plant cultivation; I’m thinking of buying another large one to use in the house for storage.)

The cover of Aberfeldy Nurseries’ Employee Handbook states the motto, “Do one thing and do it well,” with regard to offering customers the best in plants, and the best in advice about gardening. I only have to step into my garden and marvel at a newly opened spray of Skyflower or savour the fragrance of an unfurling bloom of the Chrysler Imperial rose to know that the Aberfeldy team is more than meeting its goal.

Having a special interest in roses, I make a point of keeping an eye out for the nursery’s annual delivery of imported old and new varieties. Once a grower of only Old Garden roses, I’ve developed a considerable liking for Hybrid Teas. While it’s true that Modern roses are generally less robust than traditional varieties propagated by the Bermuda Rose Society, many superb and highly scented Hybrids are proving themselves worthy of places in local gardens.



Close to the business’s checkout counter, shelves display an excellent selection of fertilizers and disease control products, tools, seeds and books. Bulbs of many kinds are also sold in the same area, when conditions are best for planting them.

