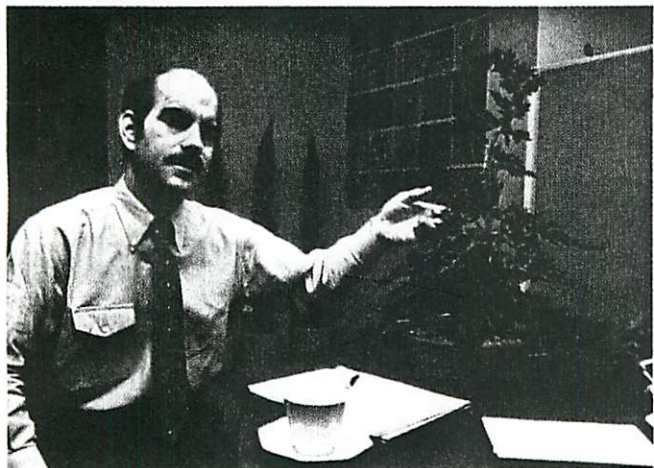


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Right: Preserved *Juniperus chinensis* 'Kaizuka' and *J. procumbens* 'Green Mound' from Weyerhaeuser offer new shapes for interiors.

Below: Weyerhaeuser Co.'s Specialty Plant Business General Manager Steve R. Barger with one of the company's preserved plants, *Juniperus procumbens* 'Green Mound'.



## Is it live . . . Or is it Weyerhaeuser?

Will Weyerhaeuser's introduction of preserved plants create new opportunities for interior landscapers or will it cut their revenues?

By Ross Brown

A new type of plant has piqued industry curiosity in a previously unheard of way. These plants not only offer a new look, they also may enable interior landscapers to reduce maintenance on many of their accounts. The new, seemingly alive plants are, of course, the preserved plants recently introduced by Weyerhaeuser Co., the Ta-

coma, WA, based conglomerate.

The company's recent deep-rooting of itself in the business of preserved plant production has provoked predictions ranging from industry revolution to industry suffering. Steve R. Barger, general manager of Weyerhaeuser's newly created Specialty Plant Business, the 10-person operation charged with developing and marketing the preserved plants, believes the new technology will increase design options, creative opportunities and potential business available to interior landscapers. Yet even Barger admits that when used extensively, preserved plants could reduce

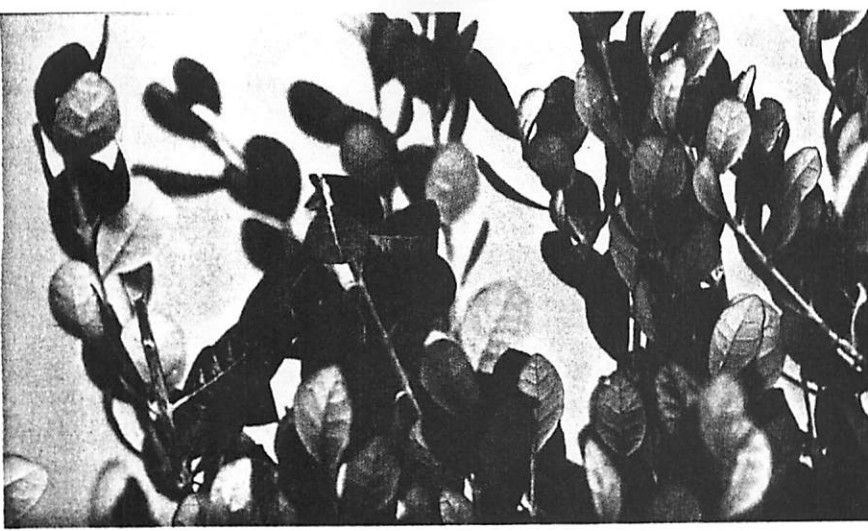
an interior landscaper's maintenance contracts.

Some interior landscapers are wary of a technology that could reduce the need for a service that provides a substantial part of their income. Interior landscapers and others have also expressed concern over the look of the product, its durability and the lack of the "humanizing effect" that live plants provide.

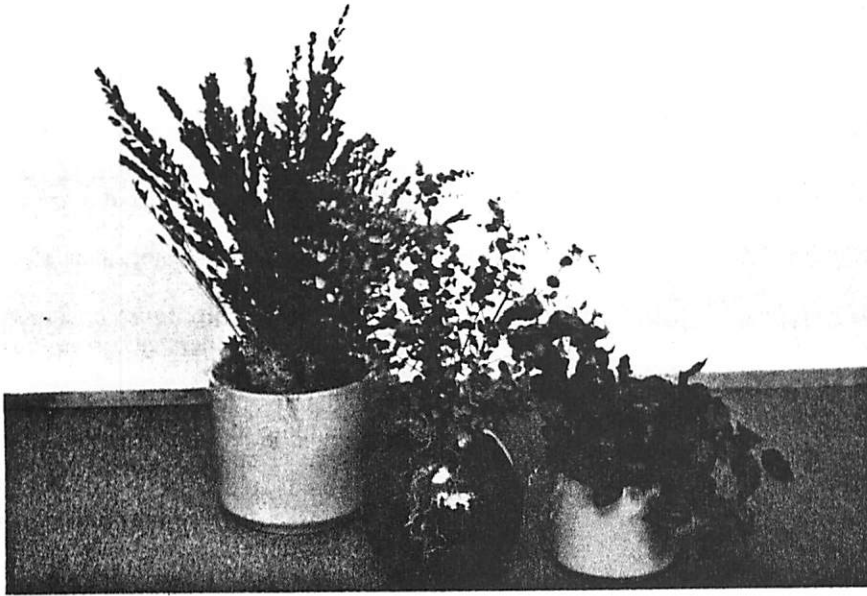
But Barger and interior landscapers who have seen Weyerhaeuser's product maintain that doubts are eliminated when one sees the plants. Indeed, as the accompanying photos indicate, the plants look realistic.

Ross Brown is assistant editor of Interior Landscape Industry. Photos by Ross Brown.





Some of exterior colors and shapes that can be brought indoors with the preservation process are: green and red-dyed Feijoa sellowiana (pineapple guava), left; Myrtus communis (myrtle), Eucalyptus gunnii (cider gum) and Gualtheria shallon (salal), bottom left; and Fagus sylvatica (European beech), below.



This look is achieved with a patented process being perfected by Weyerhaeuser. It is an internal treatment that puts odorless, colorless, nontoxic preservatives throughout the plant. Weyerhaeuser spent 18 months researching the technology and potential market before buying the process.

The US rights to the technology were bought from Broadike BV in Holland. As part of the agreement with Broadike, Weyerhaeuser is prohibited from disclosing how the process works. Additionally, Weyerhaeuser's employees who are working with preserved plants must sign confidentiality agreements.

According to Barger, Weyerhaeuser's technological know-how and resources are helpful in working out the different formulations for "interiorizing" various plants. In addition to the staff at the company's separate Specialty Plant Business, 20 people at Weyerhaeuser's main facility are also working on preserving plants.

### Preservation in Progress

Currently, plants from Tacoma-area growers and Weyerhaeuser's Hines Nursery are being preserved. Barger said the business plans to open a facility in Oregon to preserve regional deciduous trees. Additional facilities around the US are also planned. Although the business does not yet have full-scale production, it has enough stock to sell a few jobs.

"We're constrained by Mother Nature," Barger said. Plants have to be preserved when mature, because new growths do not take the interiorizing process.

The company's efforts are concentrated on perfecting the process for plants that have already been successfully preserved. Plants that Weyerhaeuser has been unable to preserve include: Ficus, Philodendron, Schefflera, pothos and most blooming varieties.

"At this point, foliage plants are a big question mark. We're working on other plants, because the exciting

part of this technology is it allows interior landscapers to put new plants indoors," Barger said.

"Most interior landscapers call and say: 'Do you do Ficus? Spathiphyllum?' They go down the list of traditional foliage plants, which are not available now. Although they are disappointed, when they visit us and see what we do have available, they get excited about the new possibilities. Then they say: 'That would have been perfect in....'"

Weyerhaeuser's initial market research indicated that this would be the response, and each day's letters, phone calls and visits from interior landscapers and others buttress the company's expectations. Before starting the Specialty Plant Business, Weyerhaeuser showed the product and explained the process to interior landscapers, architects and landscape architects in major US markets.

Their response, as well as the response that Barger has seen since the likes of Time magazine, NBC

News and National Public Radio did features on the product, have lent credence to Barger's assertion that the plants will revolutionize the interior landscaping industry.

**New Options**

Barger believes preserved plants will ultimately increase interior landscapers' business by increasing their opportunities. The areas in which preserved plants will offer new possibilities are design, plant placement and the number of buildings that can have interior landscapes.

"The product offers interior landscapers a new palette, a new look for interiors," Barger said. The process allows the colors of outdoor plants to be brought indoors, including such plants as *Betula pendula* (European birch), *Quercus rubra* (red oak) and

various types of eucalyptus. The shapes of outdoor plants, such as juniper, can also be brought indoors. Additionally, combinations of naturally colored plants and dyed versions of the plants are available. Even interior landscapers who have not seen the product agree that the most promising potential is its ability to brighten their projects.

"In interiors, we're lost for color. Some landscape architects and interior designers would like the color we haven't been able to provide them with," said David Korstad, Sedgefield Interior Landscapes, Atlanta, GA, who is former chairman of Interior Plantscape Div., Associated Landscape Contractors of America.

Don Mastick, Foliage Plant Systems Inc., Pine Brook, NJ, agrees. "Preserved plants will offer another

dimension to our ability to give designers a different look," said Mastick, who has seen some of Weyerhaeuser's plants and plans to work with the company to develop a large public display of the product.

According to Barger, preserved plants also offer increased options to architects, who will be able to design buildings without the constraints of light requirements and irrigation system needs. Not everyone would agree that this is desirable, however.

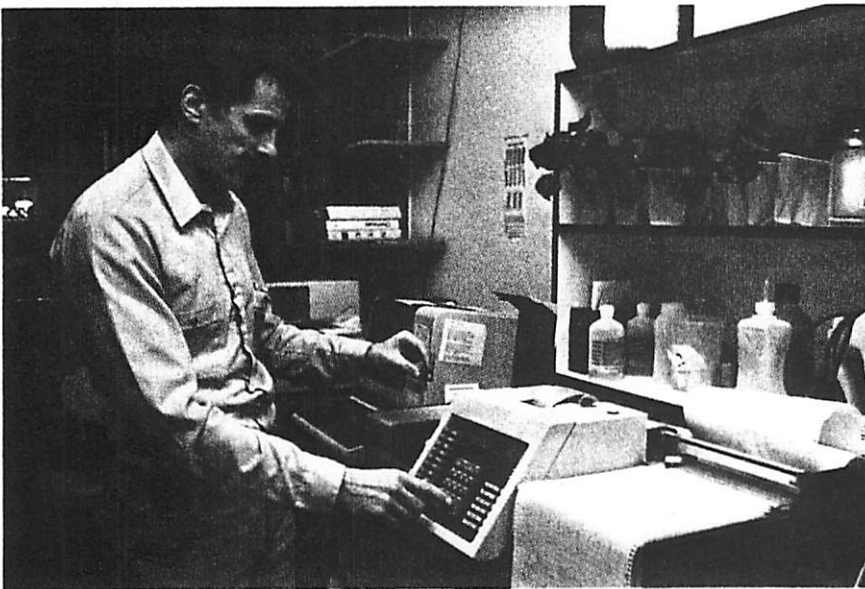
"We've been spending a lot of time convincing architects to create the proper environment for plants. If they gave up, I'd be disturbed," said landscape architect and architect Jay Graham, Graham Landscape Architecture, Annapolis, MD.

Graham believes the preserved outdoor plants will be helpful in transitional zones like foyers, where the exterior meets the interior. This and other new looks offered by preserved plants could generate more business for interior landscapers, according to Barger.

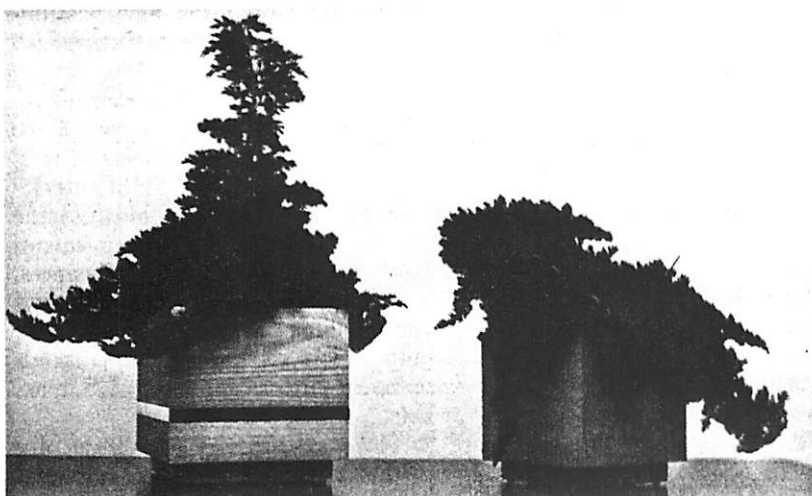
Additionally, interior landscapers can make more money from installations, because specific areas within interior landscapes and even entire buildings previously inhospitable to plants can now use the services of interior landscapers.

"I think interiorized plants will expand the interior landscaping market by allowing areas that previously couldn't have plants to have them," Barger said.

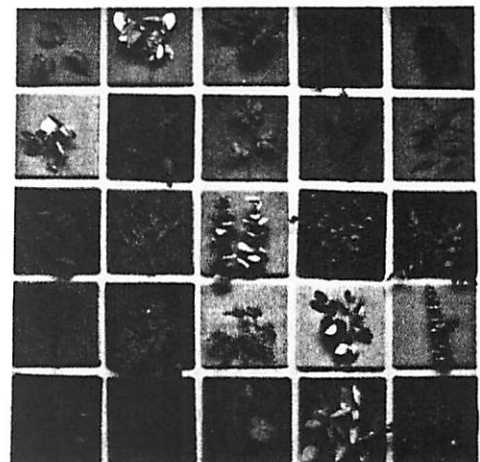
"There are situations where live plants have been a problem. Preserved plants offer a nice alternative to artificial plants in these situations," Barger said, adding that he thinks end users generally prefer pre-



Weyerhaeuser's Dr. Robert Young using an absorption spectrophotometer to analyze the chemical composition of the treatment solutions used in the preservation process.



*Juniperus procumbens* 'Green Mound' in border planters.



Some of the colors available from Weyerhaeuser.

served plants to artificial plants.

The minimal maintenance needed for preserved plants will also increase interior landscapers' business, according to Barger. He believes that preserved plants will let interior landscapers fulfill the needs of end users who don't want to pay the maintenance costs of live plants.

"Leading interior landscapers in the US have recognized that when an end user has requested the option (of not having maintenance costs), the interior landscaper can turn them away or meet their needs," Barger said. And being able to meet these needs can increase an interior landscaper's business, he added.

### No More Maintenance?

The effect preserved plants will have on interior landscapers' maintenance contracts is not universally agreed upon. How preserved plants affect maintenance contracts depends largely on how widespread they become. And there isn't even much agreement about how extensive their use will be.

"Preserved plants are going to fill a niche, but they are not going to displace anything," Mastick predicts. "99.98 percent of the plants in the US will be real." Mastick does not believe preserved plants will result in lost maintenance contracts.

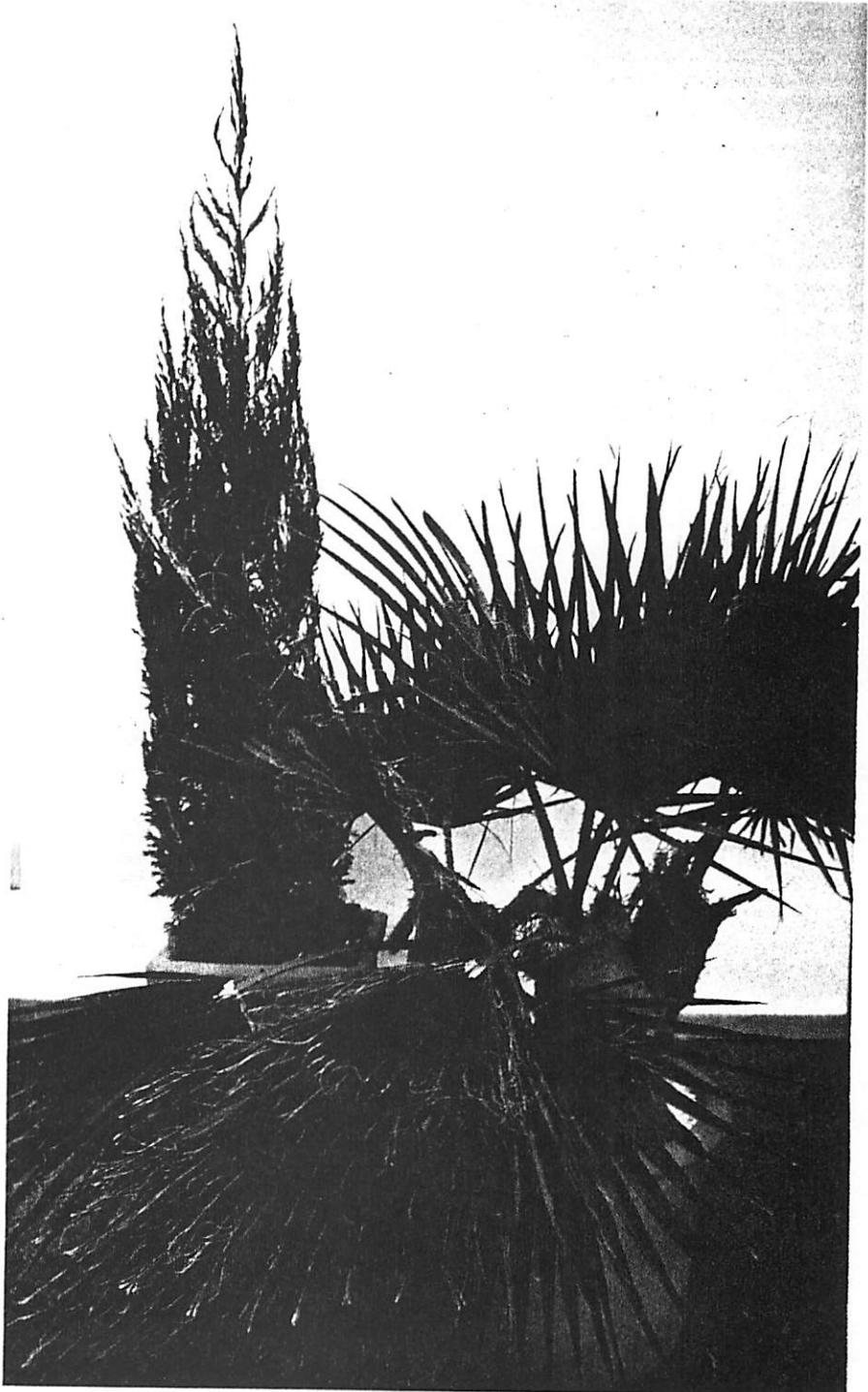
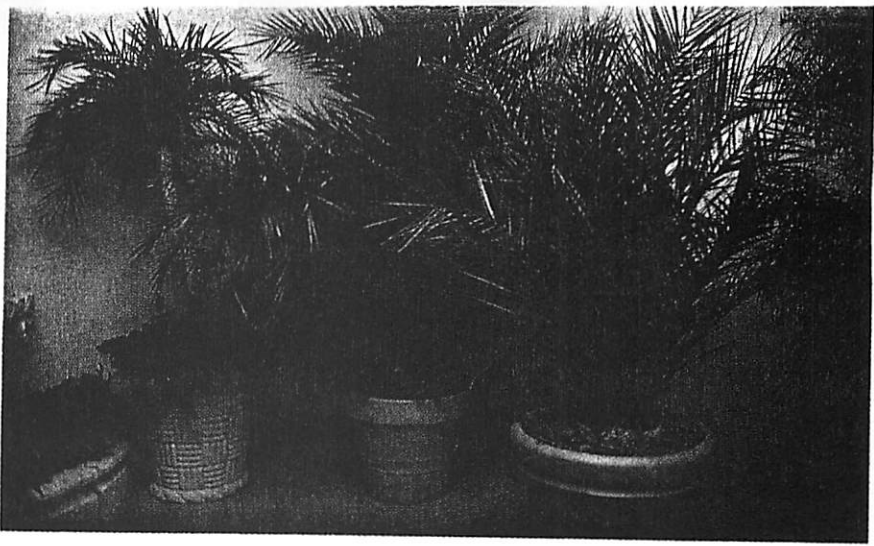
Korstad, however, believes that customers are going to be enticed by the lack of maintenance needed by preserved plants. Noting that 60-65 percent of his company's yearly income is from maintenance, Korstad said he does not "see anyway the industry is not going to suffer."

Barger believes that initially, preserved plants will not affect interior landscapers' maintenance contracts, because these materials will be used in conjunction with live plants. But, in the future and "in situations where preserved plants are used extensively, yes, they will reduce maintenance," Barger said.

Whether or not plants that can last indefinitely will reduce the demand for live plant material is another question that can only be answered

Top: Three different Phoenix canariensis (Canary Island date palm) frond arrangements that Weyerhaeuser offers.

Right: Juniperus chinensis 'Spartan' (Spartan juniper) and Washingtonia robusta (Mexican fan palm).





with a prediction of how widespread their use will be.

"They have a place, which is areas where live plants will not grow," said Jerry Soowal, East Marsh Nursery Inc., Pompano Beach, FL. "They will have some effect, but they won't put us out of business. Our business will increase, because the market will increase."

Herb Koslow, Associated Growers Inc., Delray Beach, FL, believes that because preserved plants don't look good when used alone, their use will increase the demand for foliage.

"They don't look good by themselves, but they look good when they

are used with live plants. They will enable people to put plants where they couldn't go before, so they'll increase business," Koslow said.

Barger also believes that preserved plants are not going to replace live materials, but they will provide an alternative that is preferable to artificial plants because "Mother Nature had a hand in their creation."

"I would be more worried if I was an artificial plant producer," Barger added.

One artificial plant producer isn't worried. Don Fisher, designer for Perma Plant Inc., Philadelphia, PA, has not seen Weyerhaeuser's product

but carried preserved plants five years ago.

"We got phone calls from customers saying they had dried out and the dyes had drained out," Fisher said. Additionally, Fisher believes preserved plants are too fragile to compete with silk plants. "I see the way our plants are thrown around, and preserved plants could never take that. They become brittle."

Mastick, who has a PhD in chemistry, also said preserved plants "may very well harden as the glycerin vaporizes." (Although Barger would not disclose if Weyerhaeuser's process involves glycerin, other processes

## Preliminary preservers: Who's preserving what

By Ross Brown

**W**eyerhaeuser is not the only company to enter into the preserved plant business recently. The companies that have recently announced they will be selling preserved plants are:

- Foliage Plus, Englewood, CO. Although this plant and foliage product company has been using its preservation technology for the past eight years, only the last year has been spent test marketing the product and studying production. The company's technology is based on a process bought from its Denver, CO, inventor in 1985.

According to Sam Ritchey, chief operating officer of Foliage Plus, the process is similar to Weyerhaeuser's and uses glycerin as the base chemical. The technology is different than Weyerhaeuser's, Ritchey said, in that the roots are removed for processing. (Weyerhaeuser would not reveal the technology of its preservation process nor confirm that the roots are left on plants when processed.)

Ritchey said the company will have six species available midway through this year. The company currently has an inventory of oak, aspen, eucalyptus and narrow-leaf cottonwood. The company will begin heavy production in summer.

Ritchey said he will not be able to discuss marketing plans for another 30 days. The company has, however, sold the rights to use the process to preserve native Japanese plants to a company in that country for \$15 million.

- Nature Preserved of America, San Clemente, CA.

This company was formed less than two months ago, but it will soon have immediate shipment of 12 varieties of palms. Shortly after that, the company will offer deciduous trees and two-week shipment of sourced material.

The firm's preservation process was developed by company partner Per Monie in Sweden, where he has been using the technology for a number of years. According to Dennis Gabrick, vice-president of sales and marketing, the process is totally unique. Gabrick said the company will be marketing its plants to interior landscapers and commercial contractors. Gabrick said the company's palm prices will be comparable to live material and less than silk products.

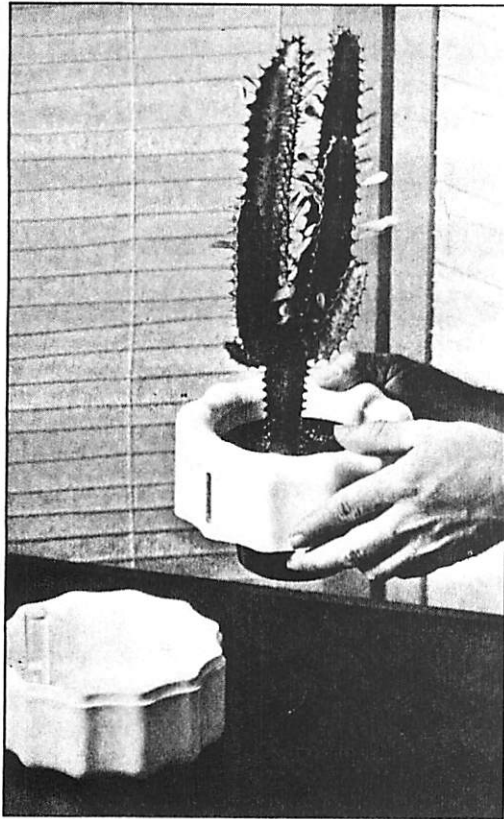
- Weyerhaeuser Co. Specialty Plant Business, Tacoma, WA. Weyerhaeuser's current line includes almost 70 products, including birch, cedar, cypress, eucalyptus, beech, oak, holly, juniper, pine, pineapple guava, salal, baby's-breath, Hedera helix (English ivy), statice, myrtle, Phoenix canariensis (Canary Island date palm) and Washingtonia robusta (Mexican fan palm). The company's research department is developing new products for preservation, and the product line will be updated.

The availability of specific products depends on the time of year and stock available. The business is making proposals and estimates for specific projects for interior landscapers.

Currently, the company has enough stock on hand for a few jobs. According to General Manager Steve Barger, the plants are "a premium-priced product," but with reduced maintenance, he believes they are comparable in cost to living plants.

The business moved into its current production facility last July and plans to open more production facilities around the US.

Ross Brown is assistant editor of Interior Landscape Industry.



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do.)

Although Barger admitted preserved plants won't last in high-traffic areas, they will remain in a natural state indefinitely. The plants preserved eight years ago in Europe still appear as they did when initially preserved. But it is this statue-like quality that causes many interior landscapers to question whether or not preserved plants will ever be able to replace live plants on a large scale.

### Too Rigid?

Barbara Helfman, Something Different Interior Plantscaping, Middletown, OH, said that people want plants for reasons that preserved plants will never fulfill. These reasons are a desire to have something living in an otherwise static environment. "Preserved and silk plants are as rigid as the officescape," Helfman said.

The abstract appeal of live plants is often cited as a personal objection to preserved plants, as well as a reason why preserved plants will not become widespread.

Korstad called that appeal the "humanizing" effect of live plants. "Most people in general like the humanizing effect of live plants. Preserved plants have no humanizing effect. People want to see it bloom or drop leaves."

Graham agrees that live plants provide a bit of "high-touch" in a "high-tech" environment. Additionally, if preserved plants become widespread, plants "will become like a stage set. Their value is that they are living. Like glass, they are fragile, and because of that, they are precious."

Soowal's personal objection to preserved plants also arose from the fact that they are not alive. "We might as well get rid of our pets and replace them with stuffed animals," he said.

These objections to the static nature of preserved plants are not an issue for most people, as long as the materials are used in conjunction with live plants and where live plants could not survive. This is the role that Barger and others foresee for them.

Barger said that he has only occasionally encountered an objection to the unchanging, statue-like nature of preserved plants. "There will be some people who feel that way, but others will be excited by the fact that they have a plant indoors that has not been in an office before," Barger

said. As for preserved plants not growing or dropping leaves, "most people have said this is an advantage, because the plant is not going to out-grow the space."

### High Visibility

After hearing about preserved plants, many interior landscapers are unconvinced that they are a realistic-looking alternative to live plants. "I'm going to wait and see what they look like at the trade shows," said Stan Winchester, Living Interiors, San Antonio, TX.

Although the business has received thousands of letters and phone calls since production was announced, Barger believes that seeing the product is the only way to overcome apprehensions about it. To achieve this, the company plans on using preserved plants in quality projects in major markets in the US. Barger said the business will be working with interior landscapers on such projects as the Columbia Center in Seattle, WA, which will feature preserved palms from Weyerhaeuser.

The plants will also be displayed at industry trade shows. The company is currently developing videotapes and brochures on the product and will have a brand name and logo within a few months.

In the future, the product will be marketed to interior landscapers, architects, landscape architects and end users. Barger said any retail sales of products using the technology will be through mail order catalogs or high-end retailers. The products that would be marketed to consumers would be bonsai-type plants and seasonal decorations, items that would not be the primary concern of the Specialty Plant Business. For now, the business has its hands full handling the flood of queries that resulted from the initial publicity.

According to Barger, the response from people who have seen the product has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. "The reaction is usually that the preserved plants are different, but better, than they expected."

Mastick was impressed with what he saw. "I was pleasantly surprised. The process preserves the natural aspect of the plant. They have a live look and feel," Mastick said.

Both the quantity and quality of the response to preserved plants indicate that, as Barger said, the "product will be around for awhile." 🌿

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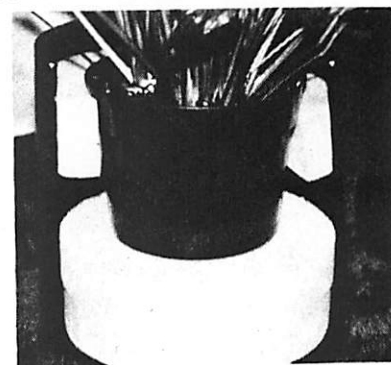
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